

# **LITTLE MILTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – WHAT IS INVOLVED BRIEF FOR STEERING GROUP – AUG 2016**

Government guidance states:

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.

We are not starting this process with a blank sheet of paper. The Parish Council formed a small working group over 8 months ago who have already done a lot of research and background work on Neighbourhood Plans and have already brought together information and evidence which will form part of our plan. Also talks have been held with representatives of SODC's planning policy team which have helped considerably, in particular with Gayle Wootton who is our point of contact

Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) have already been accepted locally for places like Thame, Henley and Woodcote. These were big pieces of work and the teams that produced were large in number. We are a small village and our plan, and the size of the team that produces it, should be scaled accordingly.

SODC's current Local Plan, known as the Core Strategy, does not allocate any new housing to smaller villages such as ours. However SODC are currently rewriting the Local Plan to run to 2032 and their recently-published Preferred Options document suggests a 5% increase in housing stock in smaller villages over the next 15 years. This amounts to 10 new houses for us.

Recently a number of large housing developments in the district have been approved after an appeal by the developers, so-called 'planning by appeal'. An accepted Neighbourhood Plan may offer some protection against this happening. Case law on this particular matter is still evolving.

## **SODC Step by Step Guide**

[Click here](#) for the step by step guide on how to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Note that we already up to Step 5!

## **What does the plan need to cover?**

SODC's planning people have suggested that a plan suitable for our village should cover the following:

1. Describe the neighbourhood plan area ie. the parish, to someone who does not know it.

2. Summarise the current housing in the parish
3. Describe any constraints on development eg. Green Belt, Conservation Area, etc
4. Describe any environmental factors which affect the village and which will influence future development
5. Ascertain the housing need – numbers and type of housing against SODC's emerging Local Plan
6. State how the housing need will be met and decide if that level of development is sustainable
7. State agreed policies which will be applied to any future development
8. Decide design criteria
9. [Select sites] – (to be decided whether we include site selection or not) [Click here for further advice and see section below](#)
10. Describe Community Infrastructure Levy priorities
11. Record other factors which need to be considered eg. traffic, impact of a major strategic housing development close by

### **The Importance of Evidence**

It is an essential part of the process that the plan is supported by evidence. For example, when stating the current housing stock, 2011 census data forms part of the evidence base. When ascertaining the housing need for the village, an appropriate piece of evidence would be the results of a village survey. [Click here for further advice.](#)

Community consultation is also an essential part of the process. It must be shown that the villagers and appropriate authorities have been consulted at the various stages in the process. And at the end the plan is subject to a village referendum and will only be accepted if a majority vote in favour. [Click here for further advice.](#)

### **Meeting Key Criteria**

The plan has to meet certain key criteria, known as the Basic Conditions:

1. Be appropriate to make the plan, having regard to national policies and advice;
2. Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
3. Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan;
4. Not breach, and be otherwise compatible with, European Union and European Convention on Human Rights obligations.

At the end, we have to produce a so-called Basic Conditions statement showing that our plan complies.

## **Funding**

Now that the neighbourhood plan area has been designated, SODC will apply to the government for financial support for the plan. They will advise how much funding they can offer us – currently it is £5000 for a small village.

Before SODC can provide the grant, they need to see and approve a project plan for developing the neighbourhood plan. (This has already been submitted.)

Further funding can also be obtained through My Community. See Annex for details.

What might we be spending money on?

- Sub-contracting village survey ~ £1500
- Printing (copy of NP to every household)?
- Stationery
- Posters and visual display items

We could pay to contract out work to consultants if we wished and if the funds will cover it. In our case, there might only be a need to do this if we come across a complex matter beyond our capabilities.

A village in Norfolk called Strumpshaw which is about the same size as us spent £4220 in their plan, much of it printing costs. They did not use consultants.

## **Six stage process**

The whole process breaks down into six stages:

1. Gather information and the initial views of the village; ascertain the future housing need
2. Bring that information together, decide how the housing need should be met and draft the plan
3. Consult on the draft and revise in the light of feedback received from:
  1. The village
  2. SODC
4. Submit the plan to SODC who then conduct a further six-week consultation period
5. Plan is submitted to the external examiner who recommends (or not) that the plan goes to referendum (possibly subject to minor modifications)
6. SODC supports the recommendation and issues a decision statement to that effect. Conduct the referendum. Accept the plan if the village supports the plan. SODC's full Council adopts the plan at the next available meeting.

How long will this take? We are aiming for a short, sharp process with a target for Stage 3 commencing in February 2017. After that, each step of the process will take a finite time as some steps are subject to mandatory consultation periods, but we would hope to be finished by summer 2017.

## **So how can this be achieved?**

There are two key pieces of work which need to be completed early in the process.

