

HENLEY ON THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE TOWN
CONFERENCE MEETING
MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY 30 APRIL 2012 AT
7:00PM IN THE LARGE HALL
TOWN HALL, HENLEY.

Present: Councillor Mrs P Phillips (Mayor)
Councillor Mrs E Hodgkin
Councillor M Akehurst
Councillor D Clenshaw
Councillor Miss S Evans
Councillor S Gawrysiak
Councillor Miss K Gehrman
Councillor W Hamilton
Councillor Miss L Hillier
Councillor D Hinke
Councillor Ms L Meachin
Councillor D Nimmo-Smith
Councillor I Reissmann

In attendance: Chris Bowden, NAVIGUS Planning
Mr M Kennedy – Town Clerk
Ms J Brazil – Committee Administrator

Also Present: Approximately 120 members of the public

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors D Silvester and Mrs J Wood

1. **WELCOME BY THE MAYOR OF HENLEY ON THAMES, COUNCILLOR
MRS PAMELA PHILLIPS**

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P Phillips welcomed everyone and introduced Mr C Bowden of Navigus Planning and invited him to address the meeting.

2. **MR CHRIS BOWDEN, NAVIGUS PLANNING** (Papers attached)

Mr Bowden gave a PowerPoint presentation on Neighbourhood Planning covering the following points:

a. **WHY WE ARE HERE**

Mr Bowden gave a summary of why the changes in Planning Law are taking place. He stated that District Councils have a Core Strategy (CS) which specifies the number of new dwellings which will have to be built over the next 15 years. The CS sets the parameters within which all other planning - including a Neighbourhood Plan will take place. Within this strategy, the required number of new dwellings are allocated to local towns including Henley.

There are a number of potential sites that have been identified for the dwellings. The process of specific locations and development of new housing is a process that the residents of the town are able to debate and determine as this is the principle of localising decision making as embodied in the Localism Act.

- There are three possibilities for such local decision making:
 1. Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP)
 2. Preparing Community Plan
 3. Not preparing a plan of either sort.
- Of these three, the NP holds legal power as it is backed up by referendum that the District Council are required to administer and then refer to for future planning decisions.
- In the absence of a NP, the District Council makes the planning decisions are required.
- Henley Town Council (HTC) as a legal body can initiate the NP process, but the work may be carried out by a group of volunteers set up specifically for this purpose. It is desirable to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the process.
- When completed, the NP will be submitted to a local referendum.

b. **GOVERNMENT'S PLANNING CHANGES**

Big Society Not Big Government

Recent Localism legislation specifies that:
 Future plans are to be decided locally; and
 Plans must be in line with District Council (DC) policy and Core Strategy.

How is this to be done?

Via Neighbourhood Plan (NP). The focus is not just to be on housing, but on a wide range of issues covering the entire infrastructure of the town over the next 15 years. It is necessary to consider what these issues are:

South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) are being proactive in the implementation of its Core Strategy (CS), and have already assembled a large amount of information. The Town of Thame, as a pathfinder town, have already undertaken the process of producing a NP and are approaching the stage where they are almost ready to take their findings and decisions to SODC. It is for Town and parish councils developing a NP to work with the DC when preparing their plan, drawing on information that the District Council has already produced.

c. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS**

CAN DETERMINE

- Specific sites for development.
- Infrastructure needs, by suggesting new roads layouts and the need for new public facilities such as schools, doctors' surgeries etc.
- Design principles such as the look or style of buildings to fit into the prevailing local style.

CANNOT DETERMINE

- Plan for less growth than is set out already in the existing CS.
- Guarantee development in certain locations.
- Take over from SODC the decision making process on applications

Sites on which to build new dwellings in Henley-on-Thames can be considered through a NP process.

It is necessary to allocate around 400, with a cap of 450 new dwellings in Henley-on-Thames over a 15 year period. SODC has already identified six sites on which to locate up to 525 dwellings. A NP could call for identification of other sites, however, the NP is not a "popularity contest" for site identification.

d. SITE CONSIDERATIONS

There are four key criteria to be taken into consideration:

1. **Sustainability:** which sites are the most sustainable, how will they meet sustainability criteria?
2. **Environmental:** which sites are the most environmentally supportable? The effects on an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
3. **Social:** what are the infrastructure considerations, e.g., schools, increase in traffic, access?
4. **Economic:** will a site meet such economic considerations as cost as well as effects on the local economy regarding employment and contribution to local businesses?

