

# Benson Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee Meeting

03 Oct 2016

## Minutes

**Present:** Jon Fowler (JF), Dave Rushton (DR), Edel McGurk (EM), Martyn Spence (MS), Philip Murray (PM), Catherine Murray (CM); Frank Farquharson (FF), Michael Winton, Andrew Ashcroft (until 9pm)

*Note - since this meeting was held, it has been confirmed that Gayle Wootton has left SODC so actions related to conversations with her will need to be pursued with someone else in SODC.*

*Blocks of text in grey shading are extracts from the agenda included to provide context to the discussion points.*

1. Review of Actions from previous meeting (the following notes cover only those actions that have not been fully discharged and are carried forward)

- a. PM to consider further whether the steering committee needs a new member to replace Lorna Denby who stepped down. (Helene Quenu does not have time)
- b. Follow-up conversations with Gayle Wootton and Mark Gray have not taken place.
- c. The documents and emails relating to the Consultation statement have been passed by Lorna Denby to JF - this action is in hand.
- d. Following a conversation with Patricia Baylis about formalising the permissive footpath under the road, DR to take the discussion forward via the Parish Council.  
**Action DR**
- e. **Action FF** to look at Littleworth Road S106 to see how community facilities commitment is described.
- f. **Action EM** to summarise next steps for mapping work for SC, and pass on thanks to Alice Jones-Evans for her work so far.
- g. **Action EM** to check for her summary of feedback at the June drop-in event, and sent to LD if not done already.
- h. **Action DR** to attend Neighbourhood Planning Teams' meeting with JF

## 2. Strategic Environmental Assessment

- Brief from Andrew - What exactly will be covered by the SEA Report and what won't? At what level of detail? Can we commission the selected consultants to

consider other aspects we believe are important, without compromising our timescales unacceptably? If we can, what limitations would apply?

- What other connected aspects do we want our SEA consultants to consider for each site - e.g. proximity to other settlements (buffers), impact on green spaces, walking access to village centre, decentralisation and erosion of services etc?

### AA's Advice

2.1 SEA is effectively a formal process by which every plan and proposal is assessed for its environmental impacts. The vast majority of NPs are screened out. (The examiner will consider whether that screening decision was robust.) This isn't a bolt-on assessment completed at the end. It's an iterative process through which the plan detail is informed by the SEA and vice versa. The process starts with us.

2.2 The purpose is to demonstrate that the plan doesn't have unacceptable environmental impacts. For every vision, objective and policy, the SEA identifies whether each of those results in an unacceptable environmental impact. Through the SEA, we can test any combination of housing site options in terms of their environmental impact. The assessment must also test reasonable alternatives.

2.3 The statutory bodies that advised SODC that an SEA should be required here were EA and English Heritage. EA flagged issues about flood risk to be taken into account. English Heritage concerns were about impacts on the conservation area and archaeological remains.

2.4 The SEA is not an encyclopaedic process – it must be proportionate to why it was required in the first place

#### 2.4 SC Questions/Comments:

Q1. Can the SEA consider settlement buffer zones?

A. Yes. Coalescence of the village is considered in our plan objectives, so the SEA could consider that.

Q2. What timescale will the SEA be completed to?

A. SEA and NP prep are expected to run in parallel with each other, so the consultant will need our draft generic and site-specific policies in order to make progress. The starting point is our vision and objectives

Q3. We have eight sites identified so far - will the SEA provide us with some objective means of determining which have the lowest impact?

A. The SEA will test each site against each of our objectives. The SEA will identify the impact and the SC will then make the judgement about how to balance up the issues, how to manage and mitigate the concerns.

Q4. How will the SEA consider impacts on archeological remains?

A. Without digging trenches, the assessment might have no more to go on than the County archeologist's view.

### 3. Progress with commissioning SEA

- Brief from Jon (and Andrew) - What is latest update on our exercise to secure SEA consultants?

3.1 A further consultant has declined the work on capacity grounds. We can consider another consultant, which quoted a higher price, but we will need more funds.

3.2 We have approached 9 consultants and had only one quote.

**Actions JF** to check with AECOM whether they are still available to do the work.

**Action PM** to approach Gayle Wootton about accessing further funds.

#### 4. Plan Production

- **Brief from Andrew** - When and how will AA take over drafting of the plan? What state do we need to get plan to in order to facilitate that handover?
- What should be the outline format of our plan? Need to consider treatment of general/stream introductions, policy phrasing, reasons paragraphs supporting policies, background evidence, appendices

4.1 We are now getting to a place where AA will be able to take all of the draft content and craft into a coherent plan.

4.2 AA needs to know what our growth strategy is in order to make progress. If the focus is on conservation and character, then our plan's green space and conservation policies would be crafted to be restrictive. The SC needs to prepare an outline in this respect for AA that shows where we are going.

