

Item for the February Deddington News

Where next for neighbourhood planning?

As the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group reassemble for the new year, we are faced with a quandary. In light of the planning inspector's decision to permit 85 houses to be built on the Prudential field north of Gaveston Gardens – what next?

Eighty-five houses are already more development than Cherwell District Council's Local Plan envisages for Deddington for the best part of two decades. Will this new housing estate be deemed enough or will further developments be approved willy-nilly, regardless of the Local Plan and any consensus we may eventually reach through the neighbourhood plan on what housing is needed and where.

Everything may hang on Cherwell's five-year housing land supply, which the planning inspector deemed to fall short.

A meeting in Westminster with the planning minister Nick Boles attended by parish councillors from Bloxham, Hook Norton, Adderbury, Milton and Cllr David Rogers from Deddington was inconclusive. On the one hand, the minister told them that unless there is a good planning reason such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Sites of Special Scientific Interest, inspectors would have to give great weight to the lack of a five-year supply and allow applications.

On the other - when challenged why communities should persevere with neighbourhood plans if they could be overruled - the minister gave his usual line: those communities that have completed their neighbourhood development plans would have control over development in their parishes, those that don't would have to rely on the district authority's local plan. And he added a new twist: those communities that have an Adopted Neighbourhood Plan will get 25% of the Community Infrastructure Levy and those that don't, won't.

In other words there is a cash incentive – or bribe – for villages to complete neighbourhood plans. It will be the steering group's task to find out quite how much that sum is likely to be.

In early January our MP Sir Tony Baldry attacked “opportunistic planning applications” in a planning debate with Nick Boles and MPs in Westminster Hall. “A classic example involves the community in Deddington, a village in my constituency. People there are busily undertaking a neighbourhood plan, entirely consistent with the provisions set out by the government. A landowner and developer come along and put in a planning application to build up to 85 houses on the edge of the community, which is refused by the local authority but allowed on appeal.”

He went on: “Under the agreed local plan, Deddington is due to take something like 80 new houses to the end of the survey period in 2031. However, the location of up to 85 has already been decided—not by the local community, but on the basis of whoever happened to get their planning application in first. With respect, that is not neighbourhood planning. It is not a plan-led system; it is a system of first come, first served.”

The minister, in his response recorded in Hansard, made a half promise. Neighbourhood plans that have completed consultation but not yet gone to referendum nor examination, he said, “can, in exceptional circumstances, be used just on the basis of prematurity to refuse an application, if the application is so substantial that it could completely knock the legs out from that emerging plan”.

On the brighter side, Deddington’s neighbourhood plan tackles numerous other issues besides housing for improving our villages and these were given a good airing at the drop-in sessions at the church in November. Many useful and original suggestions were contributed which will give guidance to the steering group – and very likely the parish council, too.

- All 1,135 written responses provided by some 230 visitors to the drop-in sessions are now posted on the website, www.deddingtonneighbourhoodplan.org/

Helen Oldfield

Item for Deddington News March 2014

How affordable is affordable?

The vexed question the Neighbourhood Plan steering group has been investigating over the past month or so is whether the 85 houses approved for the site north of Gaveston Gardens fulfill Deddington's share of Cherwell's target five-year supply of new housing.

Cherwell's planning panjandrums are bullish about this. Yes, the "Pegasus 85" do count to the total. Yes, Cherwell is very close to the required five-year supply, and yes, they'll be judging new applications on planning considerations rather than the "numbers game".

This suggests Cherwell are reasonably confident they could make their planning decisions stick at appeal. A somewhat different picture emerges from the report by the inspector in the Pegasus appeal. He implies that he would have approved the appeal even if CDC's housing supply had not fallen short. "I do not consider the proposal would have the adverse effect that has been suggested," he writes. So there.

The inspector also adjudicated on the contributions – S106 they're called – that the developers will have to provide for the village, the district and the county (including, for example, £400,000-plus for local primary school and special educational needs, and £21,000 for improvements to the Windmill Centre).

Crucially the inspector did not bow to the developers' wish to dilute their commitment to providing affordable housing. The site for affordable housing is still to be sold to the relevant housing association for £1.

There should be 29 "affordable" dwellings on the Pegasus site, 50% of them earmarked for Deddington people – most of them to rent. To be eligible for one of these homes, aside from having a proven connection to the parish, you have to be on Cherwell's housing register, which can be a hurdle in itself. To qualify you have to prove you are in pretty acute housing need: for instance, because of a medical state, or because you're currently living in substandard or overcrowded conditions.

