

Neighbourhood Planning

Note of Meeting at Fairlight Village Hall 16th September 2014

Present: Councillors Andrew Mier, Carole Gallagher, Jennifer Annetts, Stephen Leadbetter, Revd Val Gibbs, Parish Clerk John Edmunds and 40 residents/interested parties.
Apologies for absence: Cllr Charles Mendelson (holiday), Keith Jellicoe

An attendance register was completed for future correspondence.

The main purpose of the meeting was to explain the Neighbourhood Planning process to residents and to collect feedback and gauge the general feeling towards pursuing the possibility of a Neighbourhood Plan for the Village.

Cllr Mier opened the meeting by describing the purpose of Neighbourhood Planning (NP) and how it is supported by the Government. He explained how it had been previously considered by the Parish Council (PC) some 2 years ago but had been considered not the right time as it was a new concept. Times had changed and the PC now considered it right to seek the residents approval to look further into it and it is felt by the PC that there are benefits to be had. Sedlescombe PC is currently preparing their own plan and a meeting has taken place with their Chairman to find out more about it. A Consultant from Action in rural Sussex (AirS) had also visited to discuss the usefulness of an NP for the Village.

This meeting is to judge the amount of local support and interest and also to attract others to help out on things like a Steering Committee.

Councillor Leadbetter then set out the background. Neighbourhood Plans can be developed using powers under the Localism Act 2011. This allows communities to set and have an influence over planning criteria for their area. These must be in general conformity with the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) and the Local Planning Authorities Local Plan. It will enable the choice of where new homes, shops, offices and other development should be and to a degree, what properties can look like. The PC is using a Government produced leaflet "How to shape where you live. A guide to Neighbourhood Planning" as the general guideline.

The Local Planning Authority (LPA), in our case Rother, is responsible for advertising the NP and sending it for examination. If found sound it goes for referendum. The LPA undertake these tasks for which government pay them £30,000. Once agreed it is the legally enforceable plan for the area during the 15 years for which it runs.

There are many steps involved before the Neighbourhood Plan can be officially put in place, not least the fact that a referendum needs to be undertaken with all the Electorate in the Village and a majority of 50% + 1 has to agree to the plan before it can be adopted.

Where there is no Local Plan in place, as in Rother, and no identifiable supply of housing land to meet 5 years need there is a presumption in favour of development. This means that a developer applying to develop land is likely to be granted consent as long as the application meets certain basic criteria for sustainability. Currently, the Local Plan for Fairlight has 44 new properties (2011 figures) of which 5 have been built, approved plans for 2 others, 17 earmarked for the Market Garden (MG) site and 20 for the East Field (EF) site.

A Steering group made up from volunteers (not just Cllrs) will be required with a core of 3 people and as much time as each can give. Sub Committees to look at such things as transport links, coastal issues etc are likely. Help from groups already in place such as The Preservation Trust, Residents Assoc., Activate, East Field Action Group, Mopp will be welcomed as they represent a good cross section of the residents.

A consultant will also be appointed to oversee the whole process and keep it on track.

Cllr Mier then gave a run down of the Advantages and Disadvantages.

Advantages

Control over what is built and where. The designs of properties (such as clay tiled roofs), the height of a property, hedges rather than fences, lay out, social mix, surgeries, schools, Village Hall, open spaces etc.

There are financial advantages. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is paid by developers for each property built for sale. The Local Community get 25% where there is a NP in place but only up to 15% but probably a lot less otherwise. As a generality, a property in Fairlight could raise £24k which would generate £6k for spending on a project in Fairlight. The plan maps out the next 15 years of development once adopted.

Disadvantages

A community considering a Neighbourhood Plan should be clear about what it is looking to achieve and keep it as simple as possible. A Neighbourhood Plan cannot be used to block development but can direct where it should be. If proposed sites are not popular with residents, alternatives must be identified, normally at least 6 – 12 properties. Landowners can be approached to see if they are prepared to release land but cannot be forced. It is difficult in Fairlight due to SSSI land, AONB, etc. For example, an area such as EF is a development site which the PC has already stated it is against.

A NP costs money. It will cost about £15,000 but grant aid of £7,000 has previously been available and likely will be in the future although that is not certain at this stage. The Parish Council could find the rest from existing funds. The process takes about 18 months including three 6 week consultation periods.

If a decision is taken to go ahead with an NP and announced, will developers try to get in ahead of the game? That is a risk but the PC believes it is one worth taking. There is never a good time but if delayed could be a mistake. There is already a planning application in for the MG site but Rother have not yet accepted it.

Cllr Leadbetter made a final comment about Villagers fearing that to adopt the NP will allow Cllrs to allow something that Villagers would not want. He repeated the process involved, stressing that a referendum will decide the outcome of a plan that will have been put together by residents themselves.

Cllr Revd Gibbs who Chaired the meeting, thanked both Cllr Mier and Leadbetter for their contribution/explanations and then read out an email from Keith Jellicoe (EFFAG) which is attached as an appendix before opening up the discussion to the floor.

Questions and Answers

(1) How far are Sedlescombe through the process?

It is believed that they have done their draft plan and consulting with residents and may be as far as going to the Inspector for approval. Full details of progress are on Sedlescombe Parish's website. Since the meeting it has been clarified that Rother are currently conducting a seven week consultation on the plan prior to it going to inspection.

(2) Have you spoken to Rye Town Council?

Not as yet because as they are much bigger with different issues it was not felt necessary. However, we will be contacting them once we have generated sufficient questions from residents. To help generate discussion, there will be a discussion thread set up on the Fairlight website.

(3) What is the timescale for the plan?

Currently they are taking about 18 months to 2 years to complete. The grant monies for this round of spend are already spent and assuming further grants are made available, the money can be applied for next April.

Cllr Leadbetter then commented on the email from Keith Jellicoe and explained the history behind East Field and SHLAA development.

(4) If an area larger than the current development boundary was considered would that help East Field?

Yes it is possible to consider the whole parish increase but if there were proposals affecting a neighbouring Parish then they would need to be consulted as well before development could be agreed. If a development is outside of the boundary for NP then it would be subject to normal planning rules.

(5) Geoff Smith advised at this point that he had spoken to Norman Kwan (Rother Planner) today. He now understood that the original 44 new properties agreed in 2011 had now increased to 58. He also wanted to know what the stance would be with land designated AONB. Geoff has since clarified that this was based on a misunderstanding and the number remains at 44.

A decision for example with East Field would have to be taken once the NP was in place but given the drainage issues on the site (and other issues) the current stance is likely to remain. This however puts pressure on trying to find other sites to develop. From the outside of Fairlight EF looks a prime development site but once a closer look is taken, it clearly has many development issues. Whilst EF is not an easy battle to win, the further down the NP route it goes before an Application is made, the more weight and influence the NP has.

(6) The Chairman of Hastings Urban Design Plan was in attendance as he was looking for ideas as he is hopeful that Hastings might consider a similar plan. He suggested entering into a discussion with Rother for a separate plan for EF and therefore save the need to go for a NP if there were no other sites to look at.

It was explained what other sites had been discussed and that EF had been part of the current focus. The consultant from AirS had also suggested looking for other sites by advertising to see what might appear. The issue with EF is that it has to be developer led and at the present, it is identified as Amber (5-10 years) development, but there is no developer.

(7) Has any discussion taken place with other coastal Parishes who have a NP?

Not as yet although this would be something for the Steering Committee to look at.

(8) What would be the duties and responsibilities for the Steering group etc?

The Steering group would work with the appointed Consultant and see the NP through the various stages to adoption. Any sub committees would be appointed by them and they would report directly to the Steering Committee. The amount of time expected from each volunteer would be no more than they could give. There would however be at least 3 permanent members of the Steering Committee who would undoubtedly be busy.

(9) Was all the PC in favour of a NP?

Yes at a recent PC meeting all voted in favour of consulting the residents and look further into the proposal.

(10) How much influence on the infrastructure and surface water drainage issues could there be?

Specific problems can be identified in the NP and clear guidance can be given eg the Market Garden site where drainage is an issue.

Resident Comment:

Hastings and the surrounding areas are getting richer and transport links will be improving. It is a development plan for the next 15 years not now. Preservation orders can work well with a NP especially for things like a Village Green.

A vote was taken and the majority present voted in favour of the NP. There was 1 vote against.

Meeting closed 8.15 pm

Appendix

Stephen, I am writing for East Field Fairlight Action Group (EFFAG) to apologise for my absence at the meeting on the 16th September to discuss the possibilities of a Neighbourhood Plan for Fairlight as we are away. Fortunately others of our Group will be attending including Kevin Cornwell and Geoffrey Smith. They and no doubt others will be involved in the questions and answers that need to be

raised and answered on all aspects of such a Plan but especially on Planning and what the affects of setting up or not of a Neighbourhood Plan for Fairlight could have on East Field.

Your and my view for EFFAG when the Parish Council voted and all Councillors agreed that East Field should not be developed, a position your Council have not changed since then some two years ago, was as follows. It was better not to press for a Neighbourhood Plan when the Planning Authority *had not definitely* decided to include a site such as East Field in their Core Strategy Local Plan for house builds to 2028, *that position as now, ie still undecided*. The reason as once such Neighbourhood Plan was mooted for by the Parish, it indicated that *development is inevitable so lets have the limited safeguards of the plan and Rother seeing that would likely feel no problems in including the site in their Local Plan*.

Yes although Rother full Council will likely approve on 29th Sept their Plans for the Core Strategy to build 5800 houses to 2028, Rother have only desk studied possible sites and are still to decide the actual sites including perhaps East Field that they will eventually include in their Local Plan. No doubt discussions on this will be very interesting and I hope there is a useful outcome from your meeting.

Yours Sincerely Keith Jellicoe for East Field Fairlight Action Group (EFFAG)