



Buckhorn Weston and Kington Magna Parish Council

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NOTES FROM COMMUNITY MEETING REGARDING THE PROPOSAL FOR A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (NP)

Saturday 19th February 2022

10am Buckhorn Weston Village Hall & 2pm Kington Magna Village Hall

These notes should be read in conjunction with the Zoom video recording (the audio of which begins shortly after 1 minute) and the slide presentation.

Buckhorn Weston Attendance: 19 / Kington Magna Attendance: 22

Introduction by Buckhorn Weston & Kington Magna Parish Council Chair:

Everyone was welcomed to the meeting and several members of the Parish Council (PC) were thanked for their work thus far in investigating funding, organising meetings and sourcing professional consultants to attend today and assist should the NP progress. The PC is currently trying to reach as many residents as possible to find out if there is a desire for an NP and if so, what the residents want. It is important to note that a steering group, overseen by the PC, will need to be formed and contain several members of the community so if you are interested in helping to form the future of the villages, please get involved. Should the process reach a referendum stage, whether you want a NP or not, the result will only be based on those who vote so please have your say as an NP must be the choice of the community.

Presentation by Lee Searles and Andrea Pellegram:

What is a NP and what can it do for you? A Neighbourhood plan gives your community the opportunity to shape its future development. It should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies in the area or undermine the same. It cannot be seen to frustrate the policies in the local plan or national policy framework and the policies within a NP must be in accordance with the same.

The North Dorset plan set in 2016 removed the settlement boundary from both villages, concentrating development in more sustainable areas such as Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Sherborne. Sustainable areas are defined as requiring less dependence on the need for travel to and from facilities. The new Dorset Council (DC) plan will be adopted in 2023 and is following in a similar vein to the 2016 North Dorset plan.

Developments can only take place inside the settlement boundaries and places outside of these areas are considered countryside and protected by strict policies that only allow for limited planning except under exceptional circumstances e.g. rural worker accommodation and affordable housing schemes. Other restrictions may apply such as conservation areas and areas of scientific value.

A development boundary can be reintroduced by the implementation of a NP and can allocate land for development. There is a rigorous process to ensure it meets requirements. A NP may have no development boundary, it may use its Parish boundary or it can have a development boundary with set policies based on a better knowledge of the local area e.g. design and type of housing. When a planning application from within the area is then received at DC, the case officer will have to consider the NP and work within its policies therefore a good NP gives the community more influence on how development moves forward at an earlier stage of the planning process. (All development sites and policies set within a NP must be justified and evidence

based e.g. a local housing needs assessment). The financial benefit of a NP is that it can secure 25% cil (community infrastructure levy) which would otherwise be 15%.

It is important to establish a vision and include the community's priorities in a NP. These could be more housing (it may only be a small number), downsizing options, infill only, influence on how a development site is used and the design. Others may be the designation of local green spaces of value, protection of historic features, retention of rural aspects and tranquillity and responding to climate emergency. An aspirations chapter could also be included.

Production of a NP requires several steps. The decision to proceed, a settlement boundary agreed with DC, formation of a steering group, obtaining funding through grants, community consultation, evidence gathering, a requirement to ensure no need for a strategic environmental assessment and a first draft consultation to which a whole range of organisations and villagers have an opportunity to respond. A second version of the draft is then submitted to planning, along with evidence documents and a consultation statement showing the NP is not going against the local plan and national policy framework and finally a referendum. The timespan is usually 1 year to 18 months to first draft consultation stage and a further 6 months to 1 year to complete the process.

The PC has submitted an application to Dorset Council to form the designation of a neighbourhood area which represents the formal area for the NP and is usually the whole parish. The next stage is to form a steering group which can be a mix of residents and council members but the responsible body is the PC.

Questions:

Can DC make changes arbitrarily after the draft has been agreed by the community? Changes usually require a tweak with the wording. The planning authority must make sure the NP does not conflict with policies in the local plan. If changes are required but not made then later on DC will request the modifications again. The examiner will see this and recommend the policy is struck out. There is a case that some process steps may have to be repeated if changes are required.

Who organises the referendum? Dorset Council organise this and the decision is based on only those residents who vote.

What policies may cause real concern with DC? Normally where there is non-guidance on scope. It will be important to understand what is in the local and national plans and guidance will be given from the professional consultants.

There are lots of public rights of way, lots of ecological areas, areas of flood risk, no bus stops or services, no surgeries or schools. In this context what is there to gain having a NP? It could set out a framework for a public rights of way network, cycle networks, ecological sites. Also flooding could be a localised issue which isn't looked into by the Environment Agency but could be noted in the NP.

We chose to live here because we like living in a rural area? A lot of NP's are formed in areas where there is lots of development and allows them to take control. In others like here, little would happen if there is no NP. It is up to the community to answer what is the drive for one e.g. young people remaining in the village, possible older generation wanting to downsize within the village.

Who will be involved? The PC is the decision making body which is supported by the steering group and professional consultants with the clerk organising meetings and administration. Working groups could also be formed and there is also technical support from external sources.

How is it paid for? Grants are available and some outside sources cover their own costs so a NP should not cost the community anything.

If there is a plan and it is adopted, how long does it last? A NP does not have to be renewed but it must be reviewed every 5 years. As it conforms with the local plan, it should be updated at the same time or the NP will be outdated, possibly due to a change of policies. It is unlikely much change would be required for this area and as there is already a base in place, it is probable that only the new policies would need to be referred to and amended however, the process must be followed again which may involve another referendum financed by DC.

How does the NP give the area more protection over the countryside policy? The Government want 300,000 houses built per year. All councils use the 'standard method' to look at their requirement for housing. This drives DC to identify sites. As long as planning ensures there is a 5 year housing plan and, looking back 75% of that is built, then everything is OK. However, if that is not met then the Government will step in and take the power away from DC and offer it to open market. This means private developers can apply for development and even if refused by the local authority, they can appeal through the planning inspectorate who may grant permission.

Are you advising us to make a contingency for small developments? Not advising but when DC reviews its plan again, it could allocate strategic planning here however, that is unlikely.

Can we identify a couple of areas and is there a minimum number of properties which would be sufficient for the community to say we have done our bit and can use it to say no more? A NP allows the village to grow.

If Cross's Garage went ahead, would that open the floodgates to others? No because the NP would specify the exact development boundary within the settlement area. If there is a want to allocate land for development, a call for sites must be advertised. At this stage preferences can be set, e.g. position, number of houses, parking, etc. and any landowner who has land fitting the criteria can submit an application. Sites must then be assessed to choose the best one(s) before allocating that site in the NP. The development boundary would include that development, and it may want to also have infill development, but the remaining area outside of the development boundary remains under countryside policy restrictions.

Do landowners not chosen have a right of appeal over the NP decision? They have a right to put in objections but the consultation statement has to explain why their sites were not chosen and robustly justify that which has been chosen. The examiner will ultimately decide if the right site has been selected. There is always the option to withdraw and start again.

Could we put a stop to possible travellers through a policy? A strategic policy is set by DC who reserve those sites. A NP can allocate a travellers site although DC possibly would say it is not in conformity as not in line with their policy.

Old boundary probably doesn't cover the whole of the village. Should it be extended to cover all properties? There may have been a case where a garden could be used for development. Could have policies which list what can and cannot happen.

Can there be control over the appearance of new dwellings and variation applications? Yes in a design policy whereby materials, pitches on roofs, etc. are defined. Should a variation application be submitted, the policy still applies.

Is there any control over solar panel farms? This is dependent on any green connections in the parish. A NP could include a local policy to address it in some way e.g. screening. If land is just farm land a NP can place some policies on it by identifying it as part of an eco-corridor or similar. The more active policies put in place that give meaning to land will make it harder for a planning officer to select it. Wildlife corridors can help identify tracts of land and will protect development from detracting from it.

Can you specify a covenant so that a new development is for local people only, first homes or for over a certain age? DC would need to advise on this and the financial ramifications would need to be considered. A NP must be deliverable.

What if the NP conforms to the current North Dorset local plan but not the new DC plan in 2023. Would this require a renewal of the plan and repeat of the process? Emerging drafts do not indicate much difference from the 2016 North Dorset local plan. If the NP sets out an active strategy against what DC are doing, then there will be an issue. The NP can work with an emerging policy with the agreement of the planning authority. Consultants watch what is emerging and continue to update. The timescale for a NP should align well with DC's new plan. There is a team of people in DC who are very active and helpful with NPs.

