



Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Minutes

Date:	10 February 2021
Venue:	Zoom Conference Call
Steering Group Members Present:	Julia Davies (Chair), Rob Bennett, Sarah Chapman, Andrew Clayden, Mike Dormon, Robin Jewett, Rowan Lloyd, Clare Maynard, Jan Reynolds, Sharon Strutt, Maria Tasker, Gini Trower, Jacqueline Veater, Anne Washbourn, Christina Whellams (Minutes)
In attendance:	6 members of the public District Councillor Joseph Dumont 2 representatives of Websters Estate Ltd
1. Apologies:	None received

The Chair welcomed everyone and explained that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of minute-taking and that they would be deleted once the minutes were approved.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

- a. The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. Update on the current status of the Neighbourhood Plan

- a. The Chair reported that the status of the plan remained the same as the update given at the previous meeting.
- b. A workshop was held with the SAPC councillors to walk them through the process of site selection in order to restore confidence in the integrity of the process. Unfortunately this did not lead to any immediate sign of progress with the plan, but it is to be hoped that mediation arranged by Locality might do.

4. Response to the consultation on Village 7 (Briggens Estate, Gilston Area)

- a. Village 7 will be the nearest village to us of the Gilston development, with around 1500 homes.
- b. It was noted that there is a huge amount of documentation (Ref 3/19/2124/OUT) surrounding this second consultation with no explanation as to what it is they are re-consulting on, but that it is important for us to respond.
- c. All sub-groups were urged to take a look at the proposals for their individual areas and feedback to the Chair.

5. Response to the consultation on Hunsdon Neighbourhood Plan

- a. It was noted that the agenda item referred to Gilston but that the current consultation (regulation 14) is actually for Hunsdon.
- b. The plan itself is succinct and the only query they appear to have is whether they can count houses outside their settlement area. EHDC are not wanting to encourage any more site allocations, based on the close proximity of Village 7, so are happy for them to include outside the settlement area.
- c. The consultation opened on 1 February and there are still a few weeks left to respond.

6. Response to the Government's White Paper/Planning Bill

- a. It was reported that the White Paper/Planning Bill consultation is still in progress. One of the largest features supposed to come out of the consultation were new environmental impacts legislation, recovery and other various environmental legislation which is currently on hold, so not much has changed other than to permitted development rights. It has been quite heavily opposed

with cross-party opposition and areas of concern are the ability to comment on planning applications right at the beginning, and not when the detailed information is submitted.

- b. The consultation to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), is based on 'Building Better, Building Beautiful', a report produced at the end of last year and is about sustainable development, achieving well designed spaces and being more reliant on design codes..
- c. Other key areas are public transport options for urban extensions, design codes for key sites and they've just launched a bidding scheme for 10 Local Authorities to be part of a model design code pilot. North Herts are going to bid for Knebworth which is just about to submit.
- d. Overall, it is a good consultation and has a more environmental focus. JV agreed to circulate the link on the Government website that highlights each area, and Steering Group members should feedback to the Chair who will draft a response which needs to be submitted by the end of March.

ACTION: JV

7. Public Forum

- a. The Chair explained that the reason for moving the Public Forum to later in the agenda, was so that it gave the public an opportunity to hear updates before raising their points. The Chair invited the public to ask their questions.
- b. A member of the public felt that their question hadn't been previously answered at the last meeting, nor when they had written to the Steering Group in December 2020 and so raised their queries again:
 - i) If 94 houses are required, why is the Steering Group planning on building 118 homes – 26 more than required? Why has the Steering Group not considered using the brownfield site in Netherfield Lane for around 35 homes which would leave most of the greenbelt in the village intact. Netherfield Lane is in flood zone 2 and Roydon Road is in flood zone 3, and as access to sites forms part of the selection criteria, how can the sites be suitable on that basis?
 - ii) The AECOM scoring matrix on the report is not legible, so a copy of the document is requested so that the criteria can be scrutinised. Members of the public have requested this information on a number of occasions and it's not been available.
 - iii) Voting in favour of the public being even more excluded from the process than they already are is outrageous. The Steering Group is there to represent ideas of the community so how can the group be voting on excluding the community from the discussions. If the Steering Group wants transparency then the public should be allowed to view whatever is going on.
- c. A member of the public asked:
 - i) how to become a member of the Steering Group. They were advised to email the Chair and indicate which area they would like to become involved in.
 - ii) how was the decision to make the centre of the village the Coop decided? The Steering Group has previously given a vague reason with regards to "people buying newspapers" but this has skewed the selection process because the Catesby Estates and Netherfield Lane sites have been measured on the centre point. The Steering Group has ruled out the Catesby site incorrectly and it seems to be manipulating the scoring system. The Catesby site seems to offer back 60% of a 10 hectare site for use by the three parishes and is an important consideration that should be given more time. The Netherfield Lane site offers nothing to the community.

