

Notes of PPC Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held in the Village Hall
16th May 2017 at 7.30pm

Present: Nick Beaumont (Joint Acting Chair and Chair for the meeting), Catherine Jackson (Joint Acting Chair), Steve Long, Denise Miller, Paul Stevens (Secretary).

Members of the Public: 5

Site representatives: 1

1. Apologies for absence

Simon Farmer, Estelle Maisonnial (LDC), Gail Murphy, Reg Stone, Simon Ward and Dominic Williams.

NB acknowledged that the Steering Group would not be quorate given the absences, but that it was considered preferable to continue rather than abandon the session.

2. Declaration of interests

None.

3. Previous minutes

The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chair, after a member of the public questioned whether they were a complete record as they did not include a comment from CJ to the effect that she was impacted by the choice of sites. NB pointed that the minutes were not intended to be a verbatim transcript of the debate at each meeting, but a record of key points and decisions. However, there was no objection to including that comment.

4. Confirm Timetable and Process for Public Consultation

NB reported that LDC had advised that the consultation should not be started until the General Election had completed, so subject to approval at the Parish Council meeting on 13th June, the formal consultation process would commence on 19th June, ending on 30th July. Subject to any amendments required by the Parish Council, draft plan documents would be published ahead of the 19th June to allow the maximum time for residents to review them.

The process would follow the pattern of the original exercise, with two open sessions – the first would be on the evening of Wednesday 21st June, in the Pavilion, and was likely to run from 19:00 to 22:00. The second event would be on Sunday 16th July, in the Village Hall, from around 11:00 to 16:00.

Paper copies of the documents would be distributed to various sites, namely the 3 pubs, Village Hall, School, Sports Pavilion, Shop, Station and the Church Annexe.

A feedback form would be provided, for return to the Parish Clerk or to a collection box in the Shop (to be confirmed).

SF was arranging a banner, and SW was liaising with printers.

5. Update on Racecourse site

NB welcomed Julian Black (JB) to the meeting. JB reported that the racecourse was comfortable with the reserve status allocated to the site, as this allowed time to resolve the outstanding access issues.

Access was primarily concerned with satisfying ESCC on general pedestrian safety and the specific requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. Three options were under consideration:

- Purchase of land from the GateHouse to provide wider access – to date, two offers had been made, but both had been rejected. JB reported that whilst these offers had not been withdrawn, an alternative option was likely to be required
- A ‘shared surface arrangement, whereby vehicles and pedestrians shared the same surface – a specialist agency, Transport Dynamics, had been contracted to produce a scheme. The scheme also involved appropriate traffic calming measures, notably a gated ‘pinch point’ ahead of the proposed access. ESCC had requested that the scheme be amended to have traffic calming start 18m from the proposed point. Transport Dynamics had extended the scheme to provide calming north of the railway line, but also extending through the entire Plumpton Green centre. JB reported that the scheme immediately around the proposed site access would be funded as part of the development, but that to the north and through the village the working assumption was that it would be funded by the other developments via the Community Infrastructure Levy. JB stated that ESCC still had concerns regarding the scheme
- A bridge solution – a feasibility study was being conducted regarding a scheme potentially involving two bridges over the railway. This would involve refurbishment of the current bridge, and creation of a lift. This would be funded by the racecourse, though the existing bridge was owned by Network Rail. It was acknowledged that this option would be costly, but the racecourse was looking at a holistic approach that met the accessibility requirements and benefitted the wider community.

JB summarised as the first option was practical, but not yet viable. The second option will work, but ESCC has concerns, and that the third was dependent on completion of the feasibility study.

PS noted that the primary requirement was to satisfy the accessibility issues, and that traffic calming for the entire Plumpton Village was a secondary issue. NB requested JB share the traffic speed data collected as part of the study; JB will

send this on.