Market rents in Deddington are notably higher than in, say, Banbury, so the NP's housing sub-group were anxious that "affordable" might actually turn out to be unaffordable, given that affordable rents are generally defined as 80% of local market rents. It turns out these rents are set on a district-wide basis – and should not exceed the "local housing allowance". In Cherwell this currently stands at £505.87 for a two-bedroomed, £775 for a three-bedroomed home.

There is now another planning application under consideration in Deddington – for seven houses on a plot of land behind the cottages on the east side of St Thomas Street. Several considerations that were not central to the Pegasus application come into play here – traffic, the conservation area, the proximity of listed buildings, the aspect to the Castle grounds, and archeological possibilities. So far, by the way, there's no mention in the outline application of affordable housing. It will be interesting to see how this plays out – and perhaps indicative for the future.

Helen Oldfield helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

Item about Neighbourhood Plan for April issue of Deddington News

Wanted – a planning champion

Are you a planning expert? Are you wise to the wiles of developers? Have you some free time? If so you could be the very person Deddington parish will be needing when the neighbourhood plan is complete.

One of our parish councillors and the parish clerk attended a meeting called by Thame Parish Council last month. It turned out to be an eye-opening and alarming experience.

Thame began its neighbourhood plan in 2011 – three years and £100,000 later the plan is complete. Admittedly Thame, with a population of 11,000, is far bigger than Deddington and has much greater funds at its disposal but its message for other parishes embarking on a neighbourhood plan is stark. The work – and the expense – doesn't stop with the completion of the plan: the next step is to ensure the plan is enforced. At that point parishes have a choice – trust the district council to look after their interests or appoint their own representative to fight their corner when planning decisions are made and the horse-trading with developers begins.

Thame has employed their own professional planning consultant. Help of this kind is almost certainly beyond the means of Deddington parish council, which has an annual budget of around £32,000.

So far the steering group has spent nearly £1,000 – on setting up a website, hiring venues for public meetings and drop-in sessions, distributing leaflets and posters. And luckily we have received a grant of around £900 from Locality, part of the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme. But there's a long way to go yet, a questionnaire, a referendum and a final plan to be financed, even without calling in expert planning advice.

Here lies one of many paradoxes in the planning arena. On the one hand the government is promoting localism and the creation of local and neighbourhood plans. On the other hand it has brought in new legislation to enable developers to challenge local decisions. So the scene is set for a stand-off between their highly-paid planning consultants and lawyers and ours – professional in the case of Thame, more likely amateur in the case of Deddington.

Whether localism and democracy should come with a price tag is questionable, but that's the way it is. So we would be delighted if a planning expert who lives locally and cares about Deddington were to step forward: someone equipped to take on the developers that circle around us, keeping them up to the mark on their commitments to affordable housing and S106 contributions – and keep an eye on Cherwell's planning decisions.

This is for the future. At the moment the steering group is at the stage of consulting local stakeholders. These include local businesses and clubs, bus companies, local authorities, emergency services, English Heritage, and local landowners. What are their aspirations for Deddington parish?

Helen Oldfield helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

Item in May 2014 issue of Deddington News

Calling all land owners

Neighbourhood plans are all about land – whether it be a small strip between two existing houses or wide open meadows. The next set of people Deddington’s neighbourhood planners wish to meet are the farmers and land owners whose fields surround the villages. Agriculture is by far the biggest local business, so what are their hopes and concerns for the parish? There are land owners, too, who may want their land considered for development. We want to hear from them all – so please get in touch (with the chair of the housing group, Bryn Williams, abw@brynwilliams.com).

Meanwhile, events on the homes front are racing ahead of our neighbourhood plan. Arguments are stirring, passions are flaring and petitions flying at parish and county level. The planning application for 26 homes on The Poplars site alongside the Castle Grounds on the Clifton Road came before the parish council at its April 16 meeting - and alongside it a petition organised by Deddington Development Watch and signed by 686 parishioners calling on the council to resist any proposed developments of more than 15-20 houses.

The parish council actually has no power in planning matters, but it can make recommendations to the district council. The council is not as uniformly hostile to the Poplars plan as the campaigning group (DDW), but the petition – supposedly representing 52% of the electorate in Deddington village – very likely had an effect. In any case, as reported elsewhere, the parish council resolved to oppose the Poplars plan.