The first major piece of work is a **housing needs assessment**. We need to ascertain if 10 new houses is enough and what sort of houses they should be. We need to carry out a survey to help find out the need and the types of houses. Is it for 50 x 5-bedroomed mansions, or 10 x 2-bedroomed starter homes? There is recommended methodology for this process. As part of that, we need to consult the village.

The survey really has 4 objectives:

1. To find any necessary information about the village which is not already available elsewhere
2. To sense the mood of the village as far as housing development is concerned
3. To be an important step in the process of consulting the village
4. To help determine the need for housing in the village

Therefore the village survey is a key piece of work. There are now fairly standard questionnaires which can be used as a baseline and our own tailored questions added to that baseline as we see fit. Experience from the Community Led Plan survey carried out 3 years ago indicates that, if we are not careful, this survey process can seem to take for ever. However that survey covered a broad spectrum of village life and it took a long time even to agree the questions, and it was complex to analyse. This time, we just need to focus on housing and a standard set of questions is readily available.

There are obviously 4 stages involved in carrying out a survey:

1. Design the questionnaire
2. Print and distribute to all households
3. Collect completed questionnaires
4. Analyse the answers and collate into a report (This is a big piece of work)

All of this work can be sub-contracted – at a price. Community First Oxfordshire will do a survey for us, if we so wished, for a relatively large fee. Alternatively a team at Stratford District Council can assist for a smaller fee. Preliminary talks with the latter have indicated that they can help design and print the questionnaire and do all the analysis and report writing for us, for a cost in the order of £1400. We would work with them on the questions we wanted to ask and also do the distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

It is likely that the survey will form part of the critical path for the whole process. If we are to keep to a short, sharp time scale, we would need to crack on with the survey and hope to have it finished ie. analysed and a report received, by Xmas.

The second major piece of work we may have to do is called a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental effects of a plan before it is made. Work on this assessment should start at the earliest opportunity. This is so that the processes for gathering evidence for the environmental report and for producing the draft neighbourhood plan can be integrated, and to allow the assessment process to inform the choices being made in the plan.

Whether or not we need to carry out a formal SEA is determined by SODC. The relevant paperwork has already been submitted to them for 'screening'. Even if an SEA is not formally required, it is still a useful piece of work to do as it helps determine priorities as far

as protecting the environment is concerned. As a result of background work which has already been done over the last few months, the first draft SEA is near enough ready for consideration by the working group.

## **Sustainability**

We need to demonstrate that any development proposals are sustainable. We have many facilities in this village – school, shop, etc. Some sustainability issues are common-sense eg. not building houses where there is a high risk of flooding, making sure the sewage system has sufficient capacity, etc. On the other hand, the lack of a frequent bus service might mean that building houses for people who may not have a car might be considered as unsustainable.

## **Design criteria**

SODC have recently published design guidance for consultation. We can amplify that with our own design criteria if we wish.

## **Site Selection**

If we concluded, say, that 10 new houses would meet the need, we have the option, if we wish, of also saying specifically where they should go.

Site selection has been a key part of NPs in bigger settlements eg. Thame, Henley, but it has the potential to be a minefield in the case of a small village.

A site can only be proposed for development if the landowner is willing and able to sell and a developer is willing to develop; there is no question of compulsory purchase. So site selection could involve lengthy and potentially difficult discussions with key players, and could be highly contentious in a small community.

Also site selection is done on the basis of land ownership as it is today. The situation may well change considerably over the plan period of 15 years. Land which is ideal for development may not be available today, but might become available downstream.

A Neighbourhood Plan does not need to include site selection but instead may state policies which would help determine the suitability of individual sites if they came forward during the life of the plan.

For the moment, we have told SODC we will not be doing site selection.

Note: we do have a document already available which identifies all the land owners and the status of their land outside the core village.

## **Community Infrastructure Levy**

Community Infrastructure Levy is a process whereby developers have to contribute funds to SODC to help cover the costs of infrastructure. 25% of such funds would come to our Parish Council to spend on infrastructure development as they see fit. The plan can include priorities for how such funding might be invested in the community.

## Maps

We have access to an on-line mapping tool. The baseline map is Ordnance Survey data. This can be overlain with a wide variety of information eg. Green Belt, flood risk areas. In addition, there is a drawing tool which allows areas of land to be outlined, wording added, etc.

## Other Factors

A Neighbourhood Plan cannot determine policies for matters outside the scope of development planning. So the NP cannot solve the village's traffic problems, although a number of aspirations for the future might be included in the plan.

## What is the end result?

The final NP contains, amongst other things, a number of policies designed to shape development in the village eg.

In the Conservation Areas new development will be permitted provided that it will be in harmony with existing buildings and the street scene. This is likely to require buildings to be finished in natural stone, with clay or slate tiled roofs or thatched. Buildings should be of an appropriate scale, massing and proportions so as to ensure that they are in keeping with the traditional buildings located in the Conservation Areas. Whilst the Parish Council supports green energy principles, photovoltaic panels should only be used if they would not detract from the attractive local street scene in the Conservation Areas.

