

SCRIPT FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN PRESENTATION

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Good morning

In the Summer of 2013 the Parish Council decided to gather together a group of volunteer residents and parish councillors who were interested in developing a Neighbourhood Plan. At the time there was a strong feeling that it was going to be a straightforward exercise in updating the old Village Design Statement. It became clear that there was a much more formal process governed by detailed regulations.

Today we have a draft Neighbourhood Plan. It was developed by the volunteer group that was known as the Neighbourhood Plan Council and adopted by the Parish Council. It is known as a pre-submission Neighbourhood Plan because it precedes its being formally submitted to Horsham District Council after a period of public consultation about which more will be said later.

What we are going to do this morning is run through the principles behind neighbourhood planning, look at the important features of the plan and tell you what you can do to comment on the plan once this meeting is over.

Here is the structure of the presentation.

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- Neighbourhood Planning
- National and Horsham District Policies
- The Vision for West Chiltington
- Development of land use policies
- Proposal maps
- Other land use policies
- Non land use policies
- Representations

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

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You will hear and see references to the Localism Act 2011, the National Planning Policy Framework and the Horsham District Planning Framework. They contain the legal framework behind the plan along with a whole raft of regulations, policies and more Acts of Parliament that we have to take into account. But to deal with the three main references.

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Localism Act 2011 – This was a major reform of local government and planning by the coalition Government and amongst many other provisions it provided for a Parish Council to:

“...initiate a process for the purpose of requiring a local planning authority in England to make a neighbourhood development plan.”

We use Neighbourhood Plan in place of Neighbourhood Development Plan but the use of the word “development” emphasizes that this is all about development and planning for development as it goes on to say:

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“...a plan which sets out policies ... in relation to the development and use of land in the whole or any part of a particular neighbourhood area specified in the plan.”

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For us the area is the whole of the Parish of West Chiltington.

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For the past two years we have been engaged in this process with a great deal of local activity.

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Once a draft plan has been developed it has to be subject to public consultation. After that it is submitted to Horsham District Council with an extensive number of additional documents covering the environmental effects of the plan, the outcome of the public consultation and a statement showing how it complies with the legislation on neighbourhood planning. It then goes to an independent examiner who will hopefully recommend that it is put to a referendum. Horsham organizes the referendum and if it is approved by a simple majority it is then “made” and becomes legally part of the planning system to be applied when Horsham is making planning decisions. Broadly speaking sites allocated for development will be developed and sites not allocated will not be.

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Of course Horsham has to agree that our proposals are consistent with its planning policies because our policies will take precedence in a number of circumstances..

NATIONAL AND HORSHAM DISTRICT POLICIES

The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for local authorities to follow. Planning authorities that do not comply with the NPPF in particular planning decisions are likely to see them overturned on appeal.

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The NPPF emphasizes sustainable development. The word sustainable is widely bandied about. Often it would appear that anything somebody does not like is branded unsustainable. It is a little more complex than that. It is about how the planning system performs an economic role, a social role and an environmental role.

Planning should promote economic development to build a strong, competitive economy. It should support communities by providing housing that meets the community's needs and promoting wellbeing. In achieving these objectives the planning system must contribute to protecting and enhancing the heritage and natural environment.

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There is a section on Neighbourhood Plans which emphasizes the legal significance of Neighbourhood Plans and the opportunities and obligations that affect Neighbourhood Plans.

Local Plans have to conform to the policies set out in the framework.

The Horsham District Planning Framework was published in April 2014 and has been the subject of a public examination which is not yet concluded but is expected to be during the Summer.

The HDPF sets out how Horsham will deliver its need for housing over the period to 2031 from big strategic developments like those near Horsham and Southwater to policies for rural communities like ours.