Another petition – actually more of a call to arms - came from the Campaign to Protect Rural England. They are outraged by the latest report on housing need in the county – SHMA, it’s called - the assessment by a firm of consultants that Oxfordshire will need 100,000 new homes by 2031. This breaks down to 1,140 new homes per year in Cherwell – about twice as many as currently envisaged. The aim, says the report, is to accommodate population growth, young people wanting to set up new households, business requiring local staff, and the need for affordable housing.

All very laudable, but the CPRE describe their figures as “unsound, unachievable and unwanted”. In particular they reckon the estimate of how the workforce will increase over the next ten to 20 years comes from dreamland. They urge councils, organisations and individuals to resist, and Deddington parish council rallied to the call.

“Unsound” or not, the report did have points of interest. For instance, it makes explicit that nowadays there is really only one source of new affordable housing, and that is as part and parcel of a larger commercial development by way of S106 contributions. By SHMA’s calculations, aside from Oxford City, Cherwell has a more acute need of affordable housing than anywhere else in the county.

So here's another of these planning paradoxes. At present, in any development of three houses, one house has to be affordable (to conform with CDC's S106 rules). Now the government is floating the idea that the threshold should be raised to 10 houses before S106 contributions kick in – another escape route for developers wishing to avoid providing affordable housing.

There are two things I've discovered since immersing myself in neighbourhood planning: first, a whole world of new and hideous acronyms, and second the great generosity of the Deddington News. Not only do they afford us space in their excellent magazine but they are also making a cash donation to the Neighbourhood Plan steering group to help us carry out our task on behalf of the community. We are very grateful.

Helen Oldfield (helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk)

Item for June edition of Deddington News

Parking mad?

Some new volunteers have stepped forward to help prepare the Neighbourhood Plan, and we're looking for yet more as we get into the nitty-gritty of preparing a questionnaire (contact us via www.deddingtonneighbourhoodplan.org).

One of the sub-groups that's steaming ahead is Movement and Transport. Among other things, they're tackling the fraught question of parking in the village. Initially they've been focusing on the Market Place but the bumper-to-bumper squeeze extends far beyond that.

We all know what the fundamental problem is – trying to pack modern households with one, two or even three cars apiece into a village which, in the central area at least, was built cheek-by-jowl in the era of the horse and cart and Shanks's pony. To add to the snarl-up, the village is a magnet for visitors.

Some commentators at the Neighbourhood Plan's drop-in sessions last November suggested we need a car park. But where should such a car park be? As a member of the Movement and Transport group pointed out – unless such a car park is within seconds of the Market Place the evidence shows that few people would actually use it.

Others suggested parking controls – time restrictions, or parking charges, or residents' permits. The snag with these is that they need enforcement and that means parking wardens, paid for either from one of the relevant council's budgets (unlikely in these cash-strapped times) or from fines (ouch).

Meanwhile, the Business group is discovering that one of the attractions of Deddington for shops and business is the *lack* of parking restrictions. Their clients – if they're lucky – can simply drive up and park.

Beyond the village centre – and this applies to Clifton and Hempton too – residents tend to complain about their neighbours and their visitors mashing up the grass verges by parking on them. Unsightly and destructive it may be, but tempting if the alternative is to park a hundred yards or so from your home with heavy shopping to carry.

One of our parish councillors had experience of just this problem in Oxford some years back. More and more people acquired cars and encroached on the grass verge. Householders retaliated by placing rocks or posts on the verge in front of their homes. Ugly scenes erupted. Eventually the upshot was that the verges were concreted over – a solution few people would wish for in Deddington, even if the funds to do so were available, which they are not.

And so it goes on, round and round. Lots of luck to the Movement and Transport group and the parish at large filling in the questionnaire and trying to find solutions.

One small consolation: cars parked in the road, or half on the verge or pavement may be an irritation but they also act as a kind of impromptu pinchpoint slowing down the

traffic. And since finding ways to reduce speeding is another problem on Movement and Transport's plate, that can't be all bad.

Helen Oldfield
helenoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

Neighbourhood Plan item for September issue of Deddington News

Question time

At last the Neighbourhood Plan steering group has its questionnaire ready to roll. We should be delivering it to every house in the parish in the next two or three weeks. At the time of going to press our plan is to provide a form for each adult member of the household to complete. But, in any case, the questionnaire will be available online on Survey Monkey as well – plus we'll have spare print versions. In one way or another every individual parishioner should have the chance to have their say.

