

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FOR HIGHCLERE

INTRODUCTION

1. A Neighbourhood Plan's weight in deciding planning applications can be an important control tool for local communities. The Parish Council (HPC) therefore decided in February 2018 to commission a small team, the NP Advisory Group, to consider what such a Plan could mean for Highclere.
2. The terms of reference for the Advisory Group (AG), adopted by HPC in March 2018, are shown at Appendix A. They comprise two key aspects: setting out the pros and cons of Highclere having a Neighbourhood Plan, and exploring the issues around its preparation. The role of the Advisory Group is not to define a Vision or other aspects of a NP but to present realistic options with their implications for strategies, resources and costs. It is then for the PC to decide whether a NP is the appropriate tool to help define and realise a community vision of a future Highclere. The reporting deadline was set as the PC meeting of July 2018.

BACKGROUND

3. Highclere has for many years successfully retained its rural feel despite significant small-scale development. The Settlement Policy Boundary was removed in 2006, we are in the North Wessex Downs AONB, and our Borough designation is "countryside". These protections against inappropriate development have served Highclere well and so the Parish Council's historical reluctance to develop a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) does not seem unreasonable.
4. Despite these protections a number of developments have been completed over the years which might today be met with some resistance. Yet Mount Close, Four Oaks, Arkwright Close and Rutherford Close are by now well absorbed into Highclere's built environment and have proved able to co-exist with the predominantly rural feel of the Parish.
5. Today, however, there is a heightened sensitivity to our planning vulnerability, driven not least by nationally rising numbers of Council planning refusals overturned by developers on the basis of inadequate "land supply". This local sensitivity has been exacerbated by four recent events:
 - the urbanising trend embodied in the Harwood Paddock development
 - the eventually-defeated JPP application for 55 houses behind The Red House
 - the threat to BDBC's land supply from the proposed new "housing need" calculation in DCLG's 'Right homes, right places' consultation, September 2017
 - the recent call by BDBC for potential housing land under the annual SHELAA update.
6. The government's commitment to Localism in planning policy was initiated in 2011. The Neighbourhood Plan is a key plank of that policy, having weight as a statutory document supplementing an Adopted Local Plan (ALP). This position has been reinforced in subsequent legislation and consultations.

FINDINGS

Pros and Cons of a Neighbourhood Plan for Highclere

7. The key benefit of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for Highclere is that the policies it contains become statutory as part of the Adopted Local Plan. It carries equal weight as a part of the ALP, unlike documents such as the existing Village Design Guide, which now carries little weight. The table below shows features of a NP and of developing one, along with the benefits (B) or disadvantages (D) they bring – some have both. Further consideration follows, of particular aspects of the process.

Feature	B/D	Description
Statutory weight	B	Gives the parish much greater power over inappropriate development
Community involvement and support	B	Whatever the NP turns out to be, it can only be what the community wants.
	D	The involvement must be mobilised, managed and maintained over two or more years.
Applicable to any planning-related issue	B	Housing, transport, environment and economy can all be addressed. Raises "nice-to-haves" to policy status, affordable housing, transport, sustainability
Many papers on made NPs available	B	Much work has to be done, but there are hundreds of policy examples available to use or modify
Costs – community engagement	D	Organising and communicating community engagements is time-consuming and strategic consulting input could be useful.
Costs – community consultation	D	The consultation process requires more communication with good visuals
Costs - resources	D	Consultants could help with policy structure. A Strategic Environmental Assessment, would require a few £'000 worth of consulting support.
Costs - Overall	B	The £9k grant plus £8k technical support, plus PC and HS contributions could cover it.
Risk of failure	D	Lack of commitment should be the only barrier.
Not having a NP	B	No effort, no cost
	D	No control, and even less when the rest all have one. See map at Appendix B.

Developing the Plan for Highclere

8. At the heart of the NP process is the community Vision, from which a variety of planning-related policies are derived aimed at delivering and maintaining that Vision. Developing a Vision which the Neighbourhood Area population see as their own is the great challenge of Neighbourhood Planning, and requires a well-planned community engagement programme.
9. A key finding from our examination of other successful Plan programmes is the use of strategic assumptions to guide the community engagement and subsequent policy development. For Highclere these might concern: the make-up of the Plan area, growth options for the local economy, target sustainability and the scope of the NP policies. Using these to condition the shape and content of the community engagement and subsequent policy development, would require the assumptions to be evidence-based.

10. The table below shows options for the four areas mentioned above. The Advisory Group developed this range of options from our own experience, assisted by discussions with the Borough's NP specialists ; we believe it covers the credible spectrum.

Subject	Options
Plan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the whole parish central Highclere village only the village plus Penwood another combination of parish sub-areas
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use BDBC projections, with little growth in housing an evidence-based higher growth plan
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> current sustainability projections an evidence-based plan for higher levels of village sustainability
Policy Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> housing, transport and environment a smaller subset

11. The 2002 Village Design Statement and the 2008/9 Parish Plan consultation papers give a valuable insight into local views from relatively recent history. They can form a useful evidential basis for determining views on Highclere's future in the initial engagement, and how those views have changed (or not).

