

# ST. NICHOLAS HURST PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HURST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN  
STEERING GROUP  
HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, SCHOOL ROAD, HURST  
ON WEDNESDAY 7<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2018 at 7.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Wayne Smith (Chairman, St Nicholas  
Hurst PC).

Derek Birtles, David Boyd, John Edwards, Duncan  
Kendall, Maria Land, Lou Robinson, Maggie  
Sanderson, James Scales, Suzy Watt and Chris  
Zeal (Parishoners).

Liz Alexander, Robyn Tobutt (Bell Cornwell).

OFFICERS: Mrs. M. Bradshaw (Clerk).

## 0001 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Howard Larkin, Mac Stephenson, Brian Thomas and Gemma Moore.

## 0002 **Welcome and Introductions**

Councillor Wayne Smith welcomed all to the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves and indicated their association with the Parish. It was noted that this was the first formal meeting of the steering group, comprising of people who had volunteered following the first informal public meeting in The Castle Inn on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

Wayne Smith explained that the formal neighbourhood plan application had been lodged with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018. This was presented to the Executive last night and will be formalised on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018. The aim of tonight's meeting was to formalise an agenda and way forward so ensuring that a plan could be achieved swiftly. The commissioning of Consultants was seen as a key to achieving the plan as swiftly and efficiently as possible.

Liz Alexander introduced her organisation, Bell Cornwell. She explained that she had been involved in several neighbourhood plans and has extensive local knowledge of the area.

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**0003 Role and Purpose of a Neighbourhood Plan**

Neighbourhood plans are used as a powerful planning tool and carry greater weight than Village Design Statements. She explained that Planning Officers have to consider the policies contained within a Neighbourhood Plan when determining planning applications. Plans are largely used as a mechanism to enable Parishes to set out where, and to what extent, they want housing, shops, schools, businesses, facilities and employment. Meeting the needs of local people is unique to each and every Parish. Local community engagement, from an early stage, is critical and Liz was encouraged to meet such a large group of volunteers.

She explained the formality of the process which culminates in an examination and referendum before formal adopted by WBC.

It was explained that a formally adopted Neighbourhood Plan will lead to 25% of Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL's) becoming payable to the Parish.

Wayne Smith explained that, if asked by a parishoner why a Neighbourhood Plan was being written he would explain that the aim is to ensure Hurst residents have an input into how the Parish looks for the next century. It is important that residents can have control over the area in which they live. Lou Robinson and Chris Zeal concurred with this view. Chris Zeal added that, if the Parish does not take control, Central Government will. James Scales added that the local knowledge contained within the Parish was vitally important.

**0004 Objectives of the Plan and key issues**

Chris Zeal queried how a Neighbourhood Plan would impact upon the existing village envelope. It was explained that if the Neighbourhood Plan selects to re-draw the envelope then this becomes a legally binding document. Liz Alexander explained further, however, that the green belt cannot be redefined.

Discussions were had regarding the timing of the production of the Neighbourhood Plan and how this would, or would not, be in step with the Borough's Local Plan. Liz Alexander confirmed that the Borough would have a duty to support the Neighbourhood Plan and ensure that it works with the emerging Wokingham development plan. Constructive working with the Borough is critical. Wayne Smith confirmed that the Parish had a good working relationship with WBC Planners and meetings he had attended, along with fellow Parish Councillors and the Clerk, had indicated constructive joint working.

John Edwards asked Wayne Smith at what stage the Local Plan was at. Wayne Smith explained that it is behind schedule with the three Strategic Development Locations (SDL's) at Grazeley, Barkham Square and Ruscombe still under debate. The most up to date information indicates that an emerging plan will be released Summer 2018. David Boyd commented that we need to align our objectives with those of WBC and agree common ground. Liz Alexander concurred that this was the most sensible way forward and confrontation is to be avoided.

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Wayne Smith explained that 287 sites across WBC are being examined. Hurst is geographically large and WBC is drilling down to sustainability. A large site was put forward within Hurst but this is regarded as an unsustainable site. WBC is more interested in sites which sit within the community. However, it must be noted that a Neighbourhood Plan is not solely about where housing will be situated. This is just one consideration amongst many.

Extended conversation was had regarding the location of sites, numbers of houses desired by the Borough and the criteria against which sites are being judged. Liz Alexander reiterated that it depends upon what size sites Hurst would like. Lou Robinson said that the character of the Parish needed to remain intact.

The issue of affordable housing was discussed and it was noted that the vast majority of property prices in Hurst remain significantly above the national average. There is very little scope for first time buyers, key workers or down sizers. Liz Alexander asked whether the Parish had good relationships with any local landowners. If so, it would be advantageous to work closely with them. Wayne Smith noted that WBC owns approximately 60 hectares of land within the Parish. The University of Reading also owns land. Liz Alexander said that the Parish would be at liberty to undertake its own call for sites if they felt appropriate. Chris Zeal queried whether a Neighbourhood Plan can conflict with what Planners want. Derek Birtles suggested that this could be pre-empted by stating how many the Parish would be prepared to accept and where. Maria Land raised the issue of flooding, which occurs in pockets within the Parish, and stressed that this needs to be considered.

#### 0005 **Evidence Base**

It was agreed that the Village Design Statement would be an extremely useful starting point for the Neighbourhood Plan. Howard Larkin was heavily involved in the production of the Village Design Statement and would be a good source of knowledge.

#### 0006 **Public Consultation**

Liz Alexander explained that a consultation can be very focused or wide ranging. Depending on how the question is asked can often influence the response given. Lou Robinson added that Hurst is very diverse with conservation areas, parks, the country park at Dinton Pastures, businesses, the Church etc. To this end, does research have to be undertaken before questions can be asked? Liz Alexander explained that this is not necessary and that the process can be undertaken in stages. Lou Robinson thought that Gemma Moore, who is a University researcher, would be able to bring significant expertise to this stage of the process.

**RESOLVED:** Gemma Moore to be approached regarding her research and consultation expertise.

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0007 **Grant Funding**

Grant funding will be available but this will be explored at a later meeting. Wayne Smith explained that the Parish Council had made budgetary provision for meeting some aspects of the Neighbourhood Planning process.

0008 **Project Planning**

Liz Alexander recommended that the steering group should meet at least six weekly to ensure a smooth process. Liz will be available to help the group with achieving key dates and milestones.

RESOLVED: David Boyd agreed to draft a paper setting out the key issues and raising an agenda for the next meeting.

0009 **Roles and Responsibilities**

This groups association with the Parish Council was discussed. It was felt crucial that the meetings are planned, formal and minuted. Wayne Smith queried whether the Parish Council could pass the Neighbourhood Planning process to the steering group. Liz Alexander confirmed that this would be possible if desired. However, the group felt it important that Wayne Smith and the Clerk remain involved so ensuring cohesion with the Parish Council. It was agreed that the Parish Council website could be used as a means of communication and that a separate tab should be set up specifically for Neighbourhood Planning.

Wayne Smith asked for a show of hands confirming who present wished to be part of the formal group going forward.

RESOLVED: the formal steering group to comprise:

- Wayne Smith
- Derek Birtles
- David Boyd
- John Edwards
- Duncan Kendall
- Maria Land
- Lou Robinson
- Maria Bradshaw (to Clerk)

The inclusion of Howard Larkin, Mac Stephenson, Gemma Moore and Brian Thomas to be explored also.

The meeting ended at 9.30 p.m.

Signed.....

Date.....

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