

HIGHCLERE PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – END-OF-YEAR STATUS 2023

2023 has been an eventful year for the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). Much progress has been made, and as we are approaching a milestone it is appropriate to summarise progress for the Parish.

The development of NPs is governed by a clear process, starting with the designation of the area affected and moving through stages of community, Borough and technical engagement and approval before the Plan can be officially incorporated into local Planning regulations.

The progress to date of the Highclere NP through those stages is shown below.

Nov 2018	Designation of Parish granted
Mar-Aug 2019	Building the Steering Group (SG)
	Scoping the project
	Appointing consultants
	Identifying probable key issues
	Planning initial stages of Community engagement
Feb 2020	Neighbourhood Plan community launch event
--- Covid pandemic ---	
2020/2021	Drafting Vision and Objectives
Sep 2021	Vision & Objectives survey – parish mail drop
Feb 2022	Call for sites
Mar 2022	Drafting the plan begins
Apr 2022	Site selection process begins
May 2023	Site Preference survey – parish mail drop
Sep 2023	Allocation of Foxs Lane site announced
Oct 2023	Screening draft development begins

We have had four instances of community consultation, despite the intervention of Covid during and after which community engagement has been challenging :

- the original Open Day in Feb 2020. This was publicised by leaflet (Penwood), Parish magazine, Nextdoor and Highclere Society newsletter. Around 100 people attended.
- the Parish-wide mail-drop of the Plan Objectives Survey in Sept 2021. The 200+ responses were overwhelmingly positive.
- the Parish-wide mail-drop of the Site Preference Survey in May 2023. The 200+ responses formed a key input to the eventual choice.
- the series of three explanatory drop-in meetings run in parallel with the survey. Over 100 people attended.

In 2021 the five-year review of the Borough's Local Plan became due and both the Parish Council (PC) and the NPSG were consulted in its early stages of development. This revealed that the Borough planned for Highclere to have a Housing Requirement (HR) of 10 dwellings to be delivered over the Plan period to 2035. This has recently been confirmed in the latest release.

This raised two problems for the NP. The objectives so strongly supported in the September 2021 survey included support for smaller and affordable dwellings and constraining development to small sites. However, under the Borough's planning rules, only sites of 10 dwellings or more could :

- Qualify to be counted towards the HR, and
- Require the developer to provide a proportion of affordable homes.

Therefore, rather than have the Borough define where developers could build or give up the emphasis on affordable homes it was decided with the strong encouragement of our consultants, PlanET and Associates, to allocate a single site for 10+ dwellings.

While there is no formal process defined for site selection, examination of other NPs and advice from PlanET made it clear that combining a professional, independent view with community preferences and performance against the agreed Plan objectives would be a robust process.

The eleven sites proposed to us in the Call for Sites were therefore submitted to Navigus Planning, a reputed planning consultancy, for an independent assessment against planning and sustainability criteria; this step is advised in the NP process. The addition of the need to support 10+ dwellings eliminated five sites which could not support that scale of development reducing the eleven to six. Of those six the least favoured in the independent assessment was removed and five were taken forward. The Steering Group assessed the five against how well they supported the NP objectives and then used the Preference Survey last May to garner the Parish's views. The three results were used together to decide which site to allocate in the NP; the Foxs Lane site was chosen. The results of each assessment and the overall selection data are available on the Parish website.

From this point on development of the Plan will move into the more formal parts of the NP process.

Stage	Expected
Draft Plan goes to Basingstoke & Deane for preliminary screening	Jan 2024
Parish consults on the pre-submission draft (Regulation 14)	Spring 2024
Updating draft plan based on consultation responses	Spring 2024
Submission of plan to BDBC	Summer 2024
BDBC consults on proposed plan (Regulation 16)	Summer 2024
Independent examination of draft plan	Autumn 2024
Referendum	Winter 2024
Plan 'Made' by BDBC and becomes part of the Local Plan	early 2025

During these later stages there are four opportunities for Parishioners (and other stakeholders) to have their say on the contents of the Plan, shown in **bold** above.