12. The analysis of the data gleaned from the initial engagement forms the basis for the development of the Vision, its supporting Objectives and the Policies whose implementation will deliver those Objectives and support the Vision. These three essentially form the Plan.

13. The success of the initial engagement depends on the quality of the communication strategy and its execution. The quality of the subsequent analysis and the skill with which the Objectives are written and the Policies drafted will determine how well the Plan is received by the community during the consultation period.

14. In England alone over 400 NPs have now been made. In B&D fifteen parishes and towns have completed or are developing a NP. The sheer volume of available, successful examples of engagements, analysis, written visions, objectives and policies is enormous. This is a huge advantage to Highclere, not only for their content but for how it impacts our resource needs.

Resourcing the Plan

15. NPs are rarely, if ever, developed solely by local residents without support from the local Council or specialist consultants. Highclere has many people with significant experience of analysis, writing and presentation required when developing a NP. However, many of these will be unable or unwilling to commit to such a demanding programme. Suggestions for resourcing can be found in Appendix C. It is, however, certain that some supplementary, external skills will be required.

16. Looking at consultant use in St Mary Bourne (SMB), and talking to another consultancy, it seems that there are key points at which their use is most valuable :

- defining/finalising the initial engagement strategy
- reviewing the structure of the derived Vision/Objective/Policy hierarchy
- supporting the communication of the Draft Plan to local consultation.

17. The support of BDBC has already been used by the AG, to keep them apprised of our work and for us to understand the NP process better. It seems their NP team is very keen to help Parishes and can be used in a variety of ad hoc and structured ways to expedite and assure Plan development. This can be particularly useful in the consultation on the Draft Plan. There are numerous statutory and some advisable non-statutory consultees and BDBC can advise on the best approaches to them.

Costs and Grants

18. There is no 'one size fits all' cost profile for NP development, and the basic grant to support NP teams is capped at £9000. Further, a key determinant of the specialist resource required is housing allocation, because site assessment often requires professional input. This can attract a further £8000 technical support grant. While we would not expect the PC to aim for a NP with housing allocation, a technical grant has been awarded recently for the development of a local "design code".

19. An example of consulting costs has been provided by Troy Planning+Design. Running a morning workshop with the NP steering group to define and clarify the strategy for the initial community engagement would probably cost less than £1000. On that basis, running an introductory community consultation meeting for the draft Plan could be in the £3-5000 range. These costs are all grant-fund eligible.

20. St Mary Bourne spent about £8000 on consultants during policy development (covered by grant funding) and about £5000 on a Strategic Environmental Assessment (BDBC grant).

Other sources of funding

21. The Parish is only required to fund the process of Plan development up to and including pre-submission consultation. Once the Plan is submitted, BDBC is responsible for the costs of formal consultation, examination and the referendum. Non-grant and non-BDBC sources could include a precept-raised fund. The Highclere Society has indicated a willingness to make a contribution and personal donations are also legitimate.

22. It should not be forgotten that if and when development does occur, the PC's income from the Community Infrastructure Levy is up to 15% of the Levy capped at £100 per dwelling. With a made NP, the PC gets 25% uncapped.

NEXT STEPS

23. Developing a Neighbourhood Plan is time-consuming, demanding of commitment by individuals, and damaged by poor organisation and communication. However, the overwhelming view of those who have been through it, is of a process creating great community cohesion and sense of purpose.

24. Should the PC decide that a Highclere Neighbourhood Plan would be of value to our community, then the next steps should be as follows :

- find a leader/chairman/project director
- find an administrator/secretary/information manager
- build the NP Steering Group (see Appendix C)
- apply for Neighbourhood Area designation
- decide on funding model and sources, apply for grants
- retain consultants

Appendix A Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Following a public meeting on Neighbourhood Planning, Highclere Parish Council resolved to set up a small working group to examine the feasibility and resources required to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan (NP).

Membership of the Advisory Group

The group will consist of the following personnel:

- Sally Izett
- John Stoker
- Colin Wall
- Mike York.