Much evidence has already been produced by SODC and can be drawn upon in preparing a NP

It is necessary to agree the process by which a NP will be developed. Technological inputs (e.g., planning and infrastructure expertise) can be combined with local knowledge

e. OTHER ISSUES

Other possible issues for NP for Henley on Thames.

Transport and other infrastructure needs.
Air Quality.
Local employment.
Protecting the High Street.
Needs of youth & older people.

f. NEXT STEPS

Does Henley want to engage in a NP process. If so it will need to:

- Agree the process.
- Agree other issues that the NP should cover.

Henley Town Council will, if that is the decision made, to initiate the plan. But it is YOUR PLAN, THE PEOPLES PLAN.

Suggested time to produce such a NP is 12 months. However, this is only a guide as there will be variation in the time taken to develop a NP (the lack of a track record so far makes any estimate open to revision). It is important to keep in mind that the longer the process takes, the more difficult it is to sustain momentum and motivation.

3. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

Blandy Road resident - Are Henley Town Council or South Oxfordshire District Council prepared to pay, anything up to £100,000.00 if a Thame type NP is followed?

SODC is only responsible for funding certain aspects of the process, referendum and examination. HTC, whilst not presently having set a budget for development of

such a plan, could draw down on their reserves to cover the costs of producing the Neighbourhood Plan. SODC will only supply a supportive role in the process.

Where do contiguous parishes, such as Shiplake fit into this process?

Other Parishes can not be allocated sites without consultation. The CS specifies that there must be 400 new dwellings in or near to Henley and neighbouring parishes are to be considered and consulted in the decision making process as to where the sites and houses are to be. Crossing county boundaries (e.g., into Berks or Bucks) whilst possible is not recommended and could be problematic; each county would need to be in agreement with their own CS and the NP would need to include all interested parties. This could be an administrative nightmare and highly unlikely to succeed.

Mr J Horner – *When did the call for the Site allocation process actually take place?*

In 2006 Landowners were first invited to submit a proposal to SODC for consideration. In 2007 the site information was published and in 2010 HTC agreed the sites allocated with a recommendation for the total housing allocation to be around 400. It is a requirement that Site owners must be willing to sell and develop the site and be able to demonstrate that the site has the potential to be developed and fits into the requirements of the CS.

Mr D Whitehead – St Marks Road *It is understood that an AONB has protection. What effect does AONB status have over a development site?*

An AONB can be included in the process for site allocations. The status is taken into account but does not mean it is an absolute that the area is protected from development.

Rotherfield Road Resident - *What is the duration of a NP and what will happen after 15 years?*

The NP is set for 15 years but can be reviewed at any point within the 15 year time frame. At the end of the 15 years another plan will be required to be drawn up again the process that has produced this plan will need to be actioned and SODC will be required to again assist in the process.

Mr J McCall – Rotherfield Road - *What is the process needed to produce a plan?*

- a. Identify the issues.
- b. Set up a working group who will identify and select the options to be considered.
- c. Set up sub groups who will focus on specific issues.
- d. HTC is the body through which a NP is ultimately passed forward because HTC is the legal body for the process to proceed. However HTC cannot exercise a veto over the NP proposals as these are the requirements and subject to the Town Referendum.

Ms M Bend – Greys Road - *How are the number of affordable houses decided?*

SODC decide the balance between designated 'affordable' and more prestigious 'executive style' dwellings from the 400. Developers also have input in the discussions and subject to the negotiations that take place with all the designated

parties. Presently 40% of the 400 dwellings set for Henley on Thames are designated to be 'affordable housing'.

St Andrews Road Resident - Can you please explain the present status of Brown Field Sites (BFS)?

New National Policy Framework presses for the development of BFS, only if you can produce them. At present none have been presented for Henley and so SODC have looked to Green Field Sites (GFS) instead. It may be that Henley does not any BFS. That will be a question the NP can answer.

Mr A Easton – Fairmile - Presently the 6 sites allocated include the assessment of building on Highlands Farm and the least preferred of Drawback Hill. How can we change these decisions?

The CS does not look at specific sites only the required number set for 400 – 450. SODC looked at the sites and take into account all issues surrounding the requirements needed for the developments.

Mrs R Gibson – Vicarage Road - Of the 6 site allocations 3 are not in the current Parish of Henley on Thames. Can you clarify this in the NP policy?

CS is for 400 – 450 dwellings for Henley on Thames. This would include building in or on the edge of the boundary. So Parish boundaries are acceptable. The CS only looks at houses not Parish boundaries.

