

Minutes of the Meeting of the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
held in the Green Room, Village Hall
on Tuesday 28th May 2019, at 7:30pm

Present: Cllr Ian Hunt (Chair), Cllr Bill O'Neill, Martin Adams, Michael Byrne, Ken Howlett, Hugh Labram, Ruth Fleetwood and Jacqueline Veater

In attendance: Fiona Forth, Parish Clerk (Secretary) and 42 residents.

Chair welcomed those present and explained the purpose of the meeting, highlighting in particular that it was not a public consultation.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Neil Clarke and Clive Thompson.

2. Re-appointment of Members

The Chair reported that membership of the Steering Group had been re-confirmed at the Annual Parish Council meeting on 13th May 2019. In addition, whilst highlighting the arduous and time-consuming nature of the work, the Chair thanked the members of the Steering Group for continuing to volunteer, and the consultants for their professionalism and guidance.

3. Declarations of interest

The Chair provided clarity on what was expected in terms of a declaration of interest.

No declarations were made in respect of this meeting.

4. Chairman's announcements

The Chair reminded those present that this was a "task and finish" group established by the Parish Council and operating to agreed Terms of Reference. Meetings have been held when decisions have been required to progress the task, for example to agree procedures and processes for site assessments. Majority of the work is comprised of map-making, policy writing, outdoor assessments of housing and environmental options, timetabling, budgeting, preparing documentation, planning events and so forth.

It was highlighted that it had been over 18 months since the last meeting, however, the Steering Group had continued to complete the work required, checking progress via regular workshops. Whilst recognising that these tasks had taken longer than expected, it was also highlighted that monthly progress reports had been provided to the Parish Council and were frequently in the parish magazine too, as well as being available on the Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan websites.

Finally, the Chair highlighted that decisions were required at this meeting and that this was the earliest date that the meeting could reasonably be held following the election in early May.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 17th October 2017 were approved without amendment.

6. Workshop actions update – moved and combined with item 9

Prior to moving to item 7, Standing Orders were suspended. The Chair highlighted that the purpose of doing this was to enable members of the public to make points in relation to Moor Place Gate for the Steering Group to note and bear in mind for item 7. The following points were made:

- consideration of noise and light from the tennis courts;
- has the change of use of the land been completed and realigned to include this site;
- will sufficient information be included in the Neighbourhood Plan document to enable an informed decision, for example, parking, proximity to the road;
- will the use of the windfall Allowance instead of this site be put to the village in the final consultation;
- has consideration been given to the volume of traffic through the village, during the day and at peak times, and the impact of this on the entrance to the site;
- best place to put proposed affordable housing for the people of the village;
- ratio of the properties in the mix that will be affordable; and
- will there be more than affordable housing.

The Chair thanked members of the public for their contribution. Standing Orders were reinstated.

7. Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan Draft Document

The Chair reminded those present that prior to the Parish Council submitting the Neighbourhood Plan to East Herts Council (EHC), one further consultation is required, known as the pre-submission consultation. It is anticipated that this would take place from mid-August to the end of September, using the latest version of the draft Neighbourhood Plan at that time. The purpose of this agenda item, therefore, is to recommend the draft Neighbourhood Plan to the Parish Council but prior to that, need to determine the inclusion, or not, of community housing.

Community housing

The Chair highlighted that the only available site is at Moor Place Gate (MPG), where the landowner, in response to a request from the Steering Group, has offered to donate land for that purpose as part of a larger development (although considerably smaller than he originally proposed). There is, however, one potential caveat to this debate: if EHC don't grant Much Hadham the right to set policies for who would be nominated to live in this community housing, then withdrawing the site would need to be considered.

Prior to discussion by the Steering Group, Jacqueline Veater reported the feedback received from the Herts Garden Trust (HGT). Salient points are:

- suggestions made to fine tune policy text, including need to have additional policy content in relation to non-designated heritage assets;
- be clearer about the 3 categories of historic parks and gardens: those registered by Historic England; those locally listed by HGT and protected under the district plan, and others;
- although Hopley's site is on the local list (deemed to be locally important by EHC), HGT would not have included it on the list so their only comment on this site is that development should not have an adverse impact on the street scene. MPG is thought to be locally important by HGT; and
- in essence, to put housing on MPG, there needs to be sufficient benefits to outweigh the damage to the park, a recommendation to specify the maximum number of homes and some additional points to add protection to the site:

- improvements to the entrance; and
- include a requirement for a historic conservation management plan.

In relation to the last point, Jacqueline stated that the management plan was an onerous request if this is expected to cover the whole park as opposed to the portion being built on.