## What do the Neighbourhood Plans from other small villages look like?

A good example is Marsh Gibbon just over the border in Buckinghamshire. This village is about the same size as us and for their approved plan [click here](#). This plan has the great advantage of being short and concise.

Within the Vale and South Oxfordshire area, Blewbury has been quoted as an example which we may wish to follow, although the village is 3 times our size – [click here](#).

Of note in the Blewbury plan:

- The housing need is neatly summarised in section 5.4 and we may well find a similar situation in our village
- It does not include site selection but rather specifies site selection criteria
- Includes an assessment of the character of the village, which might also be helpful for us

## What are the key issues for Little Milton's Neighbourhood Plan?

The fact that the half of the village that lies west of the A329 is covered by the Green Belt is a key factor. SODC's have stated a priority to protect the Green Belt (and it is also national policy). Building on the Green Belt is only currently allowed for so-called rural exception sites for affordable homes, owned by housing associations for renting out to people with local connections only. If there is a need identified for more such houses, then

building them on the Green Belt would be permissible.

If the need is for any other type of house, then building on the Green Belt is not allowed, as the rules stand at present.

A number of houses in the village (36) are owned by two housing associations – Sovereign Housing (Warren View) and SOHA (Thame Road and Old Field). Some (9) but not all of those houses are reserved for local people. Some work has been done in the past to determine the exact mix of housing association properties in the village. The conclusion in the past has been that we already have an above-average number of housing association properties already, but those figures need to be verified.

### **Website**

It will be important that all members of the working group have ready access to the required documents and sources of information. Therefore it is intended to set up a separate section of the parish council website as the neighbourhood plan resource centre.

### **Using Other People's Work**

The neighbourhood plan process is maturing quite rapidly and there are now a wide range of approved plans to use as guides and from which to crib content and wording. There is no need to start from scratch and no need to reinvent the wheel. It has all – now – been done before.

### **Other Things to be Considered**

1. Incorporation of the plan to redevelop the school.
2. The impact of the proposal to build 3500 houses on Chalgrove Airfield if it becomes the agreed strategic site in South Oxon.

### **Documents required to be produced**

As a minimum, the following documents have to be made available by the external examination stage:

- Draft Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Basic Conditions Statement – explaining how our plan meets the Basic Conditions
- Consultation Statement – showing how we have consulted and what we have done with the feedback received
- SEA Screening Statement from SODC – do we need an SEA or not?
- SEA, if required
- Community Survey Report with appendices
- Any other appropriate supporting documents

### **The Autumn Agenda**

The following key items for the agenda for the autumn are proposed:

1. Receive confirmation from SODC that our plan area (parish boundary) has been

approved (now received).

2. Apply for NP grant (in hand)
3. Receive result of SEA screening from SODC
4. Hold the first Steering Group meeting on 23 August. Agree membership, chairman, responsibilities, meeting schedule, etc. Decide what we want to get out of (5).
5. Hold a village meeting on Tue 13 Sep at the Pine Lodge (hall is booked) to seek support in principle for a Neighbourhood Plan and to hear from villagers their initial thoughts ie. carry out the first stage in the consultation process.
6. Steering Group meeting on Tue 20 Sep to absorb feedback, comments and suggestions from 13 Sep meeting.
7. Tidy up the draft Strategic Environmental Assessment and, if required by SODC, submit for formal approval. Otherwise use as a working document and decide environmental priorities for inclusion in the neighbourhood plan.
8. Complete the housing needs assessment and survey
9. Bring together factual information and draft the first part of the plan which describes our village, the environment and the current housing stock.
10. Start discussions with the Parish Council on Community Infrastructure Levy priorities
11. Decide if we want to include design criteria in our plan and agree content.

### **After That**

Once the results of the village survey are available, we can then draft the core part of the plan which deals with how that need can be met. So the sequence in early 2017 might be:

1. Draft the plan
2. Identify any gaps and complete any additional work required to fill those gaps
3. Complete first draft
4. Consult the village on that draft (various ways in which this can be done), receive feedback and modify the plan as necessary
5. Consult SODC on the revised draft, receive feedback and further modify the plan as necessary
6. Submit the revised draft and supporting documents for external examination. The main task of the examiner is to ensure the plan meets key criteria. The examiner can reject the plan (as apparently happened in Berinsfield<sup>\*\*\*</sup>) or suggest changes in order to ensure compliance.
7. Revise and finalise the plan after receipt of the examiner's report
8. Submit to the village and seek support through a referendum

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Berinsfield's NP failed at the examination stage on, amongst other things, the

following key points:

- Does not have regard to national policies, particularly in relation to policies for the Green Belt;
- Does not promote sustainable development;
- Is not supported by proportionate, robust evidence to support many of the policies in the plan;
- Is not in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan

## **Conduct of Business**

The aim is to have the bulk of the work done by early Spring. Therefore every meeting we have needs to count and make positive progress.

