

Deddington Neighbourhood Plan

Question time

The main news from the Deddington Neighbourhood Plan steering group is that we have definitely decided upon a mini-survey of the parish focusing on the two matters aired in the December Deddington News. Namely what the parish thinks about the possibility that - first, the roads and play areas on new developments might be non-adoptable (that is, to be maintained at the new residents' expense) and second, homes on these estates might be sold on 999-year leases rather than freehold.

Each home in the parish will have at least one leaflet containing the questionnaire delivered to their door so you can fill it in the old-fashioned way. But we would prefer it if you could respond to the questionnaire online on Survey Monkey. It makes it easier and quicker for us to collate the results.

The only question that remains to be decided is the date - when should we launch the survey? The fact is we had been hoping that by early January Cherwell District Council would have published their Local Plan part 2 consultation which should tell us how many new homes they are expecting Deddington parish to accommodate over the next 15 years, together with a list of sites they consider available for development.

If these conflict with the neighbourhood plan we have ready to roll, there may be more questions we'd like to pose to the parish and it seemed sensible to include them in the same mini-survey containing the two questions outlined above. However, Cherwell have delayed publishing the two documents and there is no guarantee they will even appear in February.

If nothing does emerge from Cherwell in the next few weeks, we will probably go ahead with the two-question survey without hanging fire any further. This does of course mean we may need further community consultations when the Cherwell documents finally emerge.

Please bear with us and continue to give us your support. We would like a really convincing response to the questionnaire - both because we want a clear picture of the parish's views and because we want to make the neighbourhood plan as watertight as possible, immune from challenges from the men in wigs (as our chairman calls the property barristers who tend to zoom in when developers want to impose their will at an appeal).

In the meantime, we have joined an informal group of parishes which are drawing up neighbourhood plans of their own, with a view to sharing horrible warnings and - we hope - success stories.

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NP item for Deddington News, March 2017 issue

Home-hunters – alert!

The new estate on School Ground alongside the Banbury Road is springing up before our eyes. Now is the time to be thinking about “affordable” housing. Of the 85 homes being built on the site, 30 will be what is called affordable. And of these, 21 will be for rent to people on Cherwell District Council’s housing register.

Deddington people will have priority for at least half of these 21 homes – but here’s the rub, currently there are only *three* Deddington people on the housing register. So waste no time to check whether you’re eligible. Until recently it was very difficult to get on the register unless you were vulnerable or lived in seriously overcrowded or unsuitable conditions, but the criteria have been relaxed a little since new developments have been cropping up all over the district, each containing at least 30% affordable housing.

For example, it used to be the case that if you were living in a room at your parents’ house you were not eligible – after all, you weren’t homeless. Now you can join the register. Likewise, if you’re in financial hardship and have nagging problems paying the rent for your current accommodation, you might now be included. Key workers – that is, paramedics, nurses, teachers, firemen and so on – get a look in too.

The housing register has three bands in order of need and priority plus a reserve section. But for this estate, in this parish, a strong Deddington connection should put you at the top of the list.

To find out more and download a homeseeker’s application form, go to the council’s website <http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=1838> – or ring them on 01295 227001.

By the way, “affordable” in the rental context means 80% (or 75% if we’re lucky) of the average market rent of similar accommodation across the Cherwell district.

The remaining nine affordable houses on the School Ground site will be offered for shared ownership. You do not have to be on the house register to qualify for these – you simply have to be a first-time buyer with a household income of less than £80,000 a year.

The way it works, you buy a share – between 25% and 75% - of the value of the house with a mortgage and pay rent on the rest. As time passes and you have more money to spare you can increase your share.

If you’re interested and want to find out more the government Help to Buy website is the place to look - www.helptobuy.gov.uk/shared-ownership/ - or ring 0800 456 1188.

The affordable rental properties – which will be owned and managed by Stonewater Homes housing association - will include six one-bedroom maisonettes, one one-bedroom bungalow (that'll be a hot ticket, the only bungalow on the site), 12 two-bed houses and three three-bed houses. For shared ownership there'll be eight two-bedroom houses, and one three-bedroom house available. (These are generally smaller than the site's houses for sale on the open market, which are three-, four- and five-bedroom.)

Once you're on the housing register, you need to keep a close eye on the CDC housing website. Properties for rent are listed six weeks before they're ready for tenants to move in.

* Turning to matters that are, strictly speaking, more the direct concern of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group, the "Two more questions" we'd like you to answer are now up on Survey Monkey – www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DYZDT6F - and a leaflet should be dropping through your letter box any day now.

It should only take a few minutes to fill in, and we'd really like to know what you think.

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Item for April Deddington News

The deadline will have passed for returning your responses to the neighbourhood plan mini-questionnaire by the time you read this, so many thanks to everyone who replied.