During discussion by the Steering Group, the following points were covered:

- further meeting with EHC arranged for next week where answer sought regarding nomination rights (so no need for independent advice to be sought);
- EHC currently consulting on supplementary guidance for affordable housing;
- if don't get the nomination rights and exclude MPG site, still need to include reference to a Community Land Trust (CLT) so that there is scope for the future;
- historic conservation management plan would be acceptable provided only in relation to the land being built on, especially given not a requirement in previous developments;
- maximum number of homes:
 - maximum should be 15;
 - could outline a split: 6-8 affordable and 7-9 at market rate, remembering that 10 or more houses triggers automatic inclusion of affordable houses through EHC's policies;
- draft Plan imposes a number of restrictive policies that planning applications would have to comply with; and
- HGT's view is that there is no negative impact on the High Street.

Comments made earlier by members of the public were addressed as follows, where not covered in discussion above:

- tennis courts: the potential light nuisance is a planning consideration for the East Herts Environmental Health Services. It was commented that other local clubs have successfully dealt with this concern;
- windfall allowance: this is available where there is a struggle to reach site allocations to achieve the target and will be explained in the draft Plan but Regulation 14 consultation rules means can't include a vote on allowance v MPG. However, as included in the draft Plan, comments can be made during the consultation on this point; and
- traffic: Highways will be consulted on this but again, this is a planning consideration and not a policy one. In addition, traffic will increase within the village anyway as 54 houses required.

The Chair summarised the arguments as follows:

The main arguments for excluding the site:

- numerical housing targets can be delivered without recourse to this site by simply including a windfall allowance in the housing delivery plan;
[Post meeting clarification: inclusion of the allowance would have to be fully justified]
- site is part of land designated locally as a historic park and garden through which public footpaths run and any development would be detrimental to the immediate landscape;
- site may be within the curtilage of a Grade 1 listed building;
- any development risks disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the adjacent war memorial site; and
- junction with the High St through the listed gates is unsatisfactory.

The main arguments for inclusion of this site:

- unique opportunity to create social affordable housing in a highly sustainable location at the heart of the village and thus meet one of the key objectives of residents for this NP;
- with the cessation of an agricultural use for the land, it lost its intrinsic purpose;
- this latest offer follows the centuries-long tradition of Moor Place releasing land along the high street for all kinds of community uses as well as for housing; and
- issues around heritage, the war memorial, natural environment and access can be managed so that the whole estate is left in a better position than it currently is.

RESOLVED that Moor Place Gate is included as a housing site allocation in the Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan, conditional on EHC confirming that the Community Land Trust (or whatever similar body is formed to provide affordable housing) sets the initial and ongoing nomination policy.

Final editing status

The Chair reminded those present that the draft Neighbourhood Plan circulated with the agenda wasn't the finished product as a few items needed to be completed as well as some publishing matters, particularly the clarity of the mapping. However, in all material respects it is complete - core policies, housing site allocations and priority views and local green spaces identified. It is expected that editing will take place up to the print deadline.

Martin Adams took the opportunity to thank the Chair for the fantastic job of pulling the draft document together.

Submit to the Parish Council

RESOLVED that, recognising that there is still a little work required to finalise it before publication, to recommend this Pre-Submission Neighbourhood Plan draft to the Parish Council and for it to proceed to the Regulation 14 consultation.

Supplementary documents status

Jacqueline Veater outlined the status of the supplementary documentation:

Consultation statement – records all the consultation undertaken and will need to include the results of the pre-submission consultation before finalised. It is currently in draft form and will be available for the consultation.

Basic conditions statement – an assessment of policies against national and local policies with a draft available on the website which may change following the pre-submission consultation.

Strategic environmental assessment screening report – assesses significant land use, particularly in relation to the historic, natural and water environments. Specific agencies review this aspect and feedback comments. A detailed report is required if significant issues identified and should a report be required, there is additional support available for completing this.

8. Residents' comments

A resident congratulated the Steering Group on the extensive work undertaken but expressed concerns about open government, saying governance practices needed to be substantially improved. He gave detailed examples of what he considered to be poor governance including non-disclosure of certain documents; formal public meetings not being held to discuss matters of public concern; and a failure of the PC to reply to a letter sent 3 months earlier regarding open government and Freedom of Information. The Chair reiterated that public meetings had been held when decisions were required and that a wealth of information was available on the website. Currently, the only items missing from this documentation are the notes from the workshops which will show that no decisions have been made that should have been made in public.

Following a request that the consultation evidence mandating that MPG be included as a site for affordable housing, the Chair commented that the mandate was from the initial consultations where it was identified that affordable housing for younger people and for those wishing to downsize was required in the village.

A question regarding Community Land Trusts and how these work – covered at the end of residents' comments – see below.

