



MINUTES

Meeting: FORWARD PLANNING **Date:** 21st September 2015 **Time:** 7.30pm

Venue: North Weald Library, 138 High Road, North Weald

PRESENT:

Councillors (11)

C Hawkins (Chairman), B Bartram, T Blanks, N Bedford, B Clegg, Mrs S Jackman MBE, A Buckley, Mrs E Godwin-Brown, G Mulliner, R Spearman, A Tyler*,

** for part of meeting*

Also in Attendance (3)

Susan De Luca – Clerk to the Council
Adriana Jones – Principal Finance Officer (PFO)
Members of the Press - 1
Members of the Public - 0

FP.006 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (3)

NOTED that apologies had been received from Cllrs Eldridge, Stallan and Mrs A Grigg.

FP.007 OTHER ABSENCES (1)

Members **NOTED** other absences of Cllr Ms Adams.

FP.008 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Spearman Disclosable Pecuniary interest by virtue of submitting land via the EFDC Call for Sites and expressing interesting in developing land as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

FP.009 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - THE NEXT STEPS

At the Parish Council meeting of 7th September 2015, Council agreed to progress a Neighbourhood Plan for the Area as designated by Epping Forest District Council. Attached to the agenda was a document entitled '*Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide*' which summarises a Neighbourhood Plan and the process involved. Councillors had been asked to review this document prior to the meeting.

The PFO gave Members a short presentation which included the following:

A Neighbourhood Plan:

- must be in general conformity with the Local Plan
- must conform to National Planning Policy / European Legislation
- must be genuinely community led
- must promote the same, if not more, development than the Local Plan

Councillors noted that the task of a Parish Council is to **lead and co-ordinate** the process of producing a Neighbourhood Plan, and it is up to the Parish Council to choose how to undertake the work and whether it commissions other organisations to work with it. It is generally good practice for a working group or steering group to be set up to manage the process and report back to the Parish Council. This can include Councillors and other local people. It was reiterated to Councillors that a Neighbourhood Plan is about guiding and shaping development, not about stopping it.

In terms of the Steering Group / Working Group, this could include a range of people, such as Councillors, members of the local community, local organisations, etc, however it is essential that anybody on the Steering Group / Working Group goes into the process with an open mind, ready to assimilate and interpret the views of the wider community.

The role of a Steering Group / Working Group would include tasks such as:

- Creating a Project Plan / Action Plan - Timeframe
- Creating a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)
- Managing publicity / increasing awareness
- Creating and managing a budget / costs
- Identifying Stakeholders / Key local partners (this includes developers and land owners)
- Establishing resources available and any gaps
- Managing community engagement / involvement / expectations
- Gaining support
- Establishing what do we need to know
- Reviewing the evidence
- Providing feedback
- Understanding what they cannot do and any limitations of the process
- Establishing the Scope of the Plan following consultation
- Creating a current profile of the NP Area
- Establishing Key issues – findings of surveys and public events
- Understand current policy

One of the first steps would be to complete a skills audit, looking at what skills are needed to complete a Neighbourhood Plan, which of those may be available locally, and which may need external support (consultants). Examples of the types of skills which would be useful include:

Management, Leadership, Administration, Managing Social Media, Marketing, Research, Analytical, Design, Printing, Community engagement, Communication, Statistical, Planning / Town planning, Architectural, Historical, Financial

With regard to cost, Councillors noted that the current available funds for a Neighbourhood Plan are £37,082.75 (from precept and reserves). There are grants available of up to £8,000 (to be spent within 6 months), and £6,000 if a plan would be more complicated and requires specific technical expertise. Councillors **NOTED** that a

budget would need to be set so that costs can be appropriately managed. Councillors would need to consider if any staff time would be needed as part of the plan, and how this would be achieved, together with any associated costs. What would the cost be of engaging external support from Consultants. How would information be distributed, the cost of a letter to each home in the Parish would be in excess of £1,500. The cost of printing, venue hire and publicity would also need to be considered. The PFO gave members details of recent case studies for 5 Neighbourhood Plans that had been completed, looking at the cost to create them, together with volunteer time and length of the process.

Councillors were reminded that a Neighbourhood Plan is about the use and Development of Land within an area. This does not only relate to where new housing development will be located, but can also include:

- Type, Design, Location and mix of new development
- Affordable Housing
- Contributing to achieving sustainable development
- Creating a Vision / Aim / Objectives for the area
- Can relate to Social, Economic and Environmental matters
- Can earmark specific sites for development, e.g housing, retail, employment, mixed use
- Improving open spaces and pedestrian links
- Improving Community Facilities
- Improving social care / facilities for an aging population / disabled (through land use)
- Education
- Recreation
- Protection of Local Green Spaces
- Enhancement of village and local centres
- Reuse of existing buildings - regeneration / development

Councillor Blanks expressed his concern, stating that a Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the Local Plan, however at this stage the Parish Council were unaware of what Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) plan for the area was, although it is clear that there will be development. His concern was heightened in light of EFDC's recent engagement of Consultants Fregonese Associates to complete a Capacity Analysis and Site Selection project, the details of their brief including a full review of the North Weald Bassett Masterplan. Cllr Blanks stated that it seems pointless to complete a Neighbourhood Plan at this time without knowing what EFDC's plans are. To do so would risk a Neighbourhood Plan that was not in general conformity with the Local Plan. The PFO explained that a Neighbourhood Plan wasn't just about the siting of housing, but included a range of other important community factors as detailed earlier, such as protecting Local Green Spaces. Cllr Blanks stated that with EFDC completing a review of the Green Belt, and the possibility of release of the some green belt areas, the Parish Council had little control of Local Green Spaces anyway. Cllr Blanks stated that effectively the Parish Council

would be completing this task with one hand tied behind their back due to the lack of information in terms of what development EFDC is considering.