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Communities across Horsham are expected to contribute 1500 homes through neighbourhood plans. There is no target for particular communities but we are expected to make a contribution in accordance with the following policies:

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- Preventing the merging of settlements

- Protecting the nature and character of rural environments

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- Only developing adjacent to existing built up area boundaries
- Development must meet a local need
- Ensuring infill development does not damage the nature and character of the area

Infill is a special issue where preserving the nature and character of the area will be a primary consideration and limit any significant creeping development by infill.

In practice that means that development in West Chiltington will be modest especially because of the historic and future emphasis on only developing to meet a local need of which more later.

So that is the background – now for the vision for West Chiltington

THE PLAN VISION

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You can see the vision here with its emphasis on protecting the nature and character of the parish. That does not mean that there will no development, however. That is not an option and the Plan would not be acceptable if that is what we had said. Modest development is, however, inevitable and you will see before long that we are making extremely modest proposals that address the overriding need for affordable homes, none of which have been built in recent decades and without any significant risk to the nature and character of the parish.

DEVELOPMENT OF LAND USE POLICIES

This is the key and potentially most controversial part of the Plan so I shall go through it carefully. Right at the outset I should say that there never was any great expectation that a lot of development would take place here in our village simply because of the lack of developable land, the high cost of land and the long standing policies of Horsham Council that for many years has made, at least in theory, the meeting of a local need the most important planning consideration.

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There were four stages

The first step was the conduct of a Housing Needs Survey to update the 2009 survey that had informed planning decisions for many years.

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There was a very good response to this and it showed that there was support for small developments that delivered affordable homes. Now affordable homes has a special meaning. It is not just “less expensive” homes. It covers specifically social rented housing and shared equity housing for those who cannot afford to enter the open housing market. The survey saw 32 residents identify themselves as qualifying as in need.

There is also a potential need for cheaper homes to downsize into but the cost of land makes such housing virtually impossible to provide. We know from the Jayswood and Bracklyn developments that smaller homes are still not “less expensive”.

The next stage was to identify potential sites for development. This process is prescribed by the Planning Practice Guidance that expands on the NPPF.

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It deals specifically with Neighbourhood Plans and says that site assessment requires:

*“...proportionate, robust **evidence** (that) should support the choices made and the approach taken.”*

*“A qualifying body should carry out an **appraisal of options** and an assessment of individual sites against clearly identified criteria.”*

We were required to carry out an **audit of available sites**, ignoring previous constraints and evaluating issues afresh.

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Sites were identified from Horsham’s Strategic Housing Assessment, the data from Horsham’s Landscape Assessment and a desktop review of potential sites. Horsham invited local developers to identify sites and following the Village Show we invited residents to do likewise. In the end we identified 40 potential sites.

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The red and yellow sites were identified in the Horsham Strategic Land Availability Assessment. The blue ones were ones that emerged from the desk top exercise.

There is limited scope for development to the south, west and north because of the separation zone with Storrington, the South Downs National Park and the remoteness from the built environment so there is a concentration towards the east where regard also has to be given to the separation zone between the Common and the Village and between West Chiltington and Thakeham.

Each site was inspected and evaluated by one of a group of individuals and assessed against a framework that covered:

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- Biodiversity
- Landscape
- Heritage
- Flood Risk
- Transport
- Infrastructure
- Impact on residents

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Those assessments were then evaluated against one another to ensure consistency and peer reviewed. Some sites were readily eliminated as a result of that assessment and comparison with the planning policies that had to be met. A short list was then further assessed to check whether the land was available and a development viable and deliverable. That included speaking to some owners. A further group of sites was ruled out. That left three sites that appeared to meet a local need and the requirements of the Horsham plan. The site at Smock Alley was the subject of a planning application and when it was refused by Horsham that too was eliminated from the list until two remained. Two sites have been accepted by the Parish Council and allocated for development. Each site is for a small development of 15 homes and each will provide affordable homes and therefore meet the local housing need that the policy requires to be satisfied.

PROPOSAL MAPS

Here is a map of the 2 sites.

