

Neighbourhood Planning Meeting Tuesday 23rd May 2017 at 7.30pm Town Hall

Present: About 35 members of public including press (John Garvey, Brian Williams and Brian Quinn)

Cllrs Knight, Simpson, Farrell, Small, Winser, Benneyworth

District Cllr James Podger, West Berkshire Planning Manager Bryan Lyttle and Laila Bassett, Senior Planning officer

1) The Mayor welcomed everyone. A minute silence was held for the victims of the Manchester bombing.

2) West Berkshire Council introduced Neighbourhood planning via a power point (copy available). This was talked through by Laila Bassett with additional comments from Bryan.

Bryan Lyttle advised WBC will support all Parish and Town Councils that wish to carry out a Neighbourhood Plan and they would sign up to a SLA (service level agreement). The first NP was Stratfield Mortimer which is going to referendum on 22/6/17. The 2011 Localism act introduced NPs which offer more weight than a Town Plan due to them becoming part of the Local Plan. 3 others NPs in progress are Tilehurst, Compton and Burghfield. An NP is pro-growth and must be in conformity with local plan/policies. It goes to a referendum and will be used to determine planning applications. It can guide future development and add detail to the local plan. CIL is increased to 25% for those with a NP in place.

There is a need to consider alternatives and look at the time and cost. A steering group would have to be established and open days held or a consultation or questionnaire run. We would need to define our Neighbourhood area and fill in a WBC application form, submit a map and explanation. If it is different to the Parish boundary a 6 week consultation is needed. There is a need to support the NP with new and existing evidence such as the census etc. A landscape assessment would be very important as the area is in the AONB. BL advised we look at Woodcote, Thames, Henley, Devises and Pewsey Neighbourhood plans. A Neighbourhood plan consists of explanatory text, maps, policies and proposals. A first draft would be followed by a 6 week consultation, a main draft plan, a 6 week consultation by WBC, then onwards to an examiner which WBC will work with HTC to appoint. The examination process is usually carried out by a written representation but sometimes by a hearing. If it is not based on evidence it is at risk of being deleted or changed. For the referendum to go through 50% of those voting on the day must be in favour. WBC has a SLA to which both parties would sign. A 2 year timescale is allowed but can be extended. Stratfield Mortimer NP was started in 2014 and is not yet finished.

In 2019 WBC aim to adopt their next local plan. The NP would need to be in conformity with this so we would need to consider timing. WBC advised the cost of a NP can vary between £17k and £63K. A grant of £9K is available. It is worth contacting local businesses and planning students as they may help for free.

Any Questions: -

John Downe asked how fertile WBC are in developing NPs and what is their sponsorship

BL - WBC has a strong commitment but are not proactively promoting when they feel a plan is not suitable. The cost of risk assessments required to deal with flooding problems has excluded some towns. NPs are about additionally 'fixing our broken housing market'. NPs can end up producing 10 % extra housing over what the town wants. Tilehurst didn't like the Core Strategy and their proposals for housing were for everywhere but in Tilehurst. It doesn't cost to start a NP, apart from the time it takes to get the area designated, and it can be withdrawn. Thatcham decided against a NP due to cost. Newbury are considering a NP.

JP advised it doesn't stop houses being built

BL responded to the question why don't we do a bottom up approach. He advised Royal Burrough of Windsor and Maidenhead designated the whole area but didn't designate enough housing and they haven't delivered a local plan since before 2012.

Mike Rysiecki - A NP could be produced and be out of date the next day. How can we be sure the NP would carry any weight?

BL - We can't.

Qu - What other reasons than planning would there be to have a NP?

BL - Bristol tackled student accommodation. NPs can be used to allocate employment land or allocate a conservation area (but why not use a conservation plan for this). Residents would need to pass to HTC the areas you would like to explore in your NP. Look at other NPs for inspiration. There are over a million houses to be built in the next parliamentary period (in all 3 manifestos). The HSA DPD has just gone through and WBC is already talking about a 2036 plan which will go to examination in 2019 so it is never-ending.

Chris Scorey (Chairman of Town Plan) - We were told that the Town Plan would inform local development. WBC told us they wished for us to engage in the process. After 10 years the status of the Town Plan suddenly changed to non-land use only. Why in 2014 did WBC specifically exclude 'land use management'?

BL - It wasn't WBC it was central Government. The Localism Act of 2011 and Planning Act of 2012 changed the rules. The only way to include land use management is by examination.

