

Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan

Chairman's Report to Wheatley Parish Council, May-June 2016.

A. Work Ongoing

WNP Committee morale is high. A huge effort is being put into the work required and we are responding calmly to the SODC announcement of 31 May that all NPs must 'accelerate'.

This requirement and the new Consultation Document issued last week for the new draft Local Plan 2017-2032 has raised concerns. (See B, (below) SODC Changed Approach)

On 2 July the WNP Committee held a day's workshop to streamline our meeting pattern, shorten our Timescale and consider SODC's sudden demand that all Neighbourhood Plans 'Accelerate'. This report has had to wait until that day was completed.

A.1. Request

As WNP Chairman, may I request that Wheatley Parish Council afford an Agenda slot and due reminder for the bi-monthly WNP regular report.

Since 20 April we have been in Consultation with the Neighbourhood. This has included formal (and ongoing) interviews with the schools; informing Annual Parish Assembly; meeting with organisations; an Open Day 7 May visited by over 100, who left several hundred comments. A Straw Poll (750 q'aires) delivered across almost all locations, May-June, won 440 returns representing more than a quarter of village homes. An outside company is to provide our Housing Needs Survey and perhaps other required documents.

We have a Volunteer Contact List (170) with many more to be added from the Straw Poll returns. A small team of Street Reps (32) included two parish councillors and Maureen Stephens (Chairman's wife) helped collect the Straw Poll. The Parish Clerk has helped WNP without stint and cheerfully. Roger Bell has advised the WNP Housing team from his SODC experience; Toby Newman sits on the WNP Committee as District and Parish Councillor.

Our key brief is to listen and acquire evidence. Previously gathered evidence from Wheatley Society, Parish Council, Traffic Action Group and others forms part of the pool. An approximate figure for housing built since 1980 is being calculated – SODC Consultation Document June 2016 accepts that Wheatley has limited space. **Our core Housing team has spent months on researching**

21 sites around the village, with a view to reporting on a select few which meet key criteria, including, ‘are they available ?’

Other teams have looked at **Infrastructure** including flooding and surface water; traffic (for the purpose of WNP which has a housing brief, not a traffic brief) will be monitored when WNP short lists potential sites for housing. Availability of foot paths across the village and of on-street pavements are top named issues in the Straw Poll survey, the **Community & Business** Team is working on them.

WNP **Communication Team** uses Facebook, Twitter and a dedicated Website, as well as a letter drop at the Parish Office.. We also put bill-posters on Wheatley Parish Noticeboards (High St, Roman Rd and Littleworth Rd). The two latter are in bad condition and detract from any notice placed on them.

A.2. Request

May I urge the Parish Council to rebuild, glaze and lock our village noticeboards, and recruit volunteer custodians for them, similar to our own WNP Street Reps. Holton’s 3 boards are well maintained.

B. SODC Changed Approach, from 31 May 2016.

A muddled letter summoned ‘village representatives’ to a secret and confidential evening meeting at SODC, 31 May ‘which might help with neighbourhood planning’. I attended and rightly. The keynote of the meeting was the ‘Acceleration’ of NPs. The Local Plan 2011-2031 into which the NP fitted like a jigsaw piece was running out of time because it had insufficient land to back it. It has to have a life of 15 years minimum to remain valid. A new draft Plan (LP32) is now proposed to run 2017-2032.

Consultation by SODC with communities was also announced. One NP group there had been composing their NP for four years ! When questioned as to how acceleration *would happen* SODC told us that in-house SODC help with documentation (at little cost) would be given and SODC liaison officers would be linked to teams in support. Inspectors (would/might/will) support NPs as the way to deliver sites for the proposed housing supply, (even at submission stage). This ‘innovative approach’ has not been tested with or confirmed by inspectors.

