



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SPNDP STEERING GROUP
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12th MAY 2016 AT 7.00pm
AT COLLIERS END VILLAGE HALL

Present: Mike Gill (Chairman), Claudia Chalkley, Maureen Wren, Dick Rainbird MBE, Graham Cowell, Colin Jenkins, Brenda Howard, John Riris, Michael Baker QC CBE, Jonathan Law.

Jed Griffiths, Griffiths Environmental Planning

Minutes: Belinda Irons, Standon Parish Council Clerk

Public: 1: Sally Crook attended as a parishioner and prospective co-opted member of Standon Parish Council

16.66 Apologies Neil Johannessen, Jennifer Heaven, Jan Cunningham

16.67 Minutes of the meeting held on 26.4.16 Agreed.

16.68 Declaration of Members' Interests (disclosable pecuniary interest/another pecuniary

interest/a non-pecuniary interest)

Colin Jenkins: property is adjacent to Wickham Hill SLAA site

Michael Baker: land off Stortford Road

16.69 Steering group membership – review attendance and consider any requests to join Steering Group: no new applications

16.70 Comments from non-committee members attending (limited to three minutes)

Sally Crook reported that following a strong letter to HCC regarding the A120 Standon bypass, the planned meeting with HCC officers has been postponed until the full public consultation is open.

16.71 Village Hierarchy Study: Update by Mike Gill and Dick Rainbird

Mike Gill, Neil Johannessen, and Dick Rainbird attended the EHDC meeting which was considered by those attending to be an open discussion on the

Village Hierarchy Study discussion paper, which recommended the removal of village development boundaries, and limits to the number of dwellings allocated to each Category 1 village, as it was stated that any limit to development went against the principle of presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Standon Parish Council had written a letter of objection. Jed Griffiths responded in his professional capacity objecting specifically to the EHDC statement that categorisation went against the NPPF, which Jed Griffiths had helped to write.

Dick Rainbird had intended to read part of Jed Griffiths letter to the meeting, but was prevented from doing so by the Chair of the Meeting, Cllr Haysey, who, it was reported, became agitated that Jed Griffiths comments may be made public in this forum, and disallowed Dick Rainbird from reading the piece. Other Parish Council representatives put questions forward, but, with some questions, the Chair passed on to the next question without answering the previous question.

It became obvious that the former 'Harlow North' is back for consideration, with between 10 and 18,000 dwellings planned. The EHDC Executive Agenda received today had 'Gilston North' as an agenda item. Removal of village boundaries and limits to development will open the door for speculative developers. Each application would be assessed on its merits with no consideration of the cumulative effect of development on a settlement.

Dick Rainbird has considered the scoring process for the Village Hierarchy which is supposed to assess a settlement's sustainability level for coping with development. EHDC has grouped Standon with Puckeridge which makes a score of 80. High Cross (37) and Thundridge/Wadesmill (44) with the same distance between them as Puckeridge and Standon High Street have not been grouped, and have individual scores as shown. If Standon is separated from Puckeridge, it would score 27, and Puckeridge would score 54, the difference between Standon and Puckeridge being entirely due to the two schools and the Surgery being within the Puckeridge boundary. Both these scores are considered to be a more realistic indication of sustainability to cope with additional development.

The primary factors which are deemed to make a settlement sustainable are post office, community buildings, children's play area, public recreation area, shops, schools, and health services, which receive 1 if the service is part time, 2 if the service is full time. The score is then multiplied by 3 to give a total. If the Doctors Surgery is considered, car parking cannot be used full time. There are only four consulting rooms which will be insufficient to accommodate increasing patient numbers. The cost of an extension is likely to be £1.25m. Doctors are not remaining at the surgery. This affects on the score which EHDC considers to be sustainable. When speaking to a member of the surgery, a score of 4, rather than 6, would be more accurate.

There were more than a dozen District Councillors present at this meeting. Mike, Neil and Dick have attended this type of meeting many times, and District Councillors have rarely been present. EHDC has been warned that it

has to get its draft District Plan at least into full draft by March 2017, or Central Government will put EHDC into special measures and take over housing allocation. Dick surmised that the discussion paper was a politically driven response to Central Government pressure on EHDC to produce the numbers of houses in the District.

Dick Rainbird spoke to a member of EHDC Policy Planning after the meeting regarding the effect of joining Standon and Puckeridge for sustainability assessment and commented that Standon would prefer that the Village Hierarchy was retained, but that the scoring system was modified to properly reflect the 'on the ground' actuality. The officer agreed to consider a written presentation on the matter but the Chair overheard and insisted that it be presented within two days as their consideration process of the Village Hierarchy was moving on. Dick Rainbird sent a written statement within the two days.

Jed Griffiths commented that his professional experience over a number of years is that Village Hierarchies work, and there should be a line beyond which development is not allowed. EHDC should get on and produce its plan, which would then be used to assess and manage development in the District, rather than the NPPF being the only control. The only time the presumption in favour of sustainable development would be used by Central Government is when the District Plan is out of date or missing. This is the current situation with EHDC.

Mike Gill commented that a few villages were happy with the removal of the Village Hierarchy. Jed Griffiths commented that there are other constraints for some villages, including the Green Belt, which cannot be built on. Speculative development will proliferate.