Chris Scorey thanked BL for the answer which is the first time his question has been answered.

Qu - A negative vibe is sensed from WBC. Why? There is a need to address the housing issue.

BL advised WBC told Stratfield they would have 100 houses and they ended up with 110. If numbers are short and developers come in, that is what is going to happen.

It was pointed out that out of 64 towns and Parishes in West Berks only 1 Neighbourhood Plan is in place. This is very low compared to other districts.

P Harries suggested that if WBC has the expertise perhaps they should be doing the NPs.

BL advised it is the responsibility of the Towns or Parishes

QU - Cllr Simpson asked what the main sticking points would be with a NP

BL advised 'finding development within the town boundary' and difficulty will be finding new sites and new employment zones. Evidence is required to show that zones are no longer required or alternatives should be found.

Qu - What are the pros? BL has talked about the negatives?

BL - CIL is the only pro

QU - We are currently not seeing the AONB being protected. How can we have a voice and work together?

BL -WBC is piggy in the middle between government and Town Council. He has read all 3 manifestos and they are all about increasing housing.

CLlr Simpson advised nobody is against housing. The sticking point is on the location of it. What is WBC's vision for Hungerford?

BL - when they have one they will tell us

8.25pm B Lyttle and Laila Bassett left

HTC's view

KK - A lot of time and money was spent on the Town Plan for it to be downgraded. The same thing might happen again on a NP. He and several councillors attended NP training session, and were advised that having a NP gets you a seat at the table when development is discussed and it gives Hungerford a real chance on deciding our future. He would like to see the NP cover the Hungerford District area. Chris Scorey advised that the current Town Plan also covers the Hungerford District.

A pro is that the NP will carry weight, and planning applications and appeals will be determined against it. Also CIL will be 25%

Shinfield near Reading (population 11,000) have had their NP adopted. It is 32 pages long and took 4 years costing £10k. They were first to have a plan in the Wokingham district.

Binfield (population 6,000) have a NP adopted which is 65 pages long, took 2 1/2 years and cost £8K

A Hungerford plan would probably cost between £10k to £20K. A grant of £9k is available and it might take 2 to 3 years to deliver.

The NP has recently received royal assent and will give residents a say in future development

Qu - Why did BL say he can't guarantee that the NP will hold any weight?

JP advised he is not a planning expert but difficult decisions have to be made. BL was saying that if the government changes the law then the NP will not hold any weight.

Chris Scorey - An interesting point BL made was that the next local plan examination will be in 2019 so the NP would need to dovetail with WBC's timescale. It would be a shame if the NP could not meet the timescale.

QU - WBC are not always able to enforce planning regulations. The DPD should fend off development not in the local plan.

JP - It can be overridden. Officers recommended approval at Eddington (they are the experts) and the members went against their recommendation and in this case were wrong. The members are needed as they understand the local needs.

D Gaines – We need to visit other councils and investigate their NP process.

KK - intends to visit Shinfield

Cllr Small - We need to look at how other towns went about doing their NPs. A lot of good work has been done so far on the Town Plan and some can be used.

JP advised he would love to be involved in a Hungerford NP

KK advised Marlborough TC is 2 years into their Neighbourhood Plan. Shinfield paid their Clerk £10K and spent £1k on a consultant. 6 or 7 individuals are needed for the core work.

Cllr Simpson asked if Hungerford's status as a rural service centre would change if they lost the library and post office.

Chris Scorey advised it is unlikely. You would need to look at the evidence base. He reminded all that the Town Plan is still current and a lot of the work in it could be used as part of a NP. The Town Plan is frequently referred to in planning applications and in grants.

Cllr Simpson asked for a show of hands in favour or against a NP. About 15% were in favour, 10% against and the rest undecided.

Mike Rysiecki - The NP has to be in conformity with the Local Plan. WBC has no money and can't meet enforcement costs. He fears HTC are working on a micro scale and WBC on a macro scale. How will this work? WBC can ride roughshod over the AONB. Without a NP WBC can do what they like.

JP - WBC prioritizes resources. It is not just about housing numbers it is also about deliverability. Every single site in Hungerford has had the same scrutiny.

KK - It is clear we don't have the support at this stage. Another consultation will take place in a couple of months' time, whilst in the meantime HTC will carry out further research.

Meeting closed 9pm