Mr R Atkin – Elizabeth Road - Traffic Pollution is a real issue in the town. Can the NP deal with this and the possibility of a Ring Road around Henley on Thames?

Important issues surrounding the infrastructure can all be discussed and considered in the NP.

Mr C Baker – Lauds Close - Would a proposal to, for example, move Henley College to make the sites available for housing meet the envisaged timetable?

Phasing and sequencing are important and any such proposal would need to be mapped onto a time plan. Such phasing is important regarding the infrastructure provision in advance of housing development.

Mr N Richardson – Vicarage Road - There appears to be a danger of 2-dimensional thinking

There is a need to think of a NP in a '3-dimensional' way so as to identify a common way forward and to engage all stakeholders who may be looking for solutions to their own problems, which involvement the development of a NP could help to solve.

Ms K Dunton, Headteacher Gillotts School - It is important, however, to avoid manufacturing solutions for which there is no funding. Developers build houses with private funding whereas public institutions, such as the College and Gillotts, have to find funding from elsewhere. So, however attractive some options might be, they may simply not be viable given such constraints.

Mr D Ducker – Highlands Lane - Is there an option for not adopting a NP?

A NP is one option as is a Community Plan (CP). However it does not carry the legal weight of a NP as there is no Referendum at the end of the process and SODC are not required to adopt the recommendations of a CP as they are with a NP.

Not preparing a NP simply means that decisions are then entirely in the hands of SODC. Furthermore, the NP is not to be used as a campaigning device. The NP process itself should ensure that all voices are heard and stakeholders are enabled to contribute to the plan.

However, it won't be possible to achieve total agreement on everything. As the definitive NP will be subject to a referendum, it will need to be devised in such a way as to have a good chance of being approved. Also SODC will offer help and advice from the outset.

Mr C Williams – Blandy Road - It would seem the issue of CS and Parishes still needs to be resolved. Please can you clarify?

Whilst those present cannot speak for SODC regarding CS it can be clarified that the 400 houses discussed are considered for the sites proposed. The one thing that the NP cannot alter is the total number of dwellings required and 400 – 450 is laid out in the findings of the CS for Henley on Thames.

Mr C George – Chairman Harpsden Parish Council - With the CS in place it is imperative we have a NP in place to work out the infrastructure first . Every effort should be made and to develop in the right place before any houses are built.

This is the important way to plan. Infrastructure is an integral part of the CS and is also important to the developers who are involved in the process. With a NP you are encouraged to be involved at every level of this process.

Mr B Mason – Middle Assendon - How is it proposed that everyone is to agree?

It must be understood that not everyone can agree on everything and this is the process of the NP. If people sign up to the NP process then they must accept the outcome of the discussion. It will be a majority opinion that will prevail.

Councillor Ms L Meachin – Gainsborough Road - What are the alternatives to a NP versus that of a CP?

NP is not the only choice. A CP is also an option that Henley can take. CP however covers different issues and the process does not have any legal standing and will not result in a referendum as a NP does. It is possible for SODC to disregard a CP whereas the referendum at the end of the NP process will legally bind SODC to adopt its recommendations.

Ms D Wells – Planning Consultant – Advisor to Highlands Farm development - Has been working on all the documentation since 2006 and some of the work needed for a NP has already taken place. The 12 month time frame would appear not to be long enough to deal with all the complex details needed for a full NP?

A lot of the details can be dealt with in a 12 month time frame based on the experience of Mr Bowden. However, the full structure of a NP, Site allocation, and a

mini Local Plan would take longer. District Plans will take longer to produce and issues surrounding development may take longer than the stated 12 months, depending how the Town wishes to progress with their NP.

Mr C Baker – Lauds Close - Henley will need a compromise to adopt a NP. Can you explain what will happen with a change of Central Government?

Changes in Planning laws are always changing and under review. The present changes have taken a number of years to progress and are expansions on from the previous government details set up with the original CS. If neighbourhoods get involved it will be a positive in the right direction. However this cannot be fully answered as it is not possible to know how future governments will develop this process further in the years to come.

4. SUMMING UP BY THE MAYOR OF HENLEY ON THAMES

The Mayor asked for a show of hands from those residents present to highlight the wish to proceed further with a Neighbourhood Plan.

The majority of those present were in favour of pursuing the idea further and interested parties were asked to supply their contact details for further meetings.

The Mayor thanked all those present for their attendance and for Mr Bowden for his presentation which helped all present with the basics of the process of a Neighbourhood Plan.

Meeting closed at 9:15pm

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Mayor