

WEST CHILTINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN COUNCIL

Approved Minutes of meeting in West Chiltington Church Hall At 7.30 pm on Monday 9 February 2015

Present:

Muriel Astley AM	Norman Kirby (Chairman) AM
William Marsden AM	Clive Needham AM
Jane Needham AM (until 9.15pm)	Brian Day
Sarah Fooks AM	Judy Fryer AM
Robert Thornton AM	Phil Tapsfield AM
Marshall Monks	David Stoner
Lawrie Hudson	Carol Hudson
Sean Davis	Sharon Davis
Lucy Maxwell	Daniel Maxwell
Annie Standing	Martin Morris
Mark Russell	Trevor Fitzpatrick
Mark Price	Bill Griffiths
Janette Wright	Terry Clark
Michelle Hollingsworth	Barbara Monks
Fran Davis	Chris Gage
Nick Gage	

AM denotes an Active Member

1. Apologies for absence – Ann Bush AM

2. Matters arising from meeting 12 January 2015

A question was asked about the current stage of the plan and the Chairman explained that his assessment of a likely timetable was as follows:

March	Decision on development proposals
April	Finalise text and design
April	Complete supporting documents
May	Expert Review
June	Parish Council and Horsham DC approval
July	Publication and public consultation

Another question arose on what decisions were awaited in March and the Chairman repeated what he had explained to the January meeting, namely that the active members of the NPC had decided to defer a decision on development proposals to be included in the neighbourhood plan until after Horsham District Council had

determined the Smock Alley planning application, an event that was now expected in March. A discussion took place in which the reasons for that decision were explored covering the views of some active members that they did not want to give encouragement to the developer by making a neighbourhood plan decision before the planning application had been dealt with.

A further question was asked about development targets for the village. The Chairman explained that Horsham's proposal for 1500 homes from neighbourhood plans without individual targets for villages had been approved by the planning inspector. There was pressure on Horsham to increase the total number of homes from 650 per annum to 750-800 primarily because of its overall lack of a five year housing supply and its inability to demonstrate that it could meet its affordable homes building target. Its timetable suggested March as the time when it would provide new proposals.

A suggestion was made that at the parish council planning meeting the previous week a councilor had said that a decision on Smock Alley had already been made. The Chairman of the planning committee denied that was the case and explained that the head of planning, in a publicly available document and the case officer in private communications had indicated only that the thinking was developing towards approving the application. Having said this the fact was that no actual decision has been made.

Another resident asked if it would be possible to protect the site adjacent to the Smock Alley site. The Chairman expressed the view that negative proposals in plans were likely to be rejected but if evidence could be produced to show that neighbourhood plans that did what was being sought had passed the examination process then the matter could be looked at to see if such a policy could be included in the plan.

That led on to a further discussion about how decision making in the NPC was conducted and attendees were reminded that the NPC was a public forum for consultation on issues relevant to the neighbourhood plan. It had been decided in the Spring of 2014 to create an active members group in order to enable decisions to be made that could eventually be recommended to the parish council which was the only body with the statutory authority to develop a neighbourhood plan.

Further questions arose about the absence of a formal constitution, why membership of the active members group was not being updated, the size of that group and the openness of the decision making process. The Chairman explained that whilst it might have been better to have had a formal constitution we were where we were, the existing arrangements had been in place for less than a year and the completion of the initial neighbourhood plan was quite far advanced. After about a year of the current arrangements it might be appropriate to review the structure for the public consultation stage of the development process. One resident pressed that the matter be considered immediately.

It was claimed that the neighbourhood plan was being led by the developer, something the Chairman emphatically rejected explaining that he had never met nor spoken to the developer and the recommendations of the planning and built environment group had been developed from a completely objective assessment that would be subject to full public scrutiny in the public consultation stage of the neighbourhood plan development.

3. Housing Needs Survey

A presentation was made by two residents outlining the way in which the 2014 Housing Needs Survey had presented the data. (A copy of the presentation will be circulated with these minutes). The main concern from the data was that it was clear that the affordable homes that were likely to be built would not be exclusively reserved for West Chiltington residents. This called into question whether there existed a “local need” at all.

There was universal appreciation of the clarity and excellence of the presentation.

A view was expressed that the assumptions on values of properties in West Chiltington used in the presentation was conservative. Further questions arose about the value of properties in Steele Close specifically but accurate data was not available. It was confirmed that a contract for the transfer of the Steele Close site had been signed about a week ago and a Housing Association and Horsham DC were in discussions on the details of the proposed development. It was agreed that there had been no affordable house building in West Chiltington for many years. The Steele Close proposal was a consequence of the Jayswood and Bracklyn developments and had its origins some 4-5 years in the past.

The Chairman explained that other factors that needed to be taken into account included Horsham’s policy that 70% of affordable homes should be for social renting and 30% for shared equity, the pressure on Horsham to deliver its affordable homes target and the policy that had been discussed with Andrew Smith, the Strategic Housing Manager, that provided for affordable homes to be offered to local residents first including individuals who were not on the Housing Register or who had not even completed the questionnaire.

He went on to agree that the concerns over the ability to ensure that the homes went to West Chiltington residents was widely shared but had been warned about many times during the neighbourhood plan development. The allocation process was however complex and his rationalization of how it works in practice is as follows, using the evidence from documents on the Smock Alley planning website.

Horsham would take the 32 needs as identified in the HNS and as planning applications came forward advise the development control manager of the makeup of the affordable element that should be negotiated. In the Smock Alley case the

developer's proposals were modified using bedroom requirements as the appropriate yardstick to conform to the HNS data. It would be expected that when the next application came along it would then use the reduced figure of 24 to determine the size of homes included in the development. That was the way in which an incremental policy worked.

There remained concerns that "local need" which was the mantra for development in Category 2 settlements was insufficiently accurately measured to be acceptable and the NPC was urged to develop a policy that drew attention to this.

Discussion then moved on to the wish of many attendees, most of whom were from the Smock Alley area, for the NPC to accelerate its decision making process and oppose the Smock Alley development.

The meeting was brought to a close at 9.40pm.