



WEST HOATHLY PARISH COUNCIL

representing Highbrook, Selsfield, Sharpthorne, Tyes Cross and West Hoathly

Neighbourhood Plan Task Force Meeting Thursday 6th March 2014 in West Hoathly School

Attendees

Ken Allfree, Kathy Brown, Paul Brown, John Downe, Sylvia Downe, Keith Faricy, Neil Greatorex, Anne Halligey, Christine Jones, Peter Jones, Andrew Perkins, Lesley Perkins, Stephen Sykes, Susie Ward, Melvyn Willie

Also attending:

Helen Schofield
Chris Bowden (Navigus)

Apologies

Apologies were received from John Cull and Trevor Swainson

Introduction

Since the last meeting the landowner/developer presentations and parish exhibitions had taken place. Following these 184 comment sheets had been filled in. The output from these is available on the Neighbourhood Plan website.

At the last Parish Council meeting councillors agreed that to help the next stage of the process a consultant should be hired using money from the Fronrunner grant. Chris Bowden was therefore joining the meeting to start this process.

Councillors also agreed that, as at Council meetings where parish councillors abide by a code of conduct and have to declare any interests that might be perceived as impacting the final decision, Task Force members should also declare any personal or pecuniary interest related to the topic being discussed. No one would be excluded from the discussions but this will hopefully ensure the Task Force cannot be accused of bias.

Declarations of Interest

Andrew and Leslie Perkins do not want development that would impact Broadfield.

Keith Faricy does not want any development.

Keith Faricy and Stephen Sykes are members of the Sharpthorne Community Action Group for which a manifesto has been written. A copy of this was asked for.

Peter and Christine Jones do not want development that brings more traffic down Station Road.

Melvyn Willie's employment landlord owns the site to the North of Top Road and he lives in Broadfield.

Chris Bowden facilitated the rest of the meeting

A lot of work has already gone into the Neighbourhood Plan to establish the important principles and evidence. This must not be forgotten as it underpins what happens with site allocation.

Susie Ward joined the meeting

Site allocation has many difficulties and must not be undertaken as a "beauty contest" but must go through a process to gain wide consensus and ensure that any decision cannot be challenged at a later date by landowners/developers whose land has not been included in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The best approach is not to focus on specific sites but to go back to what it is that is important to the community and what the Neighbourhood Plan is setting out to achieve. Site allocation is a means of delivering on these objectives.

Site allocations also need to take into account sustainability in terms of social, environmental and economic factors.

What is the Neighbourhood Plan setting out to achieve?

- Housing for young people starting out
- Housing for older people wishing to stay local and downsize to a smaller, more easily maintainable house (from 4/5 bed roomed detached houses to 2/3 bed roomed houses maybe bungalows)
- Ensuring there is housing that is affordable for young people
- Smaller houses that stay as small houses for future generations
- Properties for the children of local families
- Preservation of a diverse community not becoming a retirement community
- Youth and children to maintain the viability of the school
- Addressing the traffic issues

The Neighbourhood Plan can allocate sites towards these objectives and can say what happens for each allocation.

In any discussions there is likely to have to be a consideration of a number of smaller site allocations (but potentially no affordable housing) or fewer larger sites that can deliver affordable housing and possibly other plan benefits.

What makes it a village?

The people

Services although these are being lost (e.g. a shop closed within last 5 years, bus no longer runs though West Hoathly centre)

Services may come back with more people.

This is a village and more housing may change it from a village.

The 2011 census shows the population in the parish is getting older at a faster rate than the national.

The whole parish is in the AONB. Note: this does not prevent development. As a parish surrounded by larger settlements it is fortunate to be able to carry out the Neighbourhood Plan debate without the threat of imminent development.

There is a concern that “giving away” Greenfield land now will open up more Greenfield land for later development. The Plan can be positive about growth and the area does have constraints on what can be developed. The plan can allocate specific sites and the way the policies are written can preclude future growth on the green space around them.

MSDC are keen that parishes plan for their own needs not for the wider MSDC needs. No housing numbers are being imposed by MSDC.

What is the village?

In most cases when talking about the village this encompasses West Hoathly and Sharpthorne. Neither is dominant over the other with West Hoathly having the school and main pub, Sharpthorne the local shop.

