



Northam Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Meeting
Monday 5 February 2018, 7pm

1. Present

Cllr Chris Leather (Chair), Peter Jeffrey, Peter Sawyer, Jose Emberton, Cllr Mike Durkin, Graham Ash, Angie Whitaker, Phil Hodson (PHo), Jo Johnson, Jane Mills (Clerk), Maria Bailey, Roger Levick

Apologies

Cllr Peter Hames (PHa), Cllr Hugh Brading

2. Minutes

Cll Leather informed the Steering Group that Northam Town Council are now supporting Plastic Free North Devon and Surfers for Sewage campaigns to reduce plastic in our waterways. It was confirmed that support for this will also be given within the Neighbourhood Plan as an addendum.

The minutes dated 12 December 2017, were agreed to be a true and accurate record.

3. Martin Parkes: Devon Communities Together

Devon Communities Together is a charity, based in Exeter that supports rural communities though out Devon. They assist Town and Parish Councils and community groups providing a strategic overview in many aspects including legal advice, document writing, fundraising, support work. They operate within the network of rural communities across the UK and share best practice. Devon Communities Together are funded by Devon County Council, Central Government, some local authorities and via consultancy fees. Martin is a Project Manager, specialist in localism, community surveys and neighbourhood planning.

The Neighbourhood Plan, that could also be called the Neighbourhood DEVELOPMENT Plan, is a very specific document that is consulted on by the Local Planning Authority when making planning decisions. This will become a legal document. He confirmed that it a project plan and timetable are essential to a successful plan.

Cllr Leather informed Martin of the work that had been done to date; initial community meetings, setup of the Steering Group, delivery of the first questionnaire leaflet and the subsequent leaflet. Martin responded by saying that the Town Council will be the main body to address many of the issues that are raised within the questionnaire, as they won't be Neighbourhood Plan issues, however those that are, will form the project groups and shape the document. The scope of the plan is anything you need a planning application for, ie change of use, building of new build properties, tree preservation orders, green or brownfield sites. The Plan doesn't cover areas like bus timetables, health centres, schools etc, however he did suggest that it would be very worthwhile contacting strategic partners;

Clinical Commissioning Group, Local Education Authority to determine their thoughts and plans on increased growth in our areas and how they intend to manage those. By considering partners statistics and forward plans, within the work that we will be carrying out – it will give a more knowledgeable base for development in this area.

When talking about possible development sites across the local area, it was confirmed that sites included in the Local Plan are reviewed every 12 months, with a major review every 3-5 years. If the Neighbourhood Plan has certain criteria about individual areas, this can influence the Local Plan due to more intense local knowledge and being more up to date.

Questions were raised about a recent article in the local paper, about a nearby village's Parish Plan that has held very little sway with the Local Planning Authorities decision making. It was confirmed that the Parish Plans were written as a Part Three within the previous Local Plan, giving context to the rural strategies. These documents are not statutory documents and hold no formal legal context. Neighbourhood Plans are different, in the fact that they will carry more weight and be a ratified document standing with the Local Plan.

It is a document whereby the Steering Group can pursue initiatives for social housing, protect the local green space allocation as well as earmarking those areas for development, be it housing or industrial. It can specify what types of development is needed within a locality, ie bungalow or 3 story family homes and protect existing historic sites.

On the local green space allocation, Martin cited the NPF's criteria. The area has to;

1. Be local to the community that it serves
2. Be of value to the community
3. Have local character
4. Not to be an 'extensive tract of land'

It was discussed that some planning applications, refused by Torridge District Council, have been overruled by Central Government. By having a Neighbourhood Plan in place, this can go some way to mitigating that scenario. There was some frustration when talking about infrastructure, as this will always come out as an issue when there is increased development. Whilst this is an area that needs to be highlighted but is out of bounds of the plan.

The plan should be streamlined and without pre-empting the result, should have approximately 3-4 policies covering areas of concern.

Once the Local Plan is adopted, Torridge District Council will have a 5-year land supply. On a yearly basis they have to show a 5-year supply however with an allocation in an adopted Local Plan they will only have to show a 3-year supply which gives added protection to an area with an adopted Local Plan.

It was confirmed that once the plan is complete, it will go to a referendum to the local community to vote to make it a statutory document.

Thanks were given to Martin to make the journey from Exeter and for providing clarification of the Neighbourhood Plan.

5. Results of questionnaire

MD agreed to collate the responses. NTC to give MD access to the online results. JJ to forward the original results to MD. PHo agreed to revisit the press release and forward to JM to circulate to the media in the hope that an article will get printed.

All agreed for the questionnaire cut-off date to be the end of February, in order for MD to analyse the results for the next meeting.

6. Next Stages

At the next meeting, MD has agreed to give a presentation on results.

At that meeting, the Steering Group will start to consider Vision, Aims and Objectives.

7. Any Other Business

MD informed the Steering Group of figures that he had received from Torridge District Council about unoccupied properties across Torridge and Northam. He reported that there were 650 unoccupied properties in Torridge, 165 of those were in the Parish of Northam – over ¼! He had some other very interesting statistics covering our area which will be distributed with the minutes.

The Planning Inspector reopened the examination into the proposed Local Plan in January. She had previously requested the Council submit additional housing sites. She will give further steer around 16 February, but it is likely the plan may have weight by the end of March 2018.

8. Next Meeting

Due to an existing Council Meeting, the next Steering Group Meeting will take place on 12 March 2018.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm