



MINUTES

Meeting: Neighbourhood Plan Committee **Date:** 14th June 2023

Time: 7.00PM

Venue: PARISH HALL, THORNWOOD COMMON

PRESENT:

Councillors (7) Cllr Buckley (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Hawkins, Cllr Clegg, Cllr Blanks, Cllr Born*, Cllr Tyler, Cllr Mrs Etherington.

** for part of meeting*

Officers in Attendance (2)

Susan De Luca – Parish Clerk

Adriana Jones – Principal Financial Officer (PFO)

Members of the Public (2)

Members of the Press (0)

NP.001 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Cllr Buckley was elected as Chairman for this Committee.

NP.002 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (3)

Apologies received from Cllr Ms Wood, Cllr Spearman and Cllr Kinnear. Cllr Born provided his apologies for lateness.

NP.003 OTHER ABSENCES (4)

Cllr Spearman, Cllr Bedford, Cllr Irvine, Cllr Mrs Jackman,

NP.004 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

NP.005 CURRENT POSITION

Councillors were reminded that work on the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) initially started in 2014 following the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, however work really gained full momentum in 2016 with the creation of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – a group of local residents who progressed the NP on a volunteer basis, supported by the Neighbourhood Planning Sub Committee, and providing recommendations to full Council. The Localism Act states that Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.

A considerable amount of time, effort and work was undertaken on the part of NP Steering Group and Sub Committee, which included public consultations, research, and liaison with other statutory bodies, which culminated in the creation of a draft NP document in 2020 which included draft planning policies. This draft document was put to the local community for consultation, and a copy sent to EFDC for review against the current (at that time) and proposed (now current) Local Plan. The feedback received was quite frustrating, and after the Steering Group met in November 2021 to consider this, the Steering Group made a recommendation to Council that the Neighbourhood Plan be put on hold until such time as the Local Plan had been adopted, as progressing before this time could be very time consuming and costly, and the work undertaken could ultimately be a waste of time.

At the November 2022 Parish Council meeting, Councillors were made aware that the Ongar Neighbourhood Plan had progressed to referendum. At that meeting there was discussion on the subject, and the Chairman stated that he felt the general feel around the table was that this Council should continue with a NP but advised Councillors that if this was the case the office staff would require a significant amount of support from Councillors who would need to be involved in the process and take ownership of the plan. Everybody would need to get involved. At the same meeting it was noted that there would be a financial cost and that this needed to be considered.

In March 2023, Epping Forest District Council approved its Local Plan for the period to 2033. The Local Plan sets out the development and growth in the district up to this date, and the following housing development sites within North Weald Bassett Parish are included within the Local Plan:

- NWB R1-R5 - Minimum 1,050 new homes in North Weald village
- SP4.1 – Minimum 1,050 new homes at Latton Priory
- Thor R1-R2 – Approx 172 new homes in Thornwood
- North Weald Airfield employment area
- Other Employment areas in the Parish

The current situation is that a NP must be in general conformity with the strategic elements of the Local Plan. For Councillors information, these are as follows:

- Chapter 2 'Strategic Policies' with the prefix 'SP';
- Chapter 3 'Housing, Employment and Transport' with the prefix 'H', 'E' or 'T';
- Chapter 5 'Places' with the prefix 'P'
- Chapter 6 'Infrastructure and Delivery' Policies 'D1 to D5 and D8'."

Therefore, the current position is that the District Council now has a local plan in place against which a NP could be assessed, and underneath which a NP and its policies could now sit.

NP.006 REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED

Attached to the agenda were the following documents:

- List of Local Plan Strategic Policies
- Local Plan Development Sites
- Draft Neighbourhood Plan
- Feedback from local residents
- Review of policies in Neighbourhood Plan conducted by EFDC in August 2021
- Review of EFDC's review completed by Navigus – November 2021
- Review of current policies against now 'made' Local Plan June 2023 completed by Navigus

The PFO talked through the review documents as listed, and advised Councillors that it was looking like at least one of the proposed policies on Parking would need to be deleted entirely, and that a number of the other policies may have to be watered down in order to ensure compliance with the Local Plan and Government policies. The PFO further stated that she was unsure what this would mean for the plan, and how both residents and Councillors would feel about it given that some of these policies were the ones where members of the public felt very strongly:

- GEN1 – Materials

- GEN3 – Residential Parking
- NW8 – Public Parking in the Centre of North Weald
- NW12 – North Weald Airfield
- LGS1 – Local Green Spaces
- TAR1 – Traffic and Roads

The PFO stated that potentially the NP could be watered down so much that it no longer accurately reflected the feedback received from residents, and that if this was the case could the Parish Council justify spending further money on creating it.

Cllr Tyler asked if the NP documents were private, to which the PFO confirmed they were public documents and available on the NP website, and that the public had been consulted on their content. Cllr Tyler then passed a copy to one of the members of the public present.

