

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council

Full Council Meeting 24/06/2021

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Agenda item 21/041 7: To RESOLVE that SMPC proceed with the development of a new Neighbourhood Development Plan for Stratfield Mortimer and will:

- a. set up 'The Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group', to comprise of both nominated parish councillors and members of the public in accordance with Government guidelines, to oversee and deliver the Plan.**
- b. ask F&GP to produce terms of reference for the Steering Group, for approval by Full Council, to include the sequential production of two editions of the plan 1) which concentrates on the review of policy SDB1 regarding the area of land for St John's School and the doctor's surgery 2) the longer term consideration of existing and other possible policies.**
- c. enter into a Service Level Agreement with West Berkshire Council for the purpose of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan.**
- d. provide a budget of £5,000 for the development of the NDP in the current financial year.**

BACKGROUND

Our current NDP was adopted in June 2017; the pre-submission version, which is not very different from the final version, was actually completed in October 2015. (For those not involved then, the long delay was largely caused by a difficult Examiner). In the ensuing time both national and WBC policies have changed; WBC is now developing its new Local Plan to 2037 and the government will soon be announcing significant changes to the planning system. As these changes happen our NDP loses authority and power as the newer policies override any of ours that are not in conformance. An NDP must be in conformance with national and local authority policies, so a new Stratfield Mortimer NDP is required to keep it strong, relevant and able to influence the future of the Parish as the residents would like.

Although we are not asked to allocate any land for housing in the new WBC Local Plan, there are many concepts we can cover in a new NDP as well as merely revising the existing text and policies. As an example, the planning system changes open up a whole new area of design codes which will be the way in which we can define what is and isn't acceptable in building design in our village. The new NDP will involve public consultation and new ideas may emerge. For example, the village may wish to allocate land for a rural exception site to provide affordable housing for Mortimer residents.

Two new editions

The current NDP contains policy SDB1, of which the first three points state:

- The Site must provide up to 110 dwellings, subject to the outcome of technical studies.
- The Site must include an area of at least 1.0 hectare for community facilities, to be used for the relocation of St John's Infants School, a new doctors' surgery and associated shared parking for staff and patients or visitors together with a drop off area for pupils.
- The Site shall be allocated for a period of 5 years from the formal adoption date of this NDP. If, at the end of this period, outline planning permission has not been obtained for the development required by policy SDB1 a review of the allocation shall be carried out via a review or partial review of the NDP. In addition, if within the same 5 year period outline planning permission for the development has been obtained, but no progress has been made to secure the relocation of St John's Infant School or the doctor's surgery, a review of that part of the allocation shall be undertaken through a review or a partial review of the NDP.

It is now clear from WBC that the review of the reserved land must result in a new NDP. The 5 year period ends June 2022. No outline planning permission has been obtained, nor applied for; neither is any such application being prepared. Therefore it is necessary for us to begin such a review and produce a new edition of the NDP. The understanding from WBC is that this can be a fairly quick process; it will require the stages of public consultation and an external examiner, but is likely not to require the referendum process. The intent is that this will be a one-policy change to the current document.

The work on renewing of the whole NDP to include updated policies, new policies on topics not previously covered, such items as design codes can start in parallel and will run on for significantly longer, resulting in a third edition of our NDP.

The designation of the Neighbourhood Area carries on from the existing plan. WBC now require that a Service Level Agreement is signed between WBC and the Parish Council. This specifies how WBC will provide assistance during the development of the plan. There is no cost for this agreement.

Cost

It is difficult to assess what the cost of producing a new NDP will be. As a guide, the first one cost about £12,000 (the total budget agreed in two stages was about £16,500 but not all was spent), made up of about £3000 grant and the rest paid for by the parish council. This was significantly less than estimates which were published at that time; I suggest that is largely because most of the work was done by volunteers.

Current guidance from WBC suggests the following for the inevitable activities:

- Engagement and consultation costs: Planning for Real type events: £1,500 to £5,000
- Publicity and production of plans £1,500 to £2,500
- Project management and 'footwork' £nil to £10,000

Expert studies may also be required depending on content but these may well be covered by the free technical support packages.

Available Funding

There is a basic grant of up to £10,000 available but grants for NDPs received from 2015 onwards are subtracted from this (we received ours Oct 2015) ; we should be able to apply for nearly £7000. If however, the new NDP contains design codes and/or allocates any site for housing, we may be able to apply for up to another £8000; inclusion of either of these may also make us eligible for specific free technical support packages.

Budget

The Steering Group will require an operating budget for public consultation, possible technical advice, possible administrative help etc. A starting budget of £5000 is suggested.