Cllr Blanks stated that one of his concerns was that the Parish Council, and the Neighbourhood Plan process at this time, would not be able to answer the questions that residents wanted to know, which is 'how much development is there going to be, and where is it going to go'. The PFO reminded Members that a Neighbourhood Plan is not about stopping development, but it would allow a degree of control and influence over it. She continued stating that simply because EFDC had not confirmed these details at this time does not mean that the Neighbourhood Plan process cannot go forward. There are a great many tasks and projects that could be completed in the interim to get the process underway, as well as a consultation to establish residents thoughts on what's important to them for the area and what a Neighbourhood Plan should address. Cllr Blanks expressed his concern that people had been asked the same question in 2012 and on other occasions, however they were no closer to receiving an answer. The PFO informed Members that Cllr Blanks point was important, and this is something recognised as '*consultation fatigue*'. Councillors should consider if they felt residents would perhaps be despondent about further Neighbourhood Planning consultations, and would there actually be enough support and interest within the community to ensure involvement. Cllr Blanks stated that in his opinion there were simply too many unknowns at this time.

The Chairman stated that the Parish Council did have support to progress a Neighbourhood Plan, and this is clear by way of the Parish Precept, however he did have concerns that there would be enough people within the community who would be willing or able to be involved in the process with a fully open mind. The PFO stated that the project could not be completed unless these people could be found.

Cllr Mrs Jackman stated that upon reading the documentation attached to the agenda, it stated the Local Planning Authority (EFDC) is under a duty to support and obliged by law to help people draw up their neighbourhood Plans, and asked what support EFDC would give the Parish Council. The PFO stated that EFDC had made it very clear that during the preparation of the Local Plan, they do not have the resources to assist Parish and Town Councils preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Clegg stated that whilst he understood Cllr Blanks concerns, he felt that there was work that could be completed at this point in time, none less so than establishing whether or not residents are actually interested in being part of the process, as without asking the question you would not know. If nobody is interested, then there seems little point in going forward. Cllr Clegg suggested a program of publicity to see how engaged the community were in the process, followed by a meeting of those who were interested, when at which time full details of the Neighbourhood Plan could be explained and individuals could then make a decision whether or not they wanted to be involved.

Cllr Godwin-Brown stated that the PFO had undertaken a project some time ago regarding the local area, and that she felt the PFO should be asked if she would be

willing to lead and co-ordinate the Neighbourhood Plan project. The PFO said she would, however the Parish Council would need to be clear that there was enough interest in the project. Cllr Blanks referenced the previous project completed by the PFO, asking what happened to it, to which the PFO stated that EFDC would have considered its content and it would now form part of the EFDC Local Plan Evidence Base. Cllr Bedford asked if the PFO would complete this work within her normal working hours, to which the Clerk stated she could not, and that she would need additional hours to complete this.

Cllr Mulliner stated that perhaps a better option would be to employ another person to undertake some of the smaller jobs, which would free up the PFO to complete this work.

Cllr Bedford stated that he understood Councillor Blanks' concerns, however felt there were 2 or 3 major pieces of work that could be completed and got into position at this point in time, in preparation and in readiness for when EFDC release their preferred options next year which would give the Parish Council a broad idea of their thinking.

Cllr Tyler stated that despite the hurdles and barriers in the way, there are many residents who are very interested in the future of the area, and many projects or proposals that could be considered, one being a Park and Ride at the Airfield. As residents, we should not simply give up. Cllr Tyler stated that it was essential public awareness was increased, and that social media was a great tool in doing this, suggesting a couple of Councillors may wish to start a blog.

The Chairman stated that it was essential the interests of the local people were at the heart of this project at all times, and that as a Parish Council we do what's right for the community, even if the outcome could not be determined. If the interest from local people is not forthcoming, at least you can show you tried.

Cllr Bedford **PROPOSED** that the Parish Council starts the project by completing a program of publicity (placing adverts in the local media / public arena / social media, etc) explaining where the Parish Council are at and establishing if how much public support there is in terms of involvement. A meeting would then be held with any interested parties to explain the process of a Neighbourhood Plan, providing information and guidance, and to establish if those interested parties still wanted to be involved. That the PFO is given additional time to complete this work, and that a further review takes place on how to move forward in three months time (January 2016). This was **SECONDED** by Cllr Tyler.

It was agreed by those present that this should be placed as a **RECOMENDATION** to full Council at their 5th October meeting for ratification.

Meeting closed 20.29

Signed:

Date:.....