

WNP Report to Wheatley and Holton Parish Councils for Sept-Oct 2016

September - October 2016 were scheduled in the WNP Road Map for **Consulting**,

1. The Survey

The major Survey of 1860 homes in August-September consisted of a required Housing Needs Survey (Parts 1-4) and a Community Views (Part 5). SODC recommended strongly that we enlist *Community First Oxfordshire* (CFO) to compose and print the Housing section and analyse the returns. WNP Volunteers distributed the combined Survey and returns came back via the Parish Office or by Freepost envelope provided. WNP Committee analysed the Community Views. Over one-third of the population of Wheatley and Holton responded, 36% to Housing Needs and 35% to Community. It compares well with Local Government Election turnout (30-35%) when no National Election coincides.

Human error meant the total number of returns had to be adjusted upwards from the 31% I reported to WPC and Holton PC on 7 September. The final number of returns for the two sections was 664 (36%) and 648 (35%) respectively. CFO re-analysed the Housing Needs returns immediately and were totally frank about their error. They worked overtime to remedy it and discounted £500 from the Survey bill of £2800, part for the error, but mainly for savings in time on the analysis and saving in Freepost envelopes, as so many returns came through the Parish Office, courtesy Wheatley Parish Clerk. We received CFO's final Report on 21 October. (*Section 1 distributed to WNP Committee, WPC, HPC and WNP Volunteers.*)

WNP analysed Part 5 (Community Survey on new Housing), in time for the last WNP Committee meeting on 27 October. Both CFO and WNP analyses have been sent to WPC, HPC, the WNP Committee and Associates, the WNP Volunteers, and those from both parishes due to participate in the November/December Workshops. (*Section 2 distributed as above in Spreadsheet form.*)

2. Post-Questionnaires - Consultation and Listening. Surveys need to be humanised with discussion. In September, **WNP with WPC and HPC councillors met with Brookes Estates**, important now that sale of the Campus is with an Agent. WNP reps met with **the Chairmen of both Parish Councils** to discuss our collaboration and put older misunderstandings behind us. **Wheatley and Littleworth W.I., the oldest local community group outside church and chapel, hosted WNP** and forwarded an outline of WI members' concerns. **WNP and the Footpaths Committee** are looking at mapping village pavements. **WNP and Footpaths** also sounded out Primary School Parents in July about crossing this long village to the school: they published the returns in September. Pavement mapping will also involve asking **Mother and Toddler groups** about the buggy experience with virtual pavements.

We have begun to listen to **Age UK in Wheatley**: Census 2011 found 769 residents over 65, compared to only 600 aged 16-29. 'Being 80 makes it a long journey from Ambrose Rise to The Merry Bells!'. **The Wheatley Society** is being approached for its views and long experience. WNP have linked up with Third Year **Brookes Town Planning students** to examine the building footprint at Brookes campus, as a degree project and to add to our evidence base. **The WNP Housing team** have almost completed a study of several months of **potential infill sites in Wheatley**. A WNP representative attends the new **Centre Improvement Advisory Group** initiated in October. **Two WNP reps were welcomed at an Area Council of Churches** meeting where Youth Work, Cemetery space and welcoming of

newcomers into the community were discussed. The **Air Quality Manager for SODC** has discussed local Monitoring. Wheatley was the first South Oxon village chosen for Air Quality monitoring (2006), amid concerns about the M40/A40 Corridor. The Monitoring continues.

One **missing source of evidence is the SODC feedback from 13 July** when SODC and WNP held a consultation at the Merry Bells. It was due in October with a revised draft *'Preferred Option Sites'* but has been postponed – I did ask for a preview. **WNP full Committee with HPC Chairman attending, questioned two Planners from SODC** on ambiguities and inconsistencies in Planning announcements. At least they were frank with us.

3. We have come a long way since WNP first met in January 2016. We are already drafting the first part of our Neighbourhood Plan – *Wheatley Today and Key Issues* and weighing it carefully. I have met NP members from other communities locked into their groundwork for more than 4 years, while facing developments a fraction the size of those proposed here. WNP expects to have a Draft Plan ready for public Consultation and Inspection by the Spring. A spirited and experienced Committee, supported by the patience and good will of associates and volunteers remains optimistic. We feel we know what we are about. Once the evidence is used to clarify what is village 'opinion' we can start to outline the policy principles for new housing and wider improvements based on months of listening and not just on our own pet ideas.

4. Next Step The Project Team will brainstorm (2-3 meetings 14 November – 2 December) to produce a Vision and Objectives for the Plan. Once it is drafted the Team will invite key stakeholders to meetings between 2-16 December to preview it. These will include the Chairmen of the Parish Councils, volunteers and stakeholders from both communities. The draft Plan will then go out for Public Consultation early in 2017.

5. Background Concerns

a) A Silence ? We have no communication point with SODC officers. Our link-adviser left in August, which we learned by automatic email forwarding message. The WNP Committee do not seek much advice at this stage, but we do need to know what is happening. What are the implications of the new NP Bill going through the Commons ? (see below) At what point does our Draft NP have validity in Planning deliberations ? With good management we have money left to pay for commercial advice from a company of ex-planners (www.rCOH) on writing 'a robust NP', but how do we measure their uncharted quality ? In May-June SODC had promised us just that support from within its own ranks (and in its own interest). Last month I attended a meeting of a group of NPs with SODC Chairman John Cotton to hear a speaker from *rCOH* on 'writing robust NPs'. Once they used to say 'write as amateur volunteers with common sense and evidence of listening'; now they seem to say 'you need all the professional advice and savvy you can muster. Lawyers are out to find the holes in your work.' Businesses are certainly sprouting to 'help' NPs as there is money to be spent..

b) A New Wisdom ? The Parliament website about a new NP Bill going through The Commons says that about 140 NPs have been 'made' since legislation in 2011. However, a growing critique is that they are 'too protectionist' about village spaces and against new housing. This may reflect developer lobbying and the fact that NPs which oppose housing in principle, apparently tend to fail in appeals as developers' lawyers exploit a Plan's fault lines. 'Have bargaining chips in reserve. Get to know the developer and meet halfway. You might be surprised.' (*Advice to South Oxon NPs from rCOH in October.*)

The WNP Committee thank the Parish Clerk, many Wheatley Councillors and the Chairman of HPC for their welcome support. So many volunteers, associates and 'Neighbours' in our Neighbourhood have encouraged and put their trust in us. 'Don't envy you, but stick at it !' cheers up a bad day !

John Fox
Chairman
Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan
2 November 2016.