8. To receive updates from the sub-groups

- a. *Communications* – have held several meetings and put together a plan for a first informal consultation. They plan to hold a public webinar on Zoom in around two weeks time to give an overview of the plan which will include site selection and the scoring. It will be recorded so that it is available for others to view it if they are unable to attend. They are continuing to provide regular communications via Facebook and the website, and are looking to circulate information about what happens if there isn't a Neighbourhood Plan. It was also noted that the Steering Group members had been banned from posting or commenting on the community Facebook page which has made it difficult to answer any Neighbourhood Plan questions that have arisen.

- b. *Housing* – it was noted that Network Homes are now at the planning stage of development of the garage site of Chapelfields and the public will be invited to consultation at the end of February. The Steering Group has previously anticipated that there will be 6 houses over the 2 sites, but it is not known what their plans are. They have requested the Steering Group's Design and Housing policies for that site. Thames Water also seem to be keen for their site to be used which would generate around 10 homes.

In response to the questions raised by the members of the public, it was explained that the 94 homes issue was answered in response to the Netherfield Lane residents communication in December and this can be recirculated if a copy has not been seen. All of the sites within the settlement boundary are potentially a gamble and we are not very confident that they will all be developed, so a buffer of a few extra houses had to be built-in to make sure that 94 homes could be achieved, and to also ensure that we restrict the Netherfield Lane site to as small as possible.

AECOM Scoring Matrix – AECOM do not provide a scoring matrix so its unclear what document the member of the public refers to. The Steering Group only has one copy of the AECOM report and is not able to provide the member of the public with anything different than that which has already been circulated online.

Centre of the village – this relates to one criteria in the second round scoring matrix and relates to the concept of "connectivity" which is part of East Herts Planning guidelines and requires us to make sure that all our sites connect to village facilities. All the facilities are located within the High Street which in itself is the centre of the village and looking at a map, we were able to pinpoint the Co-op and Post Office as the centre. We measured each of the sites from that centre point, so the difference in scoring by one or two points is not a crucial criteria. The Catesby site did not pass because of several crucial criteria which included it being in the greenbelt with low suitability, its high-grade agricultural land and is not immediately adjacent to the village settlement boundary. It is also likely to create coalescence with other villages which we do not want and has several Historic Environmental Records (HER) and would fail on that criteria.

- c. *Ecology* – nothing further to update.
- d. *Heritage* – have been collating actual archaeological papers and posting some information on the second biggest village website.
- e. *Business* – Due to get together. Comments that have been submitted are being reviewed and now just need policies finalising.
- f. *Transport* – Nothing to report. Heavy traffic is ruining the brick road but we cannot stop heavy goods and agricultural vehicles so need to find a way of educating companies. Survey results flagged this up, as well as the Amwell Roundabout needing traffic lights, which would not be put in place until the Gilston development goes ahead.
- g. *Design* – AECOM have reported that they have not heard from us so further clarification is needed.
- h. *Community Assets* – Requests have been submitted to all three Parish Clerks. Great Amwell had proposed another 3 but they fall outside of the settlement area.

9. Update on Finance and Technical Support

- a. We have spent £5,035.97 and currently have £8,702 in the bank. Expenditure has mostly been costs for technical support and any further spend needs to be made before the end of March to be allowable from this year's grant. Unspent money can be returned and then reclaimed for next year. If we need anything for the public consultation then we should prepare and pay for it outside of this year's grant. The timeframe between the end of grant period and the allocation of the next grant could be a month and, as we are not permitted to spend for approx 3 weeks after it's received, we may need to ask the PCs to fund a 2 month period. To date we have not had to do this due to forward planning.
- b. JV reported that she will have 4 days of support to submit since the last invoice.

10. To discuss public attendance at the Steering Group

- a. The Steering Group have recently felt that too much time is spent answering the same questions at its meetings and is slowing down progress (along with the current Covid-19 pandemic and SAPC rejecting the proposed list of sites).

- b. It was reported that Much Hadham Neighbourhood Plan had sub-groups but also ran working sessions of the Steering Group that weren't open to the public. At these working sessions they had discussions, made proposals that could then be put up for decision at Steering Group meetings, and planned feedback for Parish Council meetings. They then held public Steering Group sessions when there was significant process, if they were planning a consultation or needed to make an important decision.
- c. The Steering Group proposed that the public are restricted to only attending where we are making a crucial decision in the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan. All were in favour.

11. AOB

- a. *Infrastructure* – a Facebook post raised this as an issue and it hasn't previously been discussed at a Steering Group meeting. There doesn't appear to be any provision for infrastructure partly because we are a sustainable village with much of it already in place. It was noted that matters such as this should be placed on an action plan which will give us the ability to highlight our need for Section 106 money. It was agreed that we should discuss this at the next meeting.

ACTION: Agenda Item

12. Date of Next Meeting

- a. The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 10 March 2021 at 7.30pm for 7.45pm. It is anticipated this will be a Working Group session and not open to the public.