The following salient points were raised:

- If EFDC ultimately do not agree that the plan meets conformity requirements, they will not complete a Reg 16 consultation which means that plan cannot progress to examination.
- A NP has to be ‘positively written’.
- The residents have to understand exactly what the NP is trying to achieve, otherwise they will not vote for it at referendum.
- Work on a NP comes at a challenging time with development moving forward at North Weald, the Airfield, Latton Priory and Thornwood, and how would this impact residents engagement in the process and perception of what a NP was. Consultation fatigue was a concern, as was lack of understanding by many residents as to what a NP was and was not. It could easily be perceived that the Parish Council was building the homes, and people could vote ‘no’ at the referendum. Cllr Mrs Etherington stated many residents thought the group was actually ‘Neighbourhood Watch’.
- One of the benefits of the NP process was having a seat around the table with developers, and trying to influence the design process of any new development.
- There were some good elements of a NP which remained, in that a Parish Council would receive 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy claimed by the district Council, albeit EFDC had not introduced a Levy at this time. The protection of small green spaces demonstrably special to the community, as well as trying to influence the design of new development.
- The results of the residents survey showed that residents in each village had serious concerns about traffic and parking, which backs up the concern about infrastructure.
- When speaking with the planning consultant, they had suggested the possibility of including biodiversity net gain, however this did not feature in the survey responses.
- Each of the large development sites (EFDC Airfield, North Weald Vistry, Latton Priory) would be writing their own design codes.
- The policies included in the Plan were not just for the large developments, but also windfall homes, extensions etc.

Cllr Blanks felt it would be disingenuous to the residents to water down the policies, stating that in his opinion it was one rule for EFDC, and one rule for everybody else, considering EFDC were building a multistorey car park in Epping, yet would not support the provision of parking in North

Weald Village, and he felt this was totally unacceptable. Cllr Blanks stated that the first question he asked at the start of the process was how EFDC members got to their meetings.

Cllr Mrs Hawkins felt that changing some of the wording could be quite simple and would change the context of the policies. The Clerk supported this, stating the use of words could make a difference.

Cllr Clegg stated that two of the three main policies that required alteration revolved around infrastructure, which seems to have been swept under the carpet, specifically referencing Policy TAR1, confirming that all of the roads were unsuitable for HGVs. Councillors expressed their concern generally about the amount of development coming to North Weald, and the lack of infrastructure being provided to support this development. The push for sustainable transport was laudable, however was unrealistic, and that more infrastructure was needed given the quantum of housing. Councillors could foresee this was going to cause problems for the Parish but were powerless to do anything about it. This was without the impact of construction traffic. Cllr Clegg referenced The Plain junction in Epping operating at 110% capacity, yet nothing can be done about it. The PFO advised this was referenced in this Council's response to the EFDC Local Plan consultation, and that the NP could not address this.

Cllr Tyler suggested that the residents survey should be completed again, asking different questions such as 'do you work from home' in order to understand how peoples lives had changed. This would allow us to say we had the evidence to prove what is fundamental to our residents. The PFO explained how much work went into deciding what questions to ask as part of the original survey, as well as clearly understanding the reason why we were asking the question in order to be clear about how this would help, but that Cllr Tyler raised a good point in that the data may be out of date and require updating. The PFO explained both the financial cost, and cost in terms of time it took, to complete the survey being exceptionally high as they were all hand delivered and collected. Cllr Mrs Etherington stated she felt this option should be explored.

Cllr Blanks suggested this Council should make it clear to residents that we were in effect being told by EFDC that we must accept the extra traffic that goes with all the housing, and that the policies we wanted had not been accepted by EFDC. Cllr Blanks suggested the Parish Council should stick with what residents wanted, to which the Clerk stated that if the policies were not changed then the NP would not get to the next stage in the process.

[Cllr Born arrived]

Cllr Born advised that he attended a District meeting earlier in the afternoon, and had some excellent dialogue concerning rights of way, etc, had taken place and that the developers have no control over the roads outside of the development site, and that this was down to Highways to deal with. There is a mismatch with different departments not talking to each other.

Cllr Clegg stated that a considerable amount of time and energy had gone into creating the draft NP, and that he felt it was fundamentally ok, and if there was a way to offer this with some of the recommended changes and retain some of the other policies, then he felt the Parish Council should continue forward. Cllr Clegg further stated that without a phenomenal amount of effort, time and money in the next year, to re-do the survey would not result in anybody's mind being changed at EFDC. Cllr Mrs Etherington supported these points, stating that if possible we should at least try

and if it failed at referendum, at least the Parish Council could say it tried. Both Cllr Mrs Hawkins and Cllr Clegg supported this.

The Chairman stated that it could be a good idea to advise the public about the situation in terms of what changes were being forced upon the Parish Council, to which Cllr Clegg reported that he agreed stating that we could say ‘This is what you wanted, and this is what we are being told we can have, but we are still going to press for it’.

Cllr Tyler and one of the members of public referenced the Essex Design Guide, stating that this is often used in planning statements to support a Planning Applications. Cllr Born stated that he had read the document, and it was a good document, but that there were two things not being considered, the first being that part of these documents were built around European standards. Cllr Clegg disagreed, and following some heated discussion it was noted that the NP Steering group spent 5 years on this project and that it was done in good faith with all parties believing it was the right thing to do.

The Clerk summarised, stating that Councillors needed to consider if it wanted to re-look and the draft NP policies in light of EFDCs comments, and decide if the Council should continue with the Plan, in what context this should be done. She suggested all Councillors, especially the newer ones or those that were not heavily involved in the process, should thoroughly read the draft NP document so that they were very clear about its content. The Clerk stated further stating that Councillors needed to decide what would be gained from continuing with the NP.

NP.007 THE WAY FORWARD

It was **AGREED** that Chris from Navigus should be asked to look at the changes proposed by EFDC, alongside his supporting comments, and make the necessary changes ensuring that as much as practically possible of the original intent of the policy (which was based on feedback from local residents) was retained. In essence, making only those changes absolutely necessary, or the minimum necessary, for the plan to meet the required standard. The NP Committee could then relook at the draft document and decide if it was worth progressing further, or if not the public should receive an explanation about the journey to this point and why a NP was not being progressed.

Signed:

Date: