

Whitchurch on Thames
Neighbourhood Plan Working Group Meeting
Old Stables
30 January 2017

Attendees:

- Cllr Jim Donahue- PC Chair
- Cllr Dave Bowen - PC
- Sarah Hanfrey
- Charles Cotgreave
- Peter Ferguson
- Jean-Marc Grosfort
- John Bradon

Updates from last meeting

Cllr Donahue provide some updates since the last meeting:

- SODC Neighbourhood plan advisors are now on-board. Rachael Riach and Ricardo Rios. He had a call with them.
- SODC has also confirmed that our Area Designation has been approved and we are eligible for a £5,000 SODC grant once we have put together a plan and budget for development of our neighbourhood plan. There is also a £9,000 grant we can get from central government that we can apply for.
- They provided some examples of relevant consultant studies and including a Landscape Capacity Study recently done for Goring and a Landscape Character study done for Stroud. Before we engage a consultant we should be clearer on our objectives and scope and ideally have some candidate sites identified.

Peter and Jean-Marc agreed to investigate the different types of studies and think about its scope. Jim offered to arrange a meeting with SODC contacts when we are ready.

Follow-up actions from last meeting:

There are several likely constraints for future development were more information is required:

- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – as the village falls within the Chiltern AONB, this will limit the development that can happen. What are the rules about developing in an AONB? Jean-Marc did some investigation on this area and said, that while there were a numerous policies, there didn't appear to be clear development rules. Some rules stated that only existing building could be replaced, but new building in AONB was more difficult. We are assuming that all of Whitchurch is in the Chiltern AONB.

- John Bradon offered that WOTHABs could prepare a map of the area highlighting areas of the village that had particularly valuable ecosystems and flora and fauna.
- Charles will investigate the views of CPRE and Chiltern Society on their approach to new housing in the AONB.
- Flood Plains – As this impacts large areas of the village – what are the rules and areas affected? John presented a flow diagram that he found on-line on the decision process for building new houses in high or low risk areas of flooding. Sarah found a strategic flood assessment that SODC commissioned a few years ago that we should investigate.
- Conservation Area – Charles provided some background on the conservation area in the village. The area generally covers both sides of the high street and new developments would not be allowed in this area, although it was noted by the group that this area is already densely developed and very few further houses would be physically possible in the area anyway.
- School places – Sarah spoke with the Head Teacher Dawn which explained that expanding the school size in its currently location would not be possible. It has an intake of approx. 20 students per year. A larger intake would be at 30 students per year, which would not be feasible at the current location.
- Traffic and parking – This is already an issue on the High Street in particular. The Bridge makes this situation worse, particularly with new developments planned in Woodcote, Goring, and Benson in particular, which is planning over 1000 new homes.

Candidate sites for development:

Given these constraints, it is likely that there would be limited areas where new development can happen. The WG will start identifying candidate location once the constraints are better understood.

The landowner at the end of Eastfield lane has offered the land as a candidate site for 'a few' houses along Eastfield lane. This area is in a high-risk flood zone, so a full assessment would be required of the impacts and how they would be addressed. It was also noted that some suggestions had been made for improved public access to the river at this location as a common area as there is very limited public access to the river in the village.

Objectives discussion:

The WG member agreed that we should propose some overall objectives and vision to be circulated in the village for feedback and discussion at open days.

Initial objectives that were discussed:

- The overall objective of the Neighbourhood plan is to see if there is a way to accommodate a 5% increase in housing stock on the village in the next 10 to 15 years (approximately 17 houses)
- Advantages to accommodating this growth include:
 - A richer, more diverse community
 - More options for people wishing to stay in the village
 - Opportunities for affordable housing for young families and children of residents
- The neighbourhood plan would be a way of ensuring that the new development:
 - Is in keeping with the character of the village.
 - Does not detract from the beauty of the surrounding area.
 - Takes into account the severe constraints we have geographically between the river and flood plains on one side, the AONB Chiltern Hills on the other, and the Conservation area in the centre of the village.
 - The traffic constraints of an already congested high street and the bottlenecks of the Thames toll bridge and upper and lower narrows are addressed.
 - Takes into account the limited capacity of the highly regarded primary school.
 - Does not have a significant impact on the rich and diverse natural habitats we are blessed with.
- Identify opportunities to improve the village resulting from new development such as improved infrastructure or access to parts of the village not previously available such as the river.
- The initial vision is to identify a limited number of smaller development sites (less than 4 or 5 homes each) that fit in with existing village neighbourhoods as opposed a large new development that would likely not be within the existing character of the village.

Cllr Donahue agreed to draft a plan and initial budget for the neighbourhood plan process for review at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Monday 6th March.