

Notes from the Wivelsfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Meeting
Held Thursday 16 January 2014, 8pm, Renshaw Room, Wivelsfield Village Hall

Attending: Jason Humphrey (Chair), Jason Stoner (Chair - WPC), Craig Bowden, Nick Dutt, Ian Dawson, Richard Jephcott, Rosemary Fair, Tal Kleiman (NP Officer, LDC), Gordon Harper, Angus Thwaites, Ysanne Burns, Jeremy Swift, John Wigzell & Liz Gander.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Dave Wright and Sheila Blair had apologised that they would be late through to the meeting as they were attending a Historical Society talk next door.

2. **Where we are in the light of the District Council's decision to refuse permission to the Gleesons' application**

One of the reasons for not having had a Neighbourhood Planning (NP) meeting more promptly since the last was that it was felt important to know the outcome of the Gleesons' application as this determined the Council's approach to the NP. Had the application been approved, this would have negated the need for the NP to identify the location for 30 houses allocated to Wivelsfield Green under the Core Strategy.

Core Strategy

At the Planning Committee one thing that came up was the fact that we might be asked to accommodate more than 30 houses. J Stoner asked if Tal could clarify this. Tal explained that the Gleesons application will probably be appealed and, if successful, LDC will then have to review the number of new dwellings that they would need to allocate to Wivelsfield. The LDC Core Strategy has not progressed as they wanted it to. LDC asked an inspector to review it to check whether it would get through the examination stage and the inspector said no. Housing need is now said to be much greater than that laid out in the South East Plan (upon which LDC had based its Core Strategy figures). The Planning Inspectorate has therefore now assessed LDC as needing 9,400-10,600 new homes (by contrast with the 4,500 that it was originally working to). LDC has to state what the target range is and what it has done to try to find ways to meet that range (including working with neighbouring authorities).

Tal was unable to say when LDC will be able to give us a revised figure of how many dwellings Wivelsfield will be expected to take. It is anticipated that in March/April revisions to the Core Strategy will be going to Cabinet and if they pass this, there will be a 6-8 week public consultation period. It was suggested that as the assessed housing need is roughly twice what LDC had originally planned for, it would be prudent for the Steering Group to plan for the 30 currently allocated homes, along with a contingency for an additional 30.

Five Year Land Supply

Tal was asked whether, since LDC cannot demonstrate a five year land supply, it is now required to also have a 20% buffer? Tal said that his understanding is that the 20% buffer is a penalty for consistent under-delivery and that LDC is still planning on the basis of a 5% buffer. J Humphrey expressed concern that the LDC target is relatively low, but that lots of the sites that contribute to the land supply are quite large – meaning that if one site were to disappear, then so could a significant proportion of the planned-for land supply. JH said that the PC would encourage LDC to be prudent and to have a 10 or 15% buffer so that the five year land supply is protected should one or two sites fall by the wayside.

Brownfield Site

J Stoner said that at the 8 Jan Planning Committee the Chair mentioned that Wivelsfield has a brownfield site and suggested that this could form a part of Wivelsfield's Plan for 30

homes. JS queried this since our understanding had been that the 30 dwellings allocation was to the settlement of Wivelsfield Green, whereas the brownfield site lies in Wivelsfield. Tal said that the Springfield estate is right next door to what he thought was part of the planning boundary for Wivelsfield Green. Through the NP we have the ability to modify planning boundaries. The general rule is that development is accepted within planning boundaries and refused outside of the accepted boundaries. However if we allocate sites then we are essentially changing the planning boundary and Tal thinks that we could argue that we are extending the boundary of Wivelsfield Green to encompass the brownfield site.

Challenges

J Humphrey summarised three challenges that he feels we are going to be up against:

- An appeal from Gleasons, plus applications from other developers
- The need to produce the NP
- The need to be responding to the LDC consultation regarding housing allocations to argue that 30 is the right number for Wivelsfield and to ensure that we are being heard.

JH believes that some of the things that we will have to do for one of these we will have to do for all eg collecting data on the traffic problems at Ditchling – but that all three angles need to be taken forward.

Windfall Sites

Tal cautioned that the 30 dwellings allocated in the Core Strategy constitute a planned housing target and will be allocated/delivered within the plan as a part of that target. If outside of this a developer comes along with proposals for another site, this does not negate the need to deliver the planned housing, as speculative developments are considered to be windfall sites and are not a part of the plan-led system. That said, were a developer to put in a successful application prior to LDC finalising any revised Core Strategy allocations, then LDC may review the allocation in the light of it.

3. Proposed timescale and content for production of a plan

There was some discussion over whether there is any point in having a Plan when the lack of a five year land supply on LDC's part could render it ineffective anyway. Tal cautioned that legally there has to be a plan in place for each area and that if we don't do a Plan, then LDC will simply make policies for this area. It was therefore agreed that we need to get on and do a NP – particularly after much emphasis was placed on the Parish Council's commitment to Localism and its progression of a Plan at the LDC Planning Committee last week. It was felt that, in order to progress a Plan as quickly as possible, it would be necessary to bring in external consultants to help drive the project forward.

Mandatory Stages

Tal outlined the mandatory stages which a Plan has to go through and highlighted how it is unlikely that an area could get a plan together in less than a year.