On 8 July we invited SODC adviser Charlotte Colver to our scheduled Committee meeting. By then Merry Bells bookings had revealed that SODC were due to consult the village 13 July. Four Committee members visited Charlotte in the following week still seeking answers to questions. We also

learned that SODC has just one and a half personnel advising all its Neighbourhood Plan committees, whether they be liaison or advisers. Henley & Harpsden NP (2016) is strongly recommended as a model NP.

C. SODC Consultation on Local Plan 2032

3 – 7, Wed. 13 July, Merry Bells. WNP will participate.

C 1. Request.

WNP has advertised this locally through its own media and bill posters. Will the Parish Council also please publicise this event.

Consultation Document issues:

<http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2032>

Sections 5 and 11 refer to Wheatley and the Brookes site.

5.14 *‘... need to supply more housing is not considered to be an exceptional circumstance for a review of the Green Belt ...’* [That over 50% of respondents to a recent Refined Options Consultation advocated this is cited in support.]
Concern: how strongly can this policy be maintained ? How easily varied ?

5.44 Oxford Brookes say *‘they will soon vacate’* Wheatley campus, allowing *‘an opportunity for ... homes in the Green Belt. Our preferred approach is to allocate the site for an appropriate amount of development and work with the local NP group [WNP], Oxford Brookes and eventual developers to create a quality redevelopment scheme.’*

Concern: ‘Soon’ = 2021-2.

This places WNP in a new role of virtual co-planner for which it is not equipped. The word ‘scapegoat’ has been heard from Committee members. And how could Brookes have any say once it had sold ? And WNP would no longer exist.

5.45. *‘... given the amount of development proposed on the site and its suburban nature we [propose to inset the site from the Green Belt’ and will propose] a detailed boundary at the next stage in he Local Plan process’.*

The linked map shows an Brookes site twice the size of our WNP Brookes site.

Concern: what price the agreed NP map of January 2016 ? Moving goalposts.

5.45 The Brookes site *‘is allocated for mixed use development (including likely net capacity of at least 300 dwellings) ...any scheme will be agreed through the local NP in partnership with key stakeholders.’*

Concern: this is making WNP committee a virtual planner and designer for which role it is not equipped or authorised. Its role is creeping. How could it

take part in negotiations with anyone after its own demise in 2017 when we are aiming to finalise our 'accelerated' NP ?

11.12. 'Some villages are highly constrained ... by Green Belt. In these places a 10% growth may not be full achievable and if this is the case this will be evidenced through the NP.' Concern: *A carrot ? Empty promise ?*

11.14. 'On the basis of 10% growth, based on the 2011 Census number of dwellings, plus completions between 2011 and 2016, and commitments on 31 March 2016, the following provision is proposed to be made (excluding Wheatley) – Overall Larger village provision, 2465 new homes.' A new **'medium-sized village category'** may possibly be introduced.

Concern: *lack of clarity in 'excluding Wheatley'? Is it 'excluded' because of Green Belt constraint (11.12), or as a 'sweetener' because the new enlarged Brookes site would make up amply for any loss of land supply from Wheatley ?*

11.16. 'If an NP does not adequately progress with allocating sites (and has therefore at least been submitted to the Council) within 12 months of adoption of this local plan 2031, planning applications for housing in the larger villages will be supported, provided that:

i) proposals comply with the overall housing distribution strategy
ii) proposals comply with the housing and other applicable policies in this plan'.

Concerns: *a) The tortuous writing of this paragraph.*

b) The Brookes timescale is an unknown, and certainly much further in the future than the new working timescale adopted by WNP for its Plan completion in 2017. After that the WNP Committee dissolves.

John Fox,
Chairman,
Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan Committee
3 July 2016

Questions in SODC Consultation Paper, Section 5:

6. Do you agree with our preferred approach, whereby the allocation of most housing sites will be undertaken through NPs for the towns and villages ? Add Comments.

7. Do you agree with a proposed approach for the Oxford Brookes Wheatley Campus ? If not, what changes do you suggest ? Add Comments.