It can be a nightmare trying to arrange meeting dates which everyone can attend. It is suggested that we work on the basis that we are never going to get everyone at every meeting. Rather we should set a schedule of meetings, varying the day of the week, and that as long as we have a reasonable number at each meeting, we crack on with business.

What we need to do seems to break down into four elements:

1. Research and gathering of facts
2. Surveys and consultations
3. Drafting reports, assessments, policies and the plan
4. Constructive comment and ideas

### ***Research and gathering of facts***

This may be best done by one or two people who are already familiar with the sources of information. As mentioned earlier, a lot of the research required has already been done.

### ***Surveys and consultations***

The main village survey is going to need everyone to play a part in, firstly, agreeing the questions which are to be included, then distributing and collecting the questionnaires (with the possible help of friends and relations!).

Consultation with other interested parties eg. the school, will best be done by whoever already has contacts with that organisation. We do need to document any consultation.

### ***Drafting and editing reports, assessments, policies and the plan***

Ideally the majority of this work is probably best done by a small team who can collate information of various sources, and ensure consistency of content and consistency of style.

### ***Constructive comment and ideas***

Everyone!

## Summary

It may seem like a rather daunting task but when you start to read other people's plans, you can see that a lot of what they have written also applies to our village. Much of what is in a plan is just stating facts about the current village and just bringing together what we already know, or have found out from existing sources, in a single document.

The housing need in terms of numbers is largely pre-ordained in SODC's Local Plan. It is unlikely that there will be a groundswell of opinion in the village asking for more development than that required in the Local Plan. The Community Led Plan survey three years ago indicated no great desire for expansion of the village. Thus it is likely we will be looking more at the mix of types of houses required rather than absolute numbers.

We think we will not attempt site selection but rather we can follow the lead of Blewbury and others and simply specify site selection criteria.

There is a lot of kerfuffle in the beginning to get the ball rolling. Also there is a considerable amount that has now been written about neighbourhood planning. Extracting what really matters for us in a small village can be a challenge. It seems that the [My Communities](#) website contains good sensible advice on what we really need to do and the practicalities of achieving it.

A good Neighbourhood Plan can be of immense benefit to the village. Writing such a plan for our village is an exciting prospect.

## ANNEX A

### FURTHER FUNDING – in addition to grant funding via SODC

Taken from My Communities website

**The Department for Communities and Local Government have increased (or agreed to increase) the level of funding available to all groups from £8,000 to £9,000 from 1 April 2016. This additional funding can be used by groups to fund the completion of their neighbourhood plans. DCLG hope that some groups will use this funding to obtain more information on their evidence base, but this is not mandatory.**

All groups writing a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order are eligible to apply for up to £9,000 in grant. Groups facing a range of complex issues are able to apply for further support from the programme.

This support can come in two forms:

1. Technical support provided by AECOM – there are a range of technical support packages that groups are able to apply for as and when they become needed.
2. Groups are also be eligible to apply for a further grant of up to £6,000 giving a total grant ceiling of £15,000 in the period 2015-18.

If your group has already received £8,000 in funding and are still working on your plan, you may apply for further funding up to the maximum of £9,000 (or £15,000 for complex groups).

#### **Groups with complex issues include:**

- Neighbourhood forums (where there is no Parish or Town Council)
- Clusters of parishes
- High growth areas
- Deprived areas
- Business led neighbourhood plans
- Populations of over 25,000
- Groups preparing a neighbourhood development order.

Further detail on this is in our guidance below.

## **Technical Support**

**Amount for each grant available:** Dependant on application.

**Closing date:** We are operating a rolling application window for this programme. We expect that it will be open throughout the year.

#### **What is Technical Support and why do we need it?**

Technical Support is available to groups facing more complex issues developing their neighbourhood plan.

If you need independent advice on a technical or process issue then our team at [AECOM](#) can help!

Technical Support is designed to provide you with information (evidence) and advice (professional judgement) which will help you to decide your priorities & direction, to draft policy, avoid legal challenges and to engage confidently with stakeholders such as developers, councils, local businesses and of course residents who will have a vote at the end of it all.

Our consultants will work alongside you, doing only what you cannot manage and with a clearly defined brief, such as producing a design guide, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), evidence review or site assessment. The more substantial pieces of work will last between a few weeks to several months depending on the complexity of your situation.

Our team at [AECOM](#) are particularly keen to help ambitious groups, from all types of neighbourhood, who want to really influence how their place grows and changes going into the future.