Mike Gill commented that the 'goal posts' are constantly moving. The original maximum of 150 dwellings is now a minimum for Standon and Puckeridge. Removal of boundaries and limits would leave Standon parish open to speculative development.

Colin Jenkins commented that whilst this is an unwanted situation, no rules are being broken should EHDC carry out the removal of the Village Hierarchy from the draft District Plan.

Some Neighbourhood Plans which have already been adopted have protection built in to ensure that some aspects of development are prevented. St Ives in Cornwall has protection against second or holiday homes, with a focus on provision of homes for those local people in need. SPNPD has already identified the need for the boundaries to move to accommodate any development in the parish. Dick Rainbird asked Jed Griffiths if the village development boundaries for Standon/Puckeridge and Colliers End, which would be removed by removing the Village Hierarchy from the District Plan, could nevertheless still be written into our Neighbourhood Development Plan with an Appendix explaining this inclusion. Jed Griffiths said, in his opinion, the existing development boundaries to Standon/Puckeridge and Colliers End could form part of our NDP provided the Plan showed the land where the 150+ dwellings should go.

In summary, if the Village Hierarchy is removed, the whole of East Herts rural area containing the villages would be open to speculative development. Should EHDC fail to produce the District Plan, all planning applications will be assessed against the NPPF with a presumption in favour of sustainable development. There is also a lack of a five year land supply to deliver the amount of development dictated by Central Government.

(Jonathan Law joined the meeting)

16.72 Land Allocation and Site Assessment: update

Options

Mike Gill reported that very good meetings had taken place with Thames Water, Herts County Council Flood Management, and Herts Highways.

There have only been a few reported sewer blockages made, which has resulted in a Thames Water consideration that the sewerage system is adequate. Neither the Doctors Surgery nor the Community Centre has reported blockages. Thames Water require proposed developments in Puckeridge/ Standon of more than 10 dwellings to find a way of dealing with their sewage so that the state of the existing sewer is not worsened. A high level of development is needed to ensure the developers will undertake to pay for the work, as it is then economically viable for them to do so, and if the development is large enough it is sometimes possible to lay a new sewer on a new route to bypass an existing congested sewer. There are no single SLAA sites in the parish large enough to generate enough money for this to take place and hence a conglomeration of developments working together will be necessary to achieve this.

Flood mitigation again can only take place if development is large enough to be economically viable.

Road access onto the major arterial routes will only be assessed by Herts Highways once full planning applications have been submitted. This situation makes it virtually impossible to accurately assess the viability of any combination of development schemes. Also, Herts Highways will not agree to a new junction on a main road unless another junction is closed.

Further extensive discussion took place around the difficulties finding sites for development which do not negatively impact on the existing settlements and parishioners, including flood risk, doctors, sewerage, road access. There are natural boundaries to development which are the A120, the A10, and the B1368. Access onto the A120 from minor roads will be seriously affected once the Little Hadham bypass has been built, and before any Standon bypass is completed.

Green spaces must be protected, and there is opportunity to increase with sufficient development coming forward. For example, play areas and open green spaces with good landscaping can be included in larger development.

The density of build needs particular attention. Those present commented that high density such as that on the Fairview development at 40 per hectare was

unacceptable, and debilitating to occupants. Dick Rainbird commented that some villages are working at a lower density than the 30 recommended by EHDC. The comments from parishioners through the survey stated that small developments would be preferred over large developments. Large developments are needed to provide the necessary infrastructure.

Mike Gill asked for open discussion to try to resolve the problem of development and where it should go, and how the impacts can be mitigated.

The clerk made some suggestions which the land group will consider at its next meeting. No decision will be ideal, but this has always been understood.

Whatever changes or decisions are made, particularly by EHDC, the communities will need to be re-consulted at additional cost. Further changes elongate the process, and increase the cost. However, failure to produce a Neighbourhood Plan would result in imposition by EHDC of development, without planning infrastructure of mitigation. It is therefore vitally important the Neighbourhood Plan continues to plan for the benefit of the community.

Jed Griffiths commented that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is likely to be needed. This is likely to cost approximately £1,000.

Mike Gill commented that the Land Group is suffering from 'burn out' given the amount of work the individuals are undertaking, and the constant consideration of limitations and the requirement for mitigation. Additional volunteers are desperately needed.

16.73 Parish Surveys: update: John Riris

There have been five responses to the business survey, and two to the landowners survey.

16.74 Neighbourhood Plan: Draft document:

Policies

Jed Griffiths now has a large amount of information to work on, and he will now spend his time 'honing' the information into appropriate terminology. Some information will be guidance, rather than policy.

16.75 Communications Team: John Riris

May Day Stall: update: this was a relaxed event with good feedback.

Transcript of open meetings: update: now posted to the web site.

Future communications: there are plans to continue to raise the profile of the Neighbourhood Plan in the community.

16.76 Evidence gathering: update from topic groups

16.77 Grant/Financial Status

Update

The clerk advised the meeting that the Parish Council's Finance Committee would make a recommendation to full Council at the next meeting.

16.78 Landowner and agent consultation/meeting

A series of meetings are to be undertaken once the issues surrounding limitations and mitigation are discussed and resolved at the next Land Group meeting.

16.79 Items for next agenda

16.80 Dates of next meetings

Dates for 2016: Tuesday

14th June

Meeting closed at 10.08pm