

Minutes of the Meeting of the Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held via Zoom on Wednesday 16th December 2020, at 7:30pm

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

In attendance: 7 residents

1. **Apologies for absence**

None – Cllr O'Neill had advised he would be late and joined the meeting during item 6.

2. **Declarations of interest and dispensations**

Michael Byrne declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in matters relating to Nimney House and had submitted a written request for a dispensation to be allowed to participate in any discussion, which was agreed unanimously.

3. **Chair's announcements**

"May I welcome everyone and thank you for attending this, the 18th public meeting of the NP Steering Group. I'd specifically like to thank Ruth for kindly agreeing to take the minutes this evening. May I remind everyone that this is a meeting held in public of the NP Steering Group, a committee of the Parish Council (PC). It is not a meeting with or for the public but we do provide the opportunity for residents to give us the benefit of their views under agenda item 8.

The meeting is also limited to the items on the agenda so, for example, this meeting won't be discussing the Hopleys planning application, which the PC's Planning Committee is expecting to consider on January 12th, in the usual way.

For the benefit of the public, the members of the Steering Group here this evening are Ian Hunt, Michael Byrne, Ken Howlett, Hugh Labram, Martin Adams, Neil Clarke and Clive Thompson with assistance from consultants Jacqueline Veater and Ruth Fleetwood.

It might be useful if I (very briefly) remind everyone of where we are in the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). The Pre-Submission consultation was in Autumn 2019. All of the responses received to the Pre-Submission consultation whether from residents, statutory consultees, or local businesses and others are on the website.

Many policies have been improved either as a result of the consultation or in the light of subsequent developments. Although a few changes are noteworthy as we shall come on to later, most of them are of minor significance but, for those who had expressed concerns that the consultation would change nothing, I hope these fears have been allayed.

The primary purpose of this meeting was intended to be a decision on whether the Plan, as amended, can be recommended to the PC for final submission to East Herts Council (EHC).

We received news this morning of a problem with the Plan as it currently stands, which means that the main motion to approve the Plan will have to be withdrawn and deferred to a later date. Let me explain why.

The nearby parish of Hertford Heath are preparing their own NP. They are relying (as we are) on a windfall allowance to achieve their housing target. They forwarded their Plan to EHC as part of their own Regulation 14 Pre-Submission consultation. EHC

replied today that it did not meet the Basic Conditions because there was not a specific policy in the Plan to rely on the windfall allowance. As with our Plan, the intention to rely on a windfall allowance is stated in the text but not highlighted as a policy. Whilst we have a policy to deliver a minimum of 54 homes, our site allocation policies only aggregate to 46 units. The shortfall can be inferred to be achieved by windfall development but we need to say so explicitly as a policy.

This requires fresh wording to be added to the Plan in a form that would be acceptable to EHC.

So, whilst this meeting goes ahead so that the content of the Plan as it stands can be discussed by the Steering Group and we can hear from residents, we won't be able to vote on it.

I'm sorry that we have been knocked out of our stride at the last minute but it is necessary that we address this shortcoming and take just a little more time to get the right result."

4. **To approve minutes of the last meeting of 26 November 2019**

Approved unanimously

5. **To receive the Aecom Strategic Environmental Assessment- July 2020**

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was required late on in the process. It was triggered because, as a result of feedback during the pre-submission phase, Historic England wanted us to look more closely at the impact on the historic environment. The SEA was undertaken by Aecom and paid for by a grant. It covers several categories including heritage and environment.

The conclusion of the report was that the Much Hadham NP includes some positive effects, though fairly minimal; no potential negative effects were identified. It should be noted that Moor Place Gate had been removed as an allocated site in the NP prior to the production of the SEA because Historic England had not been happy with it.

There were three categories covered by the report - heritage, landscape and population & community:

- Landscape: It was recommended that a bit more was done on landscape, e.g. more protection for part of the Barn School site
- Population & community: Accepted that relying on windfall was Ok given the constraints on finding suitable sites
- Heritage: Overall, the NP contributed to the sense of place

The conclusion of the report, with no negatives and some positive, were as good an outcome as we could have hoped

6. **Reports on main policy changes to NP since Pre-Submission Consultation**

The policy changes made as a result of the pre-submission consultation and SEA recommendations are summarised below:

A. **Development Strategy** - Jacqueline

- a) Moor Place Gate (South side) was dropped as a site allocation due primarily to the inability to secure nomination rights so that local people would be preferred for community housing but also because Historic England were not happy about the site;
- b) A windfall allowance of 8 units is now incorporated to ensure delivery of a minimum of 54 dwellings;

- c) The policy constraint on developing in the rural area has been made more explicit;
- d) The indicative plan that was included for Hill House/Barn School has been withdrawn in favour of a tighter set of policies setting out the constraints on the site that any future developers would have to contend with. Some of this is a consequence of the SEA and some relating to issues of landscape and rural character. As the site was relatively popular at consultation, it has been retained although there are lots of problems in developing it
- e) The village boundary is proposed to be extended to include Nimney House, between the allotments and the Recreation Ground
- f) The policy to permit dwellings for St Elizabeth's Centre workers has been dropped, at the request of the Centre and its Trustees;
- g) Each site allocation has an additional policy criterion to achieve an overall net gain for biodiversity through mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures

B. Environment Strategy – Hugh

- a) Two more priority views have been identified, each looking over Barn School field. One is from Steep Jack Hill and the other from Sidehill Wood;
- b) Valued community assets have been separately designated. This gives some degree of protection against any attempt to change their planning use Class without making provision for the facility to be replaced;
- c) The policy for Non-Designated Wildlife Sites and Green Corridors has been strengthened and the mapping updated;
- d) A policy for improving tree resilience has been introduced to reduce the risk of planting at new developments inadvertently introducing diseased species;
- e) An Appendix has been included providing a wealth of information about non-designated heritage assets such as post boxes and railway bridges.

