

## **Neighbourhood Plan – Business & Employment**

Notes of a meeting of the **Topic Group – Business & Employment** held on **15<sup>th</sup> March 2017** at **4pm** in the Town Council Chamber.

Present: Cllr J Skinner (Chairman), J Dean (Vice-Chairman), S Sole, C Mason, R MacKenzie, J MacKenzie, I Pilcher, S Jenney, C Sanders, Cllr P Darby, P Le Grice, A Morris, G Edwards, J Harrup and B Harrup.

NP Consultant: Mr R Morfey  
Town Clerk: Mr R Bishop  
Deputy Clerk: Mrs C Smith

### **1. Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence received.

### **2. Introductions and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed all to the group and outlined the progress so far, that an initial meeting had identified some of the issues. The group introduced themselves around the table and gave a brief comment on their background and/or interest in the neighbourhood plan.

Cllr J Skinner – Town Councillor

J Dean – former civil engineer and Town Planner

S Sole – Interested party

C Mason – Business Owner, the Arts Lounge.

R MacKenzie J MacKenzie – residents concerned about development without due consideration to infrastructure.

I Pilcher – retired sports and leisure business consultant

S Petty, C Sanders, J Harrup, B Harrup, A Morris – interested parties and residents concerned about building development near their homes.

Cllr P Darby – Town and District Councillor

P Le Grice – Managing Director, Abel Homes

G Edwards former managing director of a window company

The group noted that a number of documents had been gathered together as an information resource. Two copies were held by the chair and vice-chair. It was agreed that the five-page document put together by planning consultant Liz Wrigley was a useful resource and would be circulated.

The Planning Consultant gave a recap on neighbourhood plans, outlining the structure of the process in Swaffham and that evidence gathered, led by the topic groups, would be pulled together by the steering group. Concern was expressed that the steering group would not be able to pull the plan together and that this topic group needed to oversee the process.

### **3. Discussion Points**

Although essentially about land use it was noted that other issues could also be considered in a neighbourhood plan. It was also noted that some issues identified would not be for the neighbourhood plan but could be directed to the organisation best placed to deal with them.

Time Lines – the group discussed time lines and noted that the steering group should receive first reports from Topic groups in July. These would be compared and collated. At the end of the process there would be a referendum, it was suggested that this would take between 12-18 months from February 2017.

Group Name - The group discussed the name of the group as it had been mooted as Housing, Business and Infrastructure at the launch event on 21<sup>st</sup> Feb, instead of the original Business and Employment. There was a protracted discussion on the focus and purpose of the group,

no resolution was made concerning the name of the group. Concerns were raised that housing did not sit with business and that many of the infrastructure issues were cross cutting across all groups. It was stated that groups could meet to discuss areas of mutual interest.

Role of Consultant – some members of the group felt that more firm guidance of how to put the plan together needed to be forthcoming from the consultants. It was explained that the consultants occasionally attended the groups in an observational capacity and that the groups themselves needed to lead and identify issues. The group discussed further the structure of the process including reporting back to the steering group.

Purpose of the groups – the Town Clerk gave an overview of the purpose of the groups and, as a number of people had attended to express concern about further housing development, he outlined how the current planning sites have come about. Most of the preferred sites for development in the Local Plan already have outline planning permission or planning permission.

Guidelines - J Dean produced and circulated a set of guidelines for the group. (Attached for information). The group discussed the guidelines and structure of the process.

Making a Start - It was stated that a start needed to be made somewhere and the Planning Consultant suggested that the group look at the question of – **‘What are the aspirations of the group for the development of business activity in the community over the next twenty years?’**. Looking at this question would help to retain focus as a topic group and get the process going.

Business Rates – The group discussed the differences in business rates for Town Centre properties, out of town and charity businesses. It was felt that these rates created an uneven playing field in terms of competition. It was also stated that businesses did not receive good value services from the local council as they had to pay separately for waste services. It was reported that these rates are set by National Government and although collected by Breckland District council most the revenue goes back to central government. It was thought that this was not an issue for the neighbourhood plan.

Further Development – Several of the attendees of the group stated that they had attended as they were concerned about housing development. They did not want to see too much development and wished to retain the character of a small rural town.

#### **4. Next Steps**

It was generally agreed that a start to formulate ideas would come in the next informal meeting. A list of bullet points to be discussed at the meeting would be drawn up and circulated by the chair to focus on the task.

#### **5. Date of Next Meetings**

- Informal meeting – 28<sup>th</sup> March 3.30pm, Town Hall, Council Chamber
- Formal meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2pm, Town Hall, Council Chamber

**It was agreed that the meetings will be kept to no more than 1.5 hours.**

Meeting Closed at 5.10pm