What is the timescale? As above but also dependant on the amount of input from the local residents.

Are both villages so similar to carry the same plan and what about the conservation area in KM? Conservation is a strategic policy so control of development in conservation areas would be heavily controlled by DC. The general position is that a neighbourhood area is seen as the default and would need a good reason to be otherwise however, if one area wants a small development this does not mean the other has to. There is no requirement to have comprehensive policies. A NP would make clear what the policy is.

If there is a particular requirement in Kington Magna which does not apply to Buckhorn Weston can you name the village in the NP? Yes. It is normal to have different policies for different areas. The NP can specify what it wants, looking at it as the two villages but in the whole. If one area doesn't want housing the NP will set out the conditions of where housing can occur.

What happens if there is no plan and Gillingham continues to have growth towards this area? A NP is not needed to defend the area. This area is considered unsustainable due to having to drive everywhere. If you want to stop the creep, the NP can comment with evidence.

Aside from housing, what could the policy be for a farming community? Some of the houses have land not being utilised. Can we say the land must be used for food production? The NP can state the value of the rural heritage and agriculture but the policy remains countryside.

What about renewable energy in conservation areas which currently have limitations to the use of solar panels on roofs? In conservation areas properties are subject to listed building and what is stipulated in planning would dictate such things like solar panels. DC has declared a climate emergency with very good policies however building control covers this area. It may be possible to open dialogue with officers to see what can be done as conservation areas need extra consent in accordance with key values of the area. It may be, through conversations with conservation officers, that a set of principles could be found and included.

Can we have a constraint to strongly encourage green policies? Yes. The NP can have policies stating new development/extensions (need to specify) should wherever possible demonstrate they are carbon neutral.

If the DC plan being put in place is made from people not in North Dorset is there much point in doing anything at all? The DC plan is very much building on what is in the North Dorset plan. Being on the border, we can be impacted on some services.

Can we have a policy on light pollution? Yes e.g. Kington Magna is aiming to restore a dark sky area. If the village has a light policy a planning application without regard to that policy can be commented on as not meeting the village policy but this would apply to this area only and only at the point of the planning application. Streetlights come under highways.

Under Class Q can a NP specify design? There is nothing that can be done about the permitted development under class Q however the NP can influence the design.

Can we have a route though using farm buildings to meet an allocation for development? This would need to have the site specified and the landowner's permission. It is not enforceable.

What about the conversion of agricultural buildings to low cost housing? This falls under permitted development rights.

What about designating green spaces? The landowner's agreement would be required if the site is not owned by the community or council.

What about concerns for the proportion of affordable housing? It is sometimes possible to get a development outside of the settlement boundary that is unique and meets a need. A site can be allocated for these specific reasons but the landowner would need to agree.

Can we increase facilities? More facilities require more housing to obtain the cil.

Buckhorn Weston:

Wants/Strengths - Don't want a small town or large village. General support for not changing. Chosen to live here for this reason. Possibly not object to some infill or perhaps 1 or 2 extra properties. Want to retain the views of countryside, lovely walks and the wildlife. Pedestrian/cycling network opportunities already here with Sustrans route and the White Hart Link walk trails. Strong community feel with the village hall, pub, church, cricket club and village green with play equipment. Lots of activities and groups, have a mobile post office, CAT service and school bus. Quite a few children live in the village. Have good relationships with local farmers who do community tasks like hedge cutting and ditch digging. Being small and quiet benefits the farms around. A lot of development means more people using the surrounding land.

Weakness – Loss of bus service, milkman, library, school, village shop and used as a cut through from A30 to A303.

Generally the majority of those who attended in Buckhorn Weston were in favour of a small development of maybe 4 or 5 houses and having a development boundary with policies set within that boundary.

Kington Magna

From those still in attendance at the end of the meeting (14), half were in favour of possible additional housing and/or a gradual increase in housing by infilling but want control, want to keep the countryside but may want some improvements. Aspirations include how to apply renewable energy under the conservation area constraints with a focus on design policies allowing homes to modernise within the constraints.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that an online survey will be organised and circulated. The steering group, when formed, will have regular meetings and report back to the parish council.

Thanks were expressed to both of the consultants for their presentation and explanations.