4.3 AA's work will only be to prepare the text of the plan. The SC will need to arrange for a nominee to coordinate the design, production and publication of the plan.

**Action all SC members to consider and make suggestions.**

4.4 For site-specific policies, they only need to cover the sites we choose to allocate for development.

#### 5. Housing Numbers/Density

- How many homes do we want to offer over and above those already 'booked' by SODC in BEN1A? How do we decide this? How do we justify our chosen number? What do we do if the SEA identifies more suitable sites than we think we need?

5.1 Depending when our plan is submitted, it is likely to be assessed against the current / old Local Plan. We may choose to allocate none, few or all sites.

5.2 We need to be able to offer a rationale for our choices, assuming that we reject some of the sites. Where we conclude that there are sites that are not favoured, we would need to look to demonstrate why harm might be caused eg on environmental grounds or what unsustainable impacts there might be on strategic infrastructure. If this relates to Benson's character as a village, we will need to have evidence as to what that character is and on what it depends.

5.3 We can allocate parts of sites for development rather than the whole.

5.4 There are some caveats (i) If there is a difference between our NP and the new local plan, the most recent has more weight. (ii) The 'Five year land supply' issue might always

be the trump card. We should focus on the golden thread of sustainable (Economic, social and environmental) development in terms of the growth we promote. Our approach should be to show the line where development/growth becomes unsustainable.

5.5 The SC discussed views on the scale of development the village may be able to accommodate. In terms of the projected number of new houses, the NP cannot include houses that are already committed ie those with either full or outline consent. Littleworth Road cannot be counted. In summary, SC members suggested an additional number of houses between 0 and 160 houses beyond those already approved, but agreed the topic needed further discussion. (The max figure in this range would exceed the number required by SODC's current Local Plan and by the Preferred Options for the Local Plan 2032 in that 240 dwellings at Littleworth Road have been approved since the March 2016 baseline, giving a total of between 240 and 400 in comparison with SODC's calculation of 10% growth as 190 new dwellings.)

5.6 In terms of capacity of the schools, there are extra places planned for 200 primary school children, which is what you would expect from 800 additional dwellings.

**Action all SC to come to next meeting with a view on number of houses and which sites may be most suitable and why.**

- What impact would agreement on a Relief Road with developers have on our offered number of homes and our buffers/distance/village envelope policies? Do we need two numbers (ie with and without a relief road)?

5.7 If a relief road became feasible, we would expect to need to accommodate more growth.

- Housing density - confirm what we need to do for each site - in terms both of policies and supporting data

5.8 We do need a policy in our plan around density.

**Action PM** to ask Helene and Martin to produce density figures for other parts of the village so that Catherine is able to develop suitable policies.

- How do we define policies to control development beyond an acceptable village envelope? And what arguments should we use to support these?

5.9 Securing the sustainability of our village centre is likely to be a key objective to focus on in determining the scale of development we decide to propose. We will need an evidence base for the amount of growth that we propose.

## 6. Policy Overlaps & Synergies

- Do we need to tailor our general policies to reflect existing circumstances and prior approvals (like BEN1)? Or can we define the policies we want and treat these as exceptions (eg buffers, impacts on landscape character, open spaces etc)?

- Review, clarify and moderate other issues and overlaps between Design Stream and other streams - eg footpaths, parking areas, infill vs retention of a sense of space etc
- Do we/how do we develop policies for plots where we can't currently decide between candidate uses (eg Salt store?)
- Which sites do we want to earmark for non-housing needs - cemetery, green spaces, parking areas, youth hall (with/without wider facilities)? Or can we safely leave these vague?

6.1 The SC held a short discussion on these matters but within the limited time available, did not reach full conclusions or agreement on the best approach to resolving all matters. It was agreed that CM would arrange discussions with the leads of each of the other workstreams where there are outstanding matters of tension or overlap. **Action CM**

6.2 The SC agreed that the NP must be precise about allocating land for key needs like cemetery, youth facilities etc.

#### 7. 'Common Good' policies

**Action all SC members** to review DR's draft by next meeting.

#### 8. AOB

8.1 JF advised that AA is taking on a new job so will be unable to attend future SC meetings but he is able to commit to writing the plan as previously agreed. The SC unanimously agreed to continue with AA's help. Given how far we have come, it would hamper our progress if we had to bring a new adviser up to speed.

#### 9. Date of next meeting

Monday 24th October.