In relation to questions in respect of affordable housing, the Chair confirmed that, following the HGT comments reported earlier, it would be a maximum of 15 properties on the MPG site, with a boundary to ensure that future building work beyond it would not be allowed. The definition used by EHC for affordable housing is being followed and the tenure of properties could be a mix of rented and shared ownership.

A resident highlighted that the consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan is an opportunity to provide true affordable housing for those who are not generally able to make themselves heard on this matter. A chance to plan for the future similar to the way in which the Almshouses and Ash Meadow were previously.

Community Land Trust (CLT)

Jacqueline Veater highlighted that this is a separate organisation that would be established to manage, or build and manage, affordable properties. There is a set process for establishing a CLT and a meeting to find out more from the national organisation had been held in recent months. As mentioned above, these properties are not necessarily owned – may be rented, shared ownership or sold. If sold, there would be a legal requirement that the sale had to be to someone in the village with rules to ensure remain affordable. Other CLT's are used as stepping stones to help people on to the property ladder.

Note – a number of residents left at this point as the remainder of the meeting dealt with detailed actions still required.

9. Workshop actions update | Pre-Submission Consultation

Ruth Fleetwood highlighted that a number of workshop actions had been completed and outstanding points were discussed.

Quotes – need more than 1 if cost expected to be over £1,000, and can't break task down to fall below this, for example, quote for all printing costs not just for elements of printing required.

Mapping issues – issues with transferring mapping information from ParishOnline to the document and also need to consider how to present maps to make them clear when printed.

Project timeline:

- draft to Parish Council's 4th June meeting – allow time for review before approval, including opportunity to go through the document in detail either on the 11th or 18th June at the Pavilion – this would not be a public meeting but an opportunity to make sure all Cllrs understand the draft Neighbourhood Plan before it is approved;
- Parish Council approve the draft – can't be at 2nd July meeting as Chair (of Steering Group) is away therefore hold an extraordinary meeting before or after that date – provisionally 25th June;
- Basic conditions document completed, and summary prepared – see below;
- pre-submission consultation undertaken during mid-August to end of September – 7 weeks instead of 6 to allow for August being a holiday month;
- process feedback received from residents and statutory consultees – see below for additional comments;
- amend, as necessary, the draft Neighbourhood Plan and supplementary documents;
- Parish Council approve the draft for submission to EHC at 3rd December meeting;
- EHC review submission and initiate a further 6-week consultation;
- submission to the external examiner; and
- referendum.

Note – anticipated that the Steering Group would not be formally dissolved prior to the examination.

Summary Neighbourhood Plan

Summary needs to include the policies, photos, introduction and consultation response form. If include all policies in full, this will be around 24 pages in length. Can be a leaflet style where policies are listed as opposed to being detailed.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the fuller summary would be produced. 850 copies would be needed for the parish. [Note – this was supported by a number of residents present]

Note – full document will be available in hard copy form and online, with support being provided to assist those wishing to view online.

Feedback

Feedback has to be worked through with notes added to each comment in relation to how it has been considered for inclusion in the Plan. No anonymous comments can be taken on board. Note – feedback will be obtained in paper and electronic formats.

Statutory consultees

Formal consultation invite needs to be sent out by the Clerk prior to the consultation period starting to around 60/70 consultees. Where not possible to email, a hard copy will need to be sent. A list of consultees has been prepared by Neil Clarke.

Open day

Suggested that this is held on 14th September. Steering Group members need to be available with documents and forms to talk about the process. No display as such needed, maybe the main policies map.

Consideration to be given to tagging on to an existing event in the hamlets, may be the coffee morning, to ensure opportunities there for residents to discuss.

Landowner responses

Landowners will be made aware of what is being proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to their sites. In addition, they will be consultees to the document and therefore able to make suggested changes through this mechanism.

10. Grant Application and Budget/Spend Report

The Clerk outlined that just over £24,000 had been spent on the project to date, the majority of which was in relation to consultants (nearly £19,000). This has been funded by:

- the original sum set aside by the Parish Council to undertake this work (£10,000)
- grants received (just over £11,000); and
- from the 2018/19 precept (just over £1,000).

Based on initial information to hand, the expectation is that further expenditure, of around £11,000, to be incurred to complete the project. This will be funded equally through grants and from the 2019/20 precept.

It was agreed that the Clerk and Ruth Fleetwood would liaise to finalise the position regarding the remaining funding required.

11. Closing Comments

The Chair commented that the decisions made were important and, with the pre-submission consultation in sight, the Steering Group is nearing the end of its work. With still plenty to do, all those present were thanked for their contributions, including the members of the public.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Date of the next meeting to be advised (with a workshop pencilled in for 6th June TBC).

The meeting closed at 9:22 pm