- Draft plan – has to be consulted upon for a 6 week period, after which any amendments have to be made
- LDC consultation - once the plan is finalised it has to be submitted to LDC who are required to do a 6 week consultation looking mainly at legal compliance
- Examination – the examination stage seems to take around 2 months
- Referendum – if successful at the examination stage, the Plan would go to referendum. This cannot take place before a minimum of 28 days after the examination.

Add to this the work required to put the plan together and Tal believes that, even if you had five people working full-time on a Plan, you would struggle to prepare one in 6-8 months.

When does a NP begin to carry some weight with the District Planning Authority?

Prior to formal adoption of a NP, the Plan begins to carry some weight with the District Planning Authority (ie LDC) from the point when they complete their statutory consultation on the Plan. As such we need to get to this stage as quickly as possible. J Humphrey suggested that we aim to reach the LDC statutory consultation within a 9-12 month time frame as it seems this would be a tough, but realistic timeframe.

Content of the Plan

Some discussion took place about the content of the Plan. Some felt that, in order to get it together as soon as possible to stave off unwanted development, the Plan should focus purely on housing development. Others said that they would be disappointed if the Plan were to be restricted purely to development as other factors are closely interlinked and it would be a missed opportunity. J Swift suggested prioritising what we would like to have in the Plan, starting with housing as the key element, so that we could essentially work as far down the list as we could within the agreed time frame. J Humphrey reminded everyone that aspirational bits are all very well, but they are limited by the amount of money available – and the money is bound up with development.

4. Proposal to engage planning consultants to produce the NP

The Parish Council proposed engaging a consultant to assist with and guide the production of the NP. Tal was aware of some planning consultants working within Mid-Sussex who deal with neighbourhood planning and will give us their details. The Clerk had been recommended to talk to Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) who are currently supporting 22 local communities with the preparation of neighbourhood plans. They have extensive experience of working with local Councils and rural communities and are well versed in running things like public engagement exercises. The estimated costs for engaging AiRS services are between £12-15k, (though they have charged between £10k & £24k depending upon the work required).

The Group agreed to invite AiRS to a meeting on Thursday 30 January, to discuss the services that they can offer. The Clerk to outline the Group's aim to shorten the time frame for the production of a plan if at all possible and to seek advice on any potential pitfalls of this (eg possible lack of community support if not including more aspirational things). AiRS also to be provided with a copy of the Steering Group's collated list of topics for possible inclusion within the plan, as guidance to what has been considered so far.

5. Funding

To be discussed when we have a better idea of what we are likely to require in terms of external support.

6. Review of possible housing sites – including question of suitability of brownfield site

The question of inclusion of the brownfield site within the plan was discussed under item 2 above. Since AiRS have said that they don't really like coming on board part way through the NP process, the Group decided not to engage in discussion about possible sites. A list of sites submitted to the Council in response to the form it sent to landowners was read out and looked at in conjunction with the SHLAA map.

The Clerk had received details of proposals for the development of the brownfield site known as Springfield Industrial Estate off the Ditchling Road and had been approached by another developer of a site off Valebridge Road in Burgess Hill. However the Group decided not to do anything about these until it has sought advice.

The Group **agreed** that a letter should be sent to landowners with land adjacent to the mini roundabout (Ditchling Road/Green Road junction) if not previously written to.

With respect to confidentiality, the Group **agreed** that all members would sign a stakeholder agreement/terms of reference. The Clerk to forward the terms of ref to Ysanne to review.

7. Contingency planning for additional development?

The Council hopes that it will receive an indication as to any revised housing allocation from LDC in around March. Prior to then it was agreed in principle that the Group will plan for the 30 homes allocated to Wivelsfield Green under the present Core Strategy figures, with an additional 30 as a back-up (should the expectation increase).

8. Project Teams

This will largely be discussed once advice has been received from AiRS. However it was **agreed** that – in the meantime - Richard, John and Angus will look at the issue of traffic congestion in Ditchling and how this can best be illustrated, (beyond traffic flow statistics which do not represent the gridlock situation often reached). This group to speak to Tom Jones, Ditchling Councillor, to find out what Ditchling PC are doing in this respect and whether we could work together.

The group will also speak to ESCC to find out about their alleged £300k scheme of traffic improvements for Ditchling. Tal asked why we should want to do this. JH explained that:

- a. It will give us evidence that development in Wivelsfield is not sustainable as it would tip the balance at Ditchling.
- b. It would enable us to respond to the LDC Core Strategy Consultation.
- c. It may indirectly impact upon content of the NP.

9. Progress from Meeting of 7 November 2013 (as per tasks allocated against the product breakdown structure)

It was agreed not to review this until such time as we know more about how the process is going to progress.

10. Task allocation

As included in agenda points above. Additionally:

- JH and RF to find out whether AiRS have their own project software.
- JH and JW to compile a skill set register and send round for completion.
- JH to put the East Sussex in Figures information on the website.
- SB, DW & RJ to assess what we may need to pull out of maps.

11. Meeting schedule

It was **agreed** to have meetings every two weeks. JH stated that with this frequency of meetings it would be important to set some parameters to safeguard decisions (like a Parish Council quorum) and to set specific agendas to ensure that only people involved in certain aspects of the Plan would need to attend.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 30 January – 8pm, Renshaw Room, Wivelsfield Village Hall.

Recommended Reading: [National Planning Policy Framework](#)