6. Questions from members of the Public

- New residents of East View Fields noted that they would directly impacted by the bridge solution to the racecourse site, and requested further details of the scheme. JB stated that until the completion of the relevant feasibility study this would not be possible. It was noted that any new solution, especially for the disabled access, would require lighting, and it was confirmed that the current footbridge was unlit.
- A subsequent question related to the principle of development south of the railway. JB re-iterated that the racecourse was in danger of being not commercially viable, and struggled to attract the necessary calibre of horses, trainers etc to compete in the sport. This had resulted in the loss of races, and poor fields in terms of numbers and quality of horses. As a national hunt venue, the weather was an important factor, but issues such as the lack of suitable stabling and accommodation were critical to the survival of the facility. PS stated that whilst there was a reluctance amongst the statutory planning authorities for residential development south of the railway, it was not prevented in principle, and the Steering Group recognised the position of both the racecourse and the college as significant landowners and employers within the draft plan. In line with consultation feedback from the statutory authorities, any decisions on these two important sites should be based on an overall estate plan, and in the case of the racecourse it should be clear that the limited development would contribute to the long term future of the site.
- One resident question why sites approved by the Parish Council had been removed, and why a new process had been started. NB stated that no site had been approved, and that the Parish Council had approved the draft plan and associated documents to go to the required consultation stage. Feedback from that consultation had necessitated revision to the plan, and that is what the Steering Group had done. This was a continuation of the same process.
- Further questions were raised by two residents questioning the methodology for selection of the preferred sites, and putting forward reasons why other sites should be used. NB stated that the reasons for selection had been set out, and acknowledging that any and all developments would have impact on some residents, but that the Steering Group had taken into account all factors when reaching its decision. NB stated that the consultation process provided the opportunity to respond to the site assessment documents and draft plan, and that it was not productive to have a long debate at this meeting. One resident wished his questions and all related discussion to be included in the minutes, to which NB agreed. The questions received have been included as an addendum to these minutes, and for clarity the answers that follow each question reflect the responses in the meeting, but do not represent a verbatim transcript of what was said.

8. AOB

None

9. Dates of future meetings

6th June, Village Hall.

Meeting closed 20:40.

Addendum: Questions provided by Andy Wride, with responses:

Q1. Access to Noland Farm has been resolved but needs more than 20 houses to make the development viable. Have the SG re-confirmed site viability with all the other developers regards plot size and access? It is our understanding that the rectory may need to be demolished to allow access and that a development cap of 20 houses has not been formally agreed.

SG Response - The Steering Group has communicated the village preference for development of a maximum of 20 units on each site, and is applying this as a constraint. With specific reference to the rectory, which impacts site 2 Glebe Land, the owner is not yet at the stage of detailed plans but does not regard the 20 unit limit as a barrier to development.

Q2. Are the selection criteria being applied consistently?

SG Response - The Steering Group has put a lot of effort into achieving consistency. The criteria are actually assessment criteria, and do not represent a scored solution to selecting sites.

- Brownfield sites – National Planning Policy and LDC Policy is to prioritise brownfield sites. The racecourse is brownfield and should be prioritised

SG Response - Whilst the racecourse may qualify as a brownfield site in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that controls planning, the site cannot be included in the draft plan as a primary site until it is deliverable. That is currently not the case due to the issues with safe and compliant access.

- The combination of Oaklands, the Glebe land, and Wells Close effectively creates a super site that has a far bigger impact on residents, access points, etc. than intended, whereas **Nolands Farm would have less impact and cannot be easily extended.**

SG Response - The issues with the selection of sites 6 (Wells Close), 7 (Glebe Land) and 8 (Land rear of Oakfield) are acknowledged. In practice, site 6 is served by existing access, and does not form a long boundary with site 7. The draft plan specifically calls for development schemes for sites 7 and 8 that maintain an appropriate separation between the sites to avoid the impression of a single large development. Whilst the landowners are at significantly different stages of planning, there is already contact with them to explore the possibilities of a joint access solution whilst maintaining the visual separation of the two sites. The developers of Nolands Farm site have told us the site is not commercially viable at 20 units, and a larger development does not match this village preference and was regarded as out of character with a rural village.

- The village stated a preference of North-South development to mitigate the impact on neighbouring houses. The sites to the north have been approved by LDC to be developable yet have been removed by the SG/NP. Why?

SG Response - The original questionnaire did include a question on north-south development, framed in the context of the historic development of the village. The issue with the northern sites has been covered in previous minutes and updates in the Parish Magazine. LDC has included the sites (19PL and 20PL) in the latest (2015) SHELAA/SHLAA documents, where they are classified as 'Developable – Unknown Suitability'. By contrast, the selected sites are classified as 'Suitable, Available and Achievable' in those documents. The text in these documents highlights the NPPF sustainability issues with the northern sites, and it is this, together with the aim of maintaining the villages rural character, that has resulted in the sites removal for the reasons already communicated – namely inclusion in the plan risks additional housing in Plumpton: "The sites to the north of Trillium and the Old Police Houses are less sustainable (in terms of access) than those nearer the village centre, and they are also outside LDC's notional planning boundary. We have therefore decided it is unwise to include them in the plan as other, more sustainable sites nearer to the village centre might then successfully get 'windfall' planning permission." [Plumpton Parish Magazine, April 2017]

- Sites that have problems that may get resolved later (Racecourse/Noland's access) or criteria that could be successfully challenged (west side section 106) should NOT be discounted or moved to the reserve list prematurely. Sites should be based in the selection criteria alone until it is proven they cannot be achieved – and not before.

SG Response - The Steering Group recognises that the planning situation is fluid, but the Neighbourhood Plan process must reach a conclusion, and the process has already been protracted compared to other similar villages; the Racecourse

and Nolands have not been included for the reasons stated previously. Regarding the western site 2 (Little Inholmes Farm), the Steering Group recognises that there could be a challenge on this site, but has been very clear in its reasoning: “The land at Little Inholmes Farm is covered by a section 106 agreement preventing development until 2074. The Steering Group considers the agreement was made in good faith and should be honoured.” [Plumpton Parish Magazine, April 2017]

- Site density should also consider proximity to existing houses

SG Response - Proximity to existing houses is acknowledged as a sensitive issue, and is recognised in the plan policies, and also in the NPPF. Specific Neighbourhood Plan policies have been included to address this.

Q3. Are the unintended consequences of the current selection methodology fully understood and communicated?

SG Response - Avoiding unintended consequences has formed a major element of the Steering Groups deliberations. In particular, as stated above, the Steering Group does not wish to leave Plumpton at greater risk of unwanted ‘windfall’ development.

- A single large site may be preferable to multiple adjoining sites

SG Response - The single large site option does not accord with the stated preferences, and the available sites (e.g. Nolands Farm, Little Inholmes Farm) that might fulfil this option have other considerations as mentioned.

- Partially developed sites could easily be extended

SG Response - It is a fact of life that partially developed sites may be extended if the planning policy allows. The Steering Group is aiming to minimise (but cannot remove) the risk of this, by adopting sites that most closely accord with the NPPF. That approach also reduces the risk of challenges by not erroneously excluding sites.

- Erroneously excluded sites could easily be challenged and developed by developers resulting on more housing

SG Response – per above, The Steering Group is aiming to minimise (but cannot remove) the risk of this, by adopting sites that most closely accord with the NPPF.

- Plumpton is currently a no-go area for buyers due to the number of proposed sites and planning confusion (source Mansell McTaggart)

SG Response – Completing and adopting a viable Neighbourhood Plan is intended to provide resolution to any planning confusion.

- We recommend the SG revalidates the criteria and methodology to ensure it meets the village's intended requirements (e.g. pocket development), excludes irrelevant LDC/ESCC "preferences" and does not leave the gates open for unintended windfall and site creep development.

SG Response – The Steering Group has put much effort into aligning a viable plan to the parishioners requirements, but it must be acknowledged that the Neighbourhood Plan cannot be created in isolation. As confirmed by Julian Black at the meeting, Neighbourhood Plans exist within the umbrella of the NPPF. In that context, ESCC/LDC preferences cannot be excluded as irrelevant when they represent the application of planning best practice within the NPPF. Specifically, Plumpton must submit the Neighbourhood Plan to LDC, and it is LDC that will decide whether that plan can be progressed to examination.