We're hoping for a huge response – Adderbury had replies from more than 60% of the parish to their survey and we'd like to top that. They attribute their success to the team of street captains they had knocking on doors, chasing people up to complete their forms, and offering help whenever anyone needed a hand. We intend to use the same system. So expect a neighbour to be calling at your door soon.

In fact, if you could spare a little time to be a street captain yourself, please be in touch – we'd be delighted (contacts below). The aim for our final plan is to reflect opinion across the villages of Deddington, Hempton and Clifton as accurately as possible and for that we need to hear from everybody, not just the activists and enthusiasts.

We've prepared a separate questionnaire for school age children to fill in – and the primary school has carried out a project with the younger ones – but there may be several young people who have slipped through the net because they attend a school we have not approached, or have left school. Please let us know if your family need copies of the junior questionnaire.

The finishing touches have still to be made to the main questionnaire because at the time of writing we're awaiting publication of Cherwell's revised Local Plan. Their previous plan was suspended by the government inspector on the grounds that it didn't take account of the latest assessment of housing need in the district. The upshot is that Cherwell District Council are having to identify sites for an extra 6,000 new homes to be built between now and 2031 - over and above the sites for 16,000 homes already earmarked. This may or may not have implications for Deddington – and hence for the questionnaire. August 18 was the date set for the new draft Local Plan to be made public.

At the moment the questionnaire contains around 75 questions – not too daunting, we hope, because most of them simply require a tick in a box. There'll be space too for any additional comments you wish to make. And there'll be details of how you return the completed form, plus a prize draw for the lucky respondent. So please, do fill in the questionnaire, encourage your family, friends and neighbours to do the same – then return it by the closing date, which will probably be two weeks after the date of delivery.

Helen Oldfield

helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

<http://www.deddingtonneighbourhoodplan.org/>

Item for Deddington News, October 2014 issue

If you haven't already received your Neighbourhood Plan questionnaires they should be with you any day now. We had a slight delay because the detail took longer than expected to finalise - not least making sure the print and online versions of the questionnaire marry up as exactly as possible.

We have a troop of street captains about 30 strong ready to knock on doors, deliver as many questionnaires as you need and offer help in filling them in to anyone who would like it. The questionnaires are already accessible online on Survey Monkey - the URL for the Adult questionnaire is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MSYWT3X>, and the URL for the Youth questionnaire (that is for people aged between 11 and 17 years old) is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MJ538XP>.

It would help the steering group streamline the task of analysing the results if, after reading the print version and pondering your response, you fill in your answers on Survey Monkey. (You have to complete the form online at one sitting, or at least without closing the file - if you close it you'd have to start from the beginning again.)

If you prefer to write in your answers on the print version, that's fine too. There's a list of places in Clifton, Deddington and Hempton where you can drop off the completed form on the form itself.

We've also put back the deadline for returning the form to November 9 to allow people longer for filling it in (but not so long that you forget all about it, we hope.) This in turn means the steering group will have to postpone the drop-in sessions at the church when we take stock of the results of the questionnaire and start drafting the final plan. They will now be held after Christmas.

The feeling was that it's better to get it right and allow everyone in the parish time to have their say, than to rush on to the next stage. Now, having spent so long fine-tuning the questions, the steering group is really looking forward to receiving your answers and suggestions.

Helen Oldfield

helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk

www.deddingtonneighbourhoodplan.org

Item for November 2014 issue of Deddington News

Last orders

The street captains have been out in force, knocking on doors, delivering Neighbourhood Plan questionnaires. Plenty of completed forms are already appearing at the drop-off points and on Survey Monkey. But still we're hearing that some people have not yet received their questionnaires.

If this is still the case by the time this Deddington News reaches you, don't give up - email me at the address below and we will make sure there'll be an express delivery to your house. The deadline for returning questionnaires is not until November 9, so there is still time.

We on the Neighbourhood Plan steering group are gearing up for the next stage - analysing the responses you're sending in.

Otherwise, there's an interesting turn-up on the housing/development front. As the days tick by and the 'deadline' approaches when the outline planning permission for 85 houses on the Prudential site runs out, no detailed planning application has been submitted; it seems Miller Homes are no longer the developer and no new owners have made themselves known - at least at time of going to press. Perhaps it isn't such a hot property after all.

Helen Oldfield

helenmoldfield@yahoo.co.uk