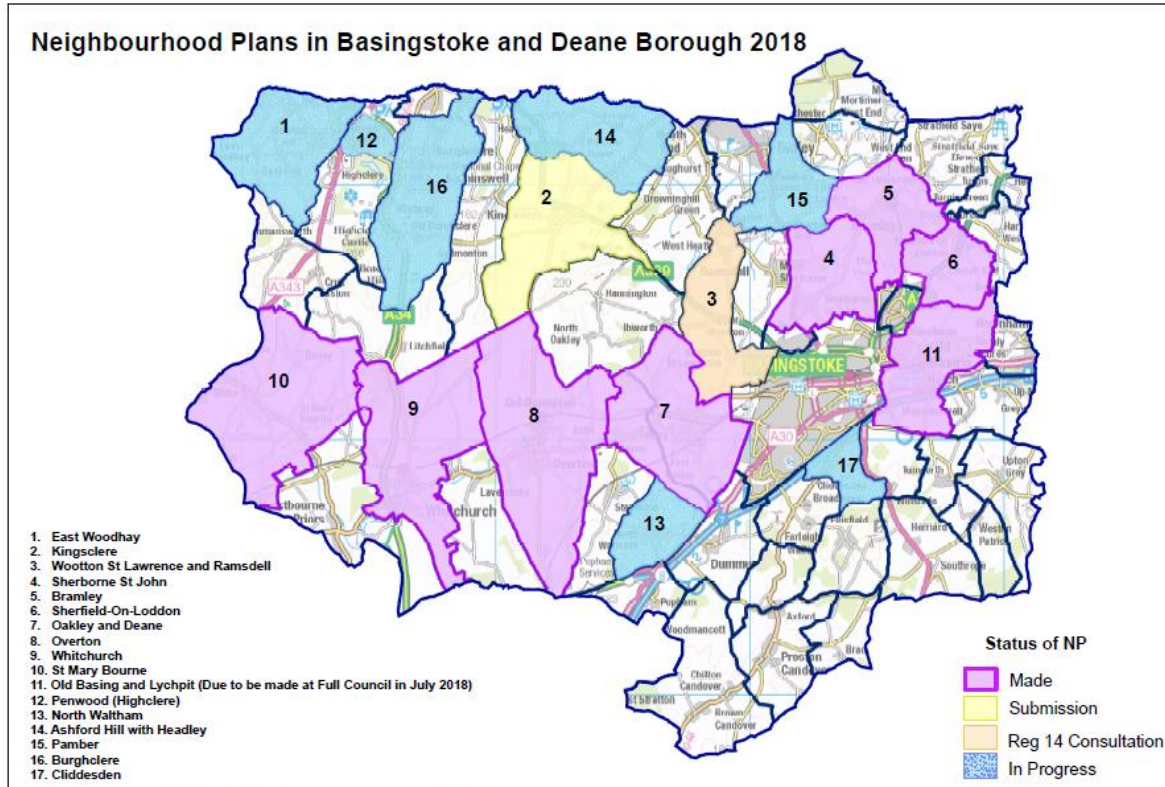
Additional members may be co-opted if required.

Purpose

- a) To examine the implications of preparing a NP for Highclere
- b) To examine the statutory requirements of a NP including its relationship to the Local Plan and the National Policy Planning Framework
- c) To contact the Borough of Basingstoke & Deane to find out the extent of their resource contribution to an NP in terms of funding, advice and personnel.
- d) To examine and evaluate further sources of funding the NP.
- e) To examine and identify resources in terms of personnel and skills that will be required to complete the NP, in particular, those which the parish can supply.
- f) To examine and review existing data from the Highclere and Penwood Parish Action Plan and the Highclere and Penwood Village Design Statement.
- g) To summarise the arguments for and against an NP for Highclere in a report to the Parish Council on or before the July 2018 Parish Council Meeting.

Appendix B Neighbourhood Plans in Basingstoke & Deane

The map below is taken from the BDBC website and shows the growing adoption of NPs across the Borough. Woolton Hill and Burghclere are already on their way to being better protected from unwanted development as Newbury dormitory villages.



Appendix C Programme organisation and management

The creation and making of a new Neighbourhood Plan is a complex and lengthy project. It is vital that the project quickly develops a clear project plan and timeline and agrees its success criteria and reporting lines with the Parish Council. Formal structures like those outlined below will make this more achievable. Resources will be key.

Organisational Structure

The Steering Committee will be responsible for the delivery of a Neighbourhood Plan for Highclere Parish, in conformance with National Guidelines, which benefits present and future parishioners whilst allowing for sustainable economic and social growth and development. It will be responsible for the overall project plan and timelines and will report to Highclere Parish Council on a regular basis.

Membership of the Steering Committee

The membership of the Steering Committee (NPSC) will consist of parish councillors and local residents. The size of the Committee should comprise around eight permanent members including one or two members from the Parish Council in order to assist the smooth progress of the Plan, one or two from the Highclere Society to leverage their recent Planning experience, and four more local residents with good connections, open minds and useful skills (see below).

There were some expressions of interest at the public meeting on Feb 8th, 2018 Additional SC members may be co-opted or brought in to a broader consultative panel as necessary to discuss or advise on particular issues.

Key resources

The challenge of NP development requires a mix of skills and experience which may be difficult to achieve. The following would all be relevant :

- familiarity with national and local Planning Policy and practice
- knowledge of the Highclere community
- experience of policy development and report writing
- experience of data analysis
- communication and presentation skills
- team-building and management skills.

Working Groups

The Steering Committee may form working groups to undertake specific tasks associated with the development of the Plan. A member of the Steering Committee will chair each of the working groups. The number and remit of the working groups will be reviewed as necessary by the Steering Committee to ensure timely progression and completion of the Plan.

Reporting and Communications

Minutes of all meetings of the Steering Committee and working groups will be kept and maintained for reference. The dates and timing of the meetings will be set by the relevant committee or group. Draft minutes will be circulated following each after clearance by the appropriate chair.

The Parish Council will receive a report on the progress of the Plan every 3 months, or more frequently, if the Council or circumstances require it.