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Steele Close is a development of which all 15 homes is affordable ie for social rent or shared equity. This has been under discussion for some 6 years ever since the Jayswood and Bracklyn developments obtained planning approval. A planning application for this development is expected to be made very soon.

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The second site is part of the Hatches Estate owned by West Sussex County Council. This has been identified by Horsham over many years as potentially developable at the western end. There are significant issues with the site including some TPOs, access, topography and flooding but it is thought that if they can be resolved then in the longer term a small development would be viable. Again only 15 homes is proposed of which 5 would be affordable. Because of the uncertainties arising from the issues with the site it is placed in a 6-10 year time frame to enable a full evaluation to be made if and when a developer came forward with a viable proposition.

So there you have it – very modest proposals – not threatening the nature and character of the parish – meeting a local need – and reflecting small scale developments. That is not to say that either site will not be controversial. Any development tends to be controversial. I shall be explaining later how you may comment on these and other proposals if you wish to do so in addition to any rights you have to comment if there is a planning application affecting any of the sites.

OTHER LAND USE POLICIES

As I have said Neighbourhood Plans are about land use and we have covered in the Plan a small number of other issues that planners can take into account if and when any proposals fall to be considered.

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We carried out a business survey which showed that there was interest in low cost small scale industrial units, offices and treatment/therapy rooms in the neighbourhood to support local enterprise. No specific sites have been identified but in principle these would be supported if suitable sites – brown field sites presumably- became available.

We have rightly emphasized affordable homes and if they are built it is clearly important that they are allocated to local residents who have expressed a need for social housing or shared equity. We have, therefore, included a policy that gives priority to local residents or people with a local connection for such affordable homes as become available. Of course if local people who qualify do not take them up if offered then it is likely that other Horsham District residents on the Housing Register will be allocated them.

Conserving the natural environment is important and in addition to the obvious sites such as Monkmead woods and the recreation ground we have sought to conserve the allotments and the separation zone between the Common and the Village with its network of well used footpaths as open space.

No proposals are included that impact heritage assets – we have 67 listed buildings – but conserving the heritage environment is clearly very important looking to the future.

The final policy is a bit of a conundrum because it is not clear yet how Horsham proposes to deal with it. Developers in some cases are required to contribute to the infrastructure of the community – roads, education and community projects for example – these are currently done through what are known as s106 agreements which can also be used to control the details of development. A new Community Infrastructure Levy has been introduced to replace some of the s106 options. If such money is available we should like to see it applied to any community project that we identify from the potential improvement of facilities for children and young people that will be referred to in the next section.

NON LAND USE POLICIES

This is the community engagement part of the Plan – policies that the working groups who consulted the community thought ought to be in place to improve the parish environment. They cover the key issues of traffic and speeding. They reflect the lack of local facilities for children and young people and encourage a thorough review of all possible options for improvement. They reflect a concern for the very elderly and disabled in our community and address what has been a vexed question elsewhere, the exploration for oil and gas. Many of these will be taken forward by the Parish Council in due course and there is more detail in the Action Plan within the Neighbourhood Plan itself.

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REPRESENTATIONS

There you are – the West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan pre-submission version.

Copies will be available for you to read and to take away. It will also be placed on the Parish Council website along with a number of other documents:

SA/SEA - that explains the impact of the plan policies on the environment and demonstrates that there is no significant impact

Housing Needs Survey

Business Survey

Site Assessment Report

What we should like you to do is to let us know what you think. Your views do need to be given in writing and you do need to identify yourself if those views are to be considered. There is a representations form that you can collect at the Exhibition stand at the back of the hall or you can download it from the website and attach it to an email.

Remember that representations must be made by 31 August. Email responses are preferred because they can be copied and recorded more easily but ballot boxes will be in the Post Office Stores in the Village, NISA in Haglands Lane and here in the Village Hall if you want to hand in a paper version. You can also post or deliver it to the Parish Office.

This has been the culmination of two years' work and now the Plan has been launched it is up to you to have your say. Thank you.