

Minutes of the Wivelsfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Meeting
Held Monday 6 July, 7.30pm, Renshaw Room, Wivelsfield Village Hall

Attending: Jason Stoner, Ian Dawson, Craig Bowden, Gordon Harper, John Wigzell, Sheila Blair, Liz Gander (Clerk), and approximately five members of the public.

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies had been received from Angus Thwaites, Judy Stoner and Dave Wright.

Lee White has resigned from the Parish Council and Steering Group.

2. **Election of New Chairman**

Jason Stoner apologised that he is no longer able to give sufficient time to the Chairman's role owing to increased work commitments and declared his intention to step aside as Chair with immediate effect. It was agreed that Ian Dawson and Craig Bowden will jointly chair the Steering Group and split the work between them. Ian Dawson assumed the role of Chair for the rest of the meeting.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

None noted.

4. **To Accept Minutes of the Steering Group Meetings Held 21 April and 1 June 2015**

Following the minor amendment requested to the minutes of 21 April at the last meeting, these minutes were approved, alongside those of the meeting held on 1 June.

5. **Progress with the Plan**

The Chairman asked Gordon Harper to explain what stage the Plan is at currently. Gordon explained that he, former Chairman Jason Stoner and District Councillor Sharon Davy had met with Ed Sheath and James Garside of Lewes District Council (LDC) last week in order to discuss the Plan. LDC has accepted the Plan but for some very minor amendments to be made (a couple of extra maps and the addition of one or two phrases), which is good news.

However LDC has advised that some additional work needs to be done in the form of a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report, a Sustainability Appraisal and possibly an SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment). It may be possible to incorporate the SEA in the SA but that will be determined in due course. The Parish Council and Steering Group had formerly been advised that these reports were not necessary. LDC had undertaken a Strategic Environmental Screening Opinion and a Habitats Screening Report to confirm that the aforementioned documents would not be needed as part of our neighbourhood plan. However, following a change in Government guidance in February this year (which went from saying that these reports were not necessary for our type of Parish, to stating that they *may* be necessary), coupled with LDC experience with other parishes (including a judicial review of Newick's Plan), LDC is now advising that the Neighbourhood Plan will be in a stronger position if the extra work is undertaken. Since the Plan becomes the responsibility of LDC and it would have to bear the cost of any judicial review, LDC would be unwilling to take the Plan to referendum unless this extra work is undertaken to make it as robust as possible. Ed Sheath has said that it is acceptable for the Scoping Report and SEA to be prepared after the Plan.

Gordon Harper has kindly agreed to undertake the bulk of the work in preparing the various reports identified above. Having discussed at length the ways in which the Parish Council feels it has been let down by LDC during the NP process, Ed Sheath has agreed to make James Garside available for three or four afternoons in order to assist Gordon. Much of the

content of the reports is technical in order to meet NPPF guidelines. John Kay from Ringmer PC has given Gordon some useful information in this respect.

The Scoping Report, once prepared, has to be submitted to three key statutory consultees (English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency) who have five weeks to come back with comments. During this period, the other documents can be substantially prepared. Gordon will be sending out regular reports/updates which it is vital that SG members read and give feedback upon.

It is hoped that LDC will agree that the reports can be published under the Regulation 16 consultation (District Council consultation stage) rather than having to go back to the Regulation 14 (Parish level) consultation. The Steering Group is awaiting confirmation of this from LDC.

The final area that LDC would like the SG to work on is de-quantifying our site assessment report, to make it qualitative rather than quantitative in its findings. This will not change the report's findings, but LDC feels it will mean that the results can be more robustly defended. LDC has provided Gordon with three or four examples of other parishes' reports which follow the format they require.

The SG agreed to proceed on the basis of advice given by LDC and committed to producing a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, a Sustainability Appraisal and an SEA – hopefully incorporated in the SA where necessary - and to redrafting the Site Assessment Report. The Clerk to write to Ed Sheath to confirm this and to seek LDC's written undertaking that in exchange, officers will assist with the preparation of the reports, will accept the Plan as it is and will pass it for referendum at the appropriate time.

John Wigzell felt that the SG should not be guided by what LDC wants as they have, at every stage – in the member's opinion - been inefficient and destructive. He felt that we have been very badly treated by LDC, that they have kept changing the goalposts and that they are now allowing all of their judgements to be guided by legal proceedings and the threat of costs. As such, as a private individual, John suggested lodging a complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman.

Whilst other SG members agreed, at least in part, with the criticisms of LDC, it was generally felt that such a move would be counter-productive and could further hold up the progress of the Plan. A complaint about the poor service received has been put to LDC and acknowledged. LDC has indicated that it is content with the Plan and is willing to put it to referendum subject to completion of the additional reports. The main thing now is to get the additional work completed as quickly as possible in order for the Plan to continue to examination and referendum.

It was suggested that should John wish to pursue the ombudsmen route, he should distance himself from the SG and have nothing further to do with the Plan, in order for there to be a clear separation between this action and the work of the Steering Group in trying to push forward to examination and referendum.

6. Village Day

Owing to lack of availability of SG members, it was decided not to prepare a display for Village Day.

7. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed. Gordon to circulate information/reports when available and working group meetings will be held as necessary. Next SG meeting to be arranged as appropriate.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.