Traffic issues

The majority of residents are concerned about traffic issues. The C319 though West Hoathly and Sharpthorne is the unofficial East Grinstead bypass with over 8,000

traffic movements a day (from Wych Cross on the A22 through to Gatwick and the M23).

Any site will generate more local traffic but minimal extra through traffic. Some sites may be able to offer the opportunity for traffic calming to be part of the development requirement.

Provision of Affordable Housing

Also need to consider the requirement for affordable housing. MSDC currently require 30% of a site to be affordable. If the number of affordable houses required on a site in the Neighbourhood Plan is increased (e.g. 50%) then the plan would need to be able to demonstrate that, at this level, the site is still viable for the developer.

Developments have to be sustainable

The countryside is highly valued locally

With the environmental impact of Philpots Quarry and Ibstock brickworks the impact of any of these sites is minor.

Sites/Housing

The Task force felt that the current list of sites was probably exhaustive and no others were likely to come forward.

Choosing brownfield sites is correct as a starting principle - are there any?

- Hangdown Mead (but there is still employment there)
- The Station Goods Yard (possibly)
- West Hoathly Garage (still actively being used as a garage – no definite availability timescale)

Does new housing in the pipeline get taken into account when looking at the requirement for 50-60 houses over the timeframe of the plan?

The Task Force would need to decide whether they addressed the needs identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. If not then the Plan would probably still need to allocate sites for the identified number of houses.

There are 5-6 smaller homes (2-3 bedroomed) in the pipeline but none of these are social affordable.

What size of site will contribute to the housing need?

Current proposed Draft District Plan – sites of 4 or more homes should provide 30% affordable

Current District Local Plan – sites of 15 or more dwellings

Central Government has just initiated a consultation on whether sites of 10 or more should provide affordable housing

Built up Area Boundary (BUAB)

Of the sites identified all are adjacent to or separate from the BUAB. If a site is allocated that is separate from the BUAB then, at examination, the examiner would need to see good reasons why this was chosen above other sites that were in, or adjacent to the boundary.

Allocation of Affordable Housing provided by a Neighbourhood Plan

On the first let, affordable housing on a site allocated in a Neighbourhood Plan will be 100% assigned to people with local connections (family, work, used to live here). On subsequent lets 50% will continue to be allocated on the same basis. This is a concession MSDC has agreed with parishes wholly in the AONB.

Note: MSDC ratios for affordable and intermediate housing are 75% affordable and 25% intermediate.

The process

There needs to be agreement within the Task Force to the process for assessing sites and that the outcome is what comes out of the process.

The process needs to identify how likely a site is to achieve the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Task Force has the following information

- Sustainability Criteria from resident issues, challenges and vision
- The objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan
- MSDC Site Assessments – done with site visits not just a desk exercise
- Resident Insights from the exhibitions

A set of criteria for site assessment needs to be agreed

From this hopefully a long shortlist of sites can be identified that can deliver against the Plan objectives.

The Task Force can then agree how to shape policies so that sites are allocated that will deliver the benefits needed from the plan. These policies would also need to be bought into by site developers.

The Neighbourhood Plan process

The recommendations from the Task Force will provide an updated Neighbourhood Plan. This document has 2 key audiences:

- Residents of the parish (who need non planning language to help them understand the document)
- MSDC Planners who will use both the MSDC Local Plan and an approved Neighbourhood Plan when assessing a local planning application.

The updated Neighbourhood Plan will be issued for a 6-week public consultation. Comments received will then need to be evaluated and the Plan amended if necessary.

The Plan (and supporting documents) will then be submitted to MSDC who will carry out a further 6-week consultation

Following this the plan will go to examination by an independent examiner. They will agree the Plan is sound, agree it with some comments to improve it or reject it.

If approved the plan will be the subject of a local referendum. All residents on the electoral roll will be able to vote. It is a simple Yes/No vote on the total plan and if a simple majority of those who vote agree (yes) the plan is “made” and will then be used by MSDC when assessing any local planning applications.

Next Steps

Chris Bowden and Task Force members should look at the Sustainability criteria from the Scoping Report, the insights from the exhibitions etc so that at the next meeting the Task Force can agree a set of assessment criteria.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 25th March 2014 starting at 7:00pm. Venue to be confirmed.