Armed with this snapshot of local opinion we'll be able to put the final touches to the neighbourhood plan – at last. The plan will be circulated across the parish for a six-week consultation in the summer. Then it goes to a government-appointed examiner for approval. And after we've taken on board any changes the examiner may propose, the whole thing goes to a referendum.

Cherwell District Council have various planning documents still to publish, but their overall strategy is clear. Concentrate new housing development in the big towns – Banbury and Bicester – plus the old air force base at Upper Heyford, and probably Kidlington, and limit building in the villages.

This is not just about preserving the beauty of the rural north Cotswolds, it's also about limiting long-distance commuting to work, and avoiding more clogging up of the roads, air pollution and so on.

The strategy tallies with our neighbourhood plan, which – based on the responses to the 2015 questionnaire – proposes a maximum of 50 houses on sites of ten dwellings or more, and 20 houses on any one site within Deddington parish in the period up to 2031.

The mismatch emerges when you compare these figures with the number of fields local land-owners are offering for development. Cherwell District Council made a “call for sites” and the results from across the district can be seen on their planning website <http://www.cherwell.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=11741>.

To summarise the Deddington options: M&G, the property developers who own the School Ground site currently under construction, are offering three sites – one at the north end of Wimborn Close for 50-60 houses, one in Hempton on the west side of the Duns Tew road for up to 40 units, and a small plot in Clifton for 20 houses.

M&G, or rather their allied company, the Prudential, acquired tracts of land around Deddington that had previously belonged to Oxford colleges, and there are still large chunks of the estate which they haven't yet offered for development – for instance the fields behind The Paddocks, Mill Close and the High Street.

Local families have offered:

* Part of the Poplars field which might accommodate 10 houses and a sloping field south of Chapmans Lane for 36 dwellings;

- * Land north of Clifton Road and east of Earls Lane for 80 homes, and also a site north of the School Ground which could accommodate 80-100 homes and might come with a gift of land for sports pitches;
- * A plot of land west of Wimborn Close, number of dwellings unspecified, perhaps around 45;
- * Three sections of bigger fields, each for 10 to 15 dwellings that the landowners suggest might be suitable for downsizers, two of them on the north side of Earls Lane, and one on the Banbury Road north of the fire station.

So how will all that work out when the planning applications begin flying in?

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Item for Deddington News, May 2017 issue

You had your say – and how

Thank you very much to everybody who responded to our mini-questionnaire either online or with hand-written replies on the leaflets. The Neighbourhood Plan steering group has now collated the results.

In all there were 250 responses – a little over 14% of the eligible voters in the parish – which is not at all bad considering the questions primarily concerned the wellbeing of future residents rather than the people already living here.

Overall, of those that voted, 89% were in favour of the infrastructure on new estates – the roads, the children’s play areas, public open space and “balancing ponds” – being maintained by the relevant local authority rather than by a private management company financed by the estate residents. And 84% were in favour of the houses being sold freehold, rather than on 999-year leases.

The most indignant responses concerned leaseholds – especially if they were sold on to finance companies.

“An appalling practice designed only to line the pockets of fat cats,” said one. “Leaseholders would be impoverishing themselves and enriching people and companies in the Cayman Islands, Virgin Islands, Liechtenstein and other tax havens,” said another.

Others felt leasehold flouted the long-held principle that an Englishman’s (or Englishwoman’s) home is his/her castle. “How can people spend hundreds of thousands on a house and not own it?”

On the question of who should maintain the estates, the prevalent opinion was that unadopted estates run by management companies were divisive.

Many took a practical view: “From experience, chasing money for a residents management company leads to neighbours falling out when residents don’t or can’t afford to pay.” “Take a look at the condition of most private roads, usually poorly maintained.” “These facilities can be used and are for the benefit of the community and should be publicly managed.” In short: “We should not create ghettos.” And besides, resident management companies could go bankrupt and what then?

A running theme among responses was horror at the thought of up to 170 wheelie bins lined up along the Banbury Road, if Cherwell District Council adheres to its policy of not collecting refuse from private roads.

Among the antis, a few felt a management company might actually make a better job of maintaining new estates. One or two candidly admitted they would prefer unadopted estates because it might reduce their own council tax. But the most common view was – “Caveat emptor.”

While unwilling to buy properties leasehold or on unadopted estates themselves, they felt it was not our business to interfere with the market. "If they are daft enough to buy a house under such circumstances, it's up to them." Or to put it another way, "We are not a nanny state."

You can read the results in full on the Neighbourhood Plan website - www.deddingtonneighbourhoodplan.org.

On the leaflets, there was space for additional comments, not necessarily related to the two specific questions. Traffic problems, road safety, the absence of bungalows and the need for better public transport were all raised. One favoured "Land tax to be implemented, and mass council housing programme!"

Another suggestion made us smile: "I am not aware if there is a place for retired men to meet up like a 'man shed'. But I think the men would benefit from such a place – maybe the 'Old Bowling Club House' as now the British Legion is closing."

And what survey would be complete without this comment: "Swimming pool would be beneficial to the young and old."

Now it is the steering group's task to incorporate these preferences – at least the ones that attracted more than an 80% consensus – into the neighbourhood plan. We're at last within striking distance of completing the plan, and then it will go out to public consultation in the parish – and ultimately, with the modifications you propose, to a referendum. So stand by for more leaflets dropping through your letter box. I think we can be proud that this neighbourhood plan really will be a communal effort – so thanks again for your patience and diligence.

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Neighbourhood Plan item for Deddington News, June issue, 2017

It's a deal

One of the by-products of new estates being built is the financial contribution the developers have to make to the surrounding community - either in the form of S106 money or the more recent Community Infrastructure Levy. There won't be much coming the way of Deddington parish in the future if the Neighbourhood Plan is honoured and new developments are small but there should be richer pickings from the David Wilson Homes development currently going up on the School Ground.

This will include 85 homes, a fairly hefty number, and when planning permission was granted, numerous S106 contributions were agreed in a Deed of Covenant - most of which were ratified by the examiner who granted the appeal. The idea of S106 money is that it "mitigates" the effects of new developments and finances improvements to local facilities to cater for the new residents.

Unfortunately development companies are notorious for trying to wriggle out of their S106 commitments once construction is under way - protesting that their profit margin is at risk. Which might or might not give us cause for concern concerning the S106 contributions due from the School Ground developers.

Under the covenants agreed between the two local authorities - Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council - and the then owners M&G Property, a variety of sums should come the way of the parish, for example £21,000 towards improving the Windmill Centre, a similar amount or more towards the library; some £85,000 for off-site outdoor sports, which we hope will go towards expanding football and other sports facilities at the Windmill; and, crucially, a goodly sum towards the rebuilding of the nursery alongside the primary school - which will be very handily located for small children on the new estate.

Around £73,000 is promised for public transport - probably for the S4 bus - a sum which might persuade Stagecoach to make the Deddington to Oxford stretch of the S4 route half-hourly as it has the Banbury to Deddington stretch.

Although the roads are not likely to be adopted by the county council, there is an agreement in place for the play areas on site to be handed over to the district council a year after completion on payment of £1 for the freehold - rather than the residents having to pay for the upkeep themselves.

The parish council has been badgering the two councils, Oxfordshire and Cherwell, since February requesting reassurance that the monies will be paid and in good time. So far we have received no satisfactory reply.

Contribution for primary and secondary education and affordable housing are the big budget items facing developers. The sums we're expecting for the library, the community centre and the sports pitches are small beer by comparison.

Let's hope David Wilson Homes is a company that honours the agreement it has inherited from M&G Property and that we have some good news soon.

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Deddington Neighbourhood Plan Item for Deddington News, July 2017

Holiday reading?

In something over a month, the draft Deddington Neighbourhood Plan will be ready for its official seven-week consultation period. Since there will be no Deddington News next month, this is by way of an early warning. All being well, the complete draft neighbourhood plan will be available for everyone to read on our website (see address below) in August together with two supporting reports - one a Consultation describing the neighbourhood planning process over the past four years, and one a Basic Conditions Statement demonstrating how our draft plan conforms with national planning policy and the Local Plan drawn up by Cherwell District Council.

Printed copies of all three documents should be accessible at Deddington library, the parish council office at the Windmill Centre and the CDC offices in Bodicote. We'll also be delivering a pamphlet to every household in the parish giving an overview of the plan and in particular a summary of the policies. The various ways parishioners can respond to the draft neighbourhood plan will be made clear in the pamphlet.

We're hoping many people will respond – with suggestions for improvement and (let's hope) confirmation that we're on the right track and are fairly representing the aspirations of the parish as revealed in the questionnaires and the drop-in sessions. We'll also be approaching all the stakeholders - local businesses and groups, land owners and statutory consultees for their views.

One piece of perhaps welcome news is that Deddington will most likely not be expected to help accommodate "Oxford's unmet housing need". Cherwell district is required to provide 4,400 new homes – over and above the 22,800 already envisaged – for the expected hugely expanding workforce in Oxford.

In a partial review of its earlier Local Plan now published for comment, Cherwell is proposing that all 4.400 homes should be built in areas extending north from Oxford, to the south and south-east of Kidlington and along the A44 corridor in Yarnton, Begbroke (a whopping 1,950 homes on the west side of the A44 there) and on to Woodstock, close to a proposed new Park and Ride.

We can expect an outcry from these places, not least because the proposals involve some building on the Oxford Green Belt. But the rationale is that the homes need to be reasonably close to the new employment centres in and around Oxford, and need to have good public transport links. Building in villages further afield, it is recognised, would clog up the roads with commuter cars.

Cherwell has other planning documents in the pipeline, but at least we in Deddington now know that we won't have to adapt our neighbourhood plan to allow for Oxford overspill.

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Item for September 2017 Deddington News

Deddington Neighbourhood Plan

Home truths

If you are hoping to influence future development in the parish – as we are on the Neighbourhood Plan steering group – it's useful to see what lessons can be learned from developments that are already under way, specifically the David Wilson Homes estate on the northern edge of Deddington.

It was reassuring to see the letter from Catherine Senior, on behalf of David Wilson Homes, in the July Deddington News confirming that the company does indeed intend to honour its obligation to make contributions towards the parish infrastructure – amounting to £600,000. Both Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council have been making encouraging noises about this too.

From the parish's point of view there are one or two serious hitches – the sewage and drainage works for the estate are not scheduled until next January so, as more new residents move on to the estate, it's a bit of a mystery how the drainage is being managed in the meantime. And some of the essential path and road works are still to be undertaken in breach of the agreed deadlines.

But the most disappointing element is the lack of a contribution towards Deddington's nursery. This is because the deed of covenant signed in 2013 (the relevant document for this development) only stipulated a sum for primary education, around £400,000, with no mention of pre-school. And, in fact, the agreed amount is to go to Adderbury's primary school which is planning to expand its pupil intake, and not to Deddington primary school, which has improvements in mind but not expansion.

David Wilson Homes were asked to make a voluntary contribution towards the nursery but rejected the idea.

The affordable housing on the estate seems to be well in hand and with luck some Deddington people, who have priority, will be accommodated there. The first hurdle if you are seeking rental property is to get on Cherwell District Council's housing register. You can download an application form from Cherwell District Council's website (www.cherwell.gov.uk) - a CDC officer who is keeping an eye on affordable housing in Deddington suggests you mark your filled-in application for her attention: Teresa.Chapman@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk. But hurry, because there are only a limited number of homes available.

The other "affordable" option is shared ownership, for which you don't have to be on the housing register. If you're interested, look on the website of Stonewater Homes, the housing association that's handling the affordable housing on Deddington Grange - www.stonewaterhomes.co.uk. They're offering a 40% share of a two-bedroom house for £112,000, available off-plan in

September. (You pay affordable rent on the remaining 60% and can increase your share of the house over time.)

Turning to future development in the parish, the draft Neighbourhood Plan is now virtually complete and should go out for consultation to the whole of the parish in October. More details (editor permitting) in next month's Deddington News.

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Item for Deddington News, October 2017 issue

Deddington Neighbour Plan – the consultation

The moment has arrived. By October 1st you should be receiving through your letterbox a pamphlet which launches the seven-week public consultation on the draft Deddington Neighbourhood Plan.

The pamphlet gives an overview of the plan and policies and explains where to find - and how to respond to - the complete draft Neighbourhood Plan. This sets out the background and rationale for the 28 policies in full, and is supported by two attendant documents: the Consultation and Basic Condition Statements which show how we arrived at this version of the plan, and how it conforms with national and local statutory requirements.

Whether in response to the longer or shorter version of the plan, we're hoping as many people as possible will send in their comments. The whole consultation exercise includes dozens of institutions far and wide as well as local businesses, landowners and stakeholders, but our main concern is that people in Deddington, Hempton and Clifton should feel the plan reflects their hopes for the future of the parish - as expressed loud and clear in the various drop-in sessions and questionnaires we have held.

The views we discovered about future development were not unexpected. However sympathetic to the wider housing crisis, beautiful rural villages are not usually keen on hosting extensive new housing estates. Likewise, anxieties about speeding and parking are common to every village in the county.

Pleasingly it became clear from our findings that most people are happy to live in Deddington, for all kinds of reasons – the rural charm, the shops, the pubs, the clubs, the historic features, the landscape, the friendliness and spirit of the place.

What did come as a bit of a surprise was the harsh criticism of some of our most prized facilities – the Windmill Centre, the playgrounds and the sports pitches.

Whether our housing policies are honoured and the look and feel of the parish is preserved will be largely down to the planning authority, the developers and possibly government departments. But closer to home, matters are more in our own hands - we can do something about upgrading those prized facilities, we can at least try to tackle traffic problems and we can help make life a little easier for businesses in the parish.

These are the aims of our policies. Please let us know if we've got it right. As well as the pamphlets delivered to your door, there will be printed copies of the full neighbourhood plan and attendant documents available at the library, the parish office at the Windmill Centre and Cherwell District Council's offices in Bodicote House. And all the documents are on our website (address below).

This consultation is the first of the hurdles we have to clear. Next Cherwell District Council and a government examiner have their say. Then we have the referendum to look forward to.

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