7. Workshop actions update

The majority of the previous actions have been completed (see further below):

- IH/MB to contact the owners of the path on Steep Jack hill about including the view of the Barn School site in the NP. Completed – the owners are happy for the path to be used so the new view from Steep Jack Hill can be included
- IH/MA to include grid references in policies for non-designated heritage assets. Completed
- MA to include valued community assets on a map. It was decided this was not practical to be shown on a map and grid references have been used instead
- IH/MA/JV to complete changes to the NP including update mapping of policies to objectives (JV), policies map (MA), update policy LNE1 (JV), review of photos & titles (JV), proof-read & formatting (IH/JV). Completed other than new windfall policy.
- IH to update resident and statutory consultee feedback tables to remove personal names and to sort in order of the NP doc, rather than by respondent. Completed
- IH to publish statutory consultee feedback once personal names have been removed and it has been checked by JV. Completed
- RF to include changes relating to pre-submission in Consultation Report. Will be done once all the feedback and changes have been confirmed as completed
- JV to create a new housing policy for sites which already have planning permission which are to be included in the overall housing allocation. Completed.

8. Residents' comments

A resident and parish councillor is proposing to develop the site of his current house, Nimney House, as he is planning to downsize. He has employed an architect to come up with a development proposal for 3-4 houses, one of which would be small. *[A discussion on Nimney House is covered under item 9].*

A resident who lives adjacent to Hopleys commented that the proposed development at Hopleys would have a huge effect on privacy and sunlight for residents on the boundary of Hopleys. She was concerned that the deadline for comment on the planning application for the site was 12th Jan 2021 which is also the date of the next PC meeting. She was clear that she wants to support the NP and work with Hopleys and the PC. She requested that the view from the adjacent site should be taken into account, including the elevation of proposed buildings, and suggested that members of the PC who are due to have a site visit in the near future could go through the gate into her garden in order to get their perspective on the proposed development. The Chair responded that he would pass on these comments to the PC before the site meeting at Hopleys and would be in touch with her about access to her garden. He confirmed that there would be an opportunity for her to raise her concerns at the next PC planning committee meeting on 12th January and that she could make comments now to EHDC rather than wait. A member also suggested she request an extension to the deadline date.

9. **To review draft NP To recommend to the Parish Council that the Neighbourhood Plan be submitted to East Herts Council under Regulation 15**

As stated earlier, due to the requirement for an additional policy for windfall sites, the Neighbourhood Plan is not yet ready to be passed to the Parish Council for approval.

Neighbourhood Plan remaining timeline (Jacqueline)

- i. Meet again to formally approve the Neighbourhood Plan in a public meeting then take to PC for approval to submit to EHDC via Regulation 15
- ii. EHDC to check that basic conditions have been met (should not take long)
- iii. EHDC to put the NP out for formal submission consultation – this is usually 6 weeks but, due to Covid restrictions, could be up to 8 weeks
- iv. In parallel with the consultation, EHDC will identify and propose an examiner to us, although we have the option to request a different available examiner
- v. All the comments from the submission consultation will be sent to the examiner and to us and we have 2 weeks to clarify responses to comments.
- vi. The examiner will produce a list of questions which will go to EHDC and to us and there will be a confidential fact-checking report
- vii. The examiner will produce a final report and all changes recommended in that report will need to be applied by the team to the NP and agreed with EHDC.
- viii. The plan can't go to the next stage until May
- ix. Once EHDC are happy with the NP, they will confirm that it is ready to go to referendum and will organize this as soon as possible. At this stage, the NP will have significant weight even though it has not been adopted.
- x. The referendum will work in a similar way to a local election; all residents will get voting cards and a date will be arranged for residents to go to a polling station to vote. If more than 50% vote in favour, the NP will go forward for formal adoption by EHDC

Note that EHDC will not make changes to the NP following the regulation 15 submission – all changes will be requested by the examiner and undertaken by the NP team.

Nimney house proposal

A discussion was held about the proposal to develop this site, including the following:

- Concerns were raised about development close to the allotments because this area is rich in wildlife which should be protected
- The landowner has proposed a ransom strip between the site and the allotments to help protect wildlife; this strip could be conveyed to the PC

- A suggestion was made about possible additional access to the playground from the site
- It is proposed that the village boundary is extended to include Nimney House to be consistent with other houses along the High St – this will be voted on at the next meeting
- A query was raised about whether the small house proposed on the site could be available as an affordable home, preferably for local residents with a covenant to this effect in the deeds. The landowner is prepared to consider including first nomination rights to the village for this property.
- More detail on this site will be provided before the next meeting

10. **Actions outstanding**

Withdrawn but the future timeline was covered under item 9

11. **Finance report**

The total spend to date is almost £34k of which £19k has been funded by the parish and £15k from grants. A further £17k was spent on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, which was fully grant funded.

There is still £2k of grant funding to be applied for and the PC has budgeted £2k from its own resources to cover the remaining anticipated costs – largely for consultancy.

12. **Date of next meeting**

To be confirmed in the New Year

The Chair thanked all attendees and wished everyone a happy Christmas. The meeting closed at 8:34pm