

WNP at general NPs meeting, SODC Chairman in attendance

7 October 2016, 8-10.30 p.m., Brightwell cum Sotwell *nr* Didcot..

JF attended for WNP with some 60 other NP reps.

Purposes:

- a) to seek 'robust advice' from a guest-Planner (Indep Planning Adviser) *address* rCOH
- b) to allow SODC Chairman (John Cotton) to hear concerns.(Mainly around 'NP failures on Appeal'.) And to hear news we are not hearing because advisers have almost vanished and SODC Planning Dept is understaffed and over-pressed..

- a) Neil Homer [rCOH www.rcoh.co.uk] spoke after we heard out several case-study experiences. **How to write a 'robust NP'**. His points were: -
 - i) **go higher than the number of houses ... but be creative about the use of space** – get a shop thrown in – add key pathway ... **pragmatic spatial strategy**, not just sites
 - ii) don't expect SODC **to know and understand your area in detail ... that is the key NP card** and its task with that card is to 'preserve specialness' and obtain 'realistic housing numbers'.
 - iii) **Talk to the developers.** They have several cards, but you still have your ONE. A relationship with developers can work for you - and can also avert appeal (defeat at which is the big NP problem – where lawyers start to nitpick at NP detail. They 'find the yawning cracks'. SODC cannot afford to defend NP at appeals any longer.)
 - iv) **SODC officer engagement is 'woeful'** [*sic*] – generally middle planning management only, not planning decision makers. Now apparently no advisers.
 - v) **SODC needs to give NPs real weight**, not words & exhortation. E.g. if a hostile predatory or pre-emptive application comes up where an NP is pending, but not yet completed, SODC must delay the application itself until the NP is 'made'.
 - vi) **Planning Officers should now be citing NPs** (at whatever draft stage) in their reports as they cite any other national policies – NP are now a National Policy.
 - vii) SODC Planning Committee need to **recognise quality and effort in** 'robust' NPs.
 - viii) Think of **'where best in a village' as well as of site details**. Several small sites can produce the flexibility/compromise two huge sites cannot, however more convenient they may be for a developer to work. As long as your small sites have 15 houses minimum (i.e. over 14) they also qualify for the 35% affordable housing provision..
 - ix) Essential Criteria of a robust NP: **Community Opinion**, from which an NP takes its legitimacy. Observance of **National Planning :Policies**. Understanding of **Landowner and Developers' Intentions**. Awareness of **Physical Constraints**. To show Assessment of **Sustainability and Environment**. To acknowledge **context of the neighbourhood** in the wider strategic local housing plan.

b) **SODC Chairman** was asked 'Are you worried about being put into Special Measures ?' Reply: 'My staff are, but I'm not'. **Lack of advisers** was mentioned. My small contribution was to say that advice was less crucial at this stage than reliable **information is**. For instance I only heard of the postponed publication of final draft of July's '*Preferred Sites*' proposals due this October, now to be November, during this meeting. It delays our own draft Plan writing too. We were also told that new legislation to support Neighbourhood Plans is at its Second Reading in The Commons (JF.- unchecked information). We were further told that Thame is paying an NP Officer to monitor observance of TNP's now 'made' Plan, rather than ask NP to stay on in skeleton-form to monitor. (JF - what is a Parish Council for ?)