WESTBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

DRAFT VISION NOTE OCTOBER 2019

Introduction

The Parish Council decided to investigate the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish at the end of 2018. On 1 August 2019 AVDC confirmed the designation of the Neighbourhood Plan Area. O'Neill Homer has been commissioned to support the Parish Council during the preparation of the Plan. An initial discussion was held on 14 October 2019 with some members of the Parish Council to discuss planning matters in the Parish and to establish the potential scope of the Plan.

Key points raised

The Neighbourhood Plan process

The session started with an overview of the process for making the plan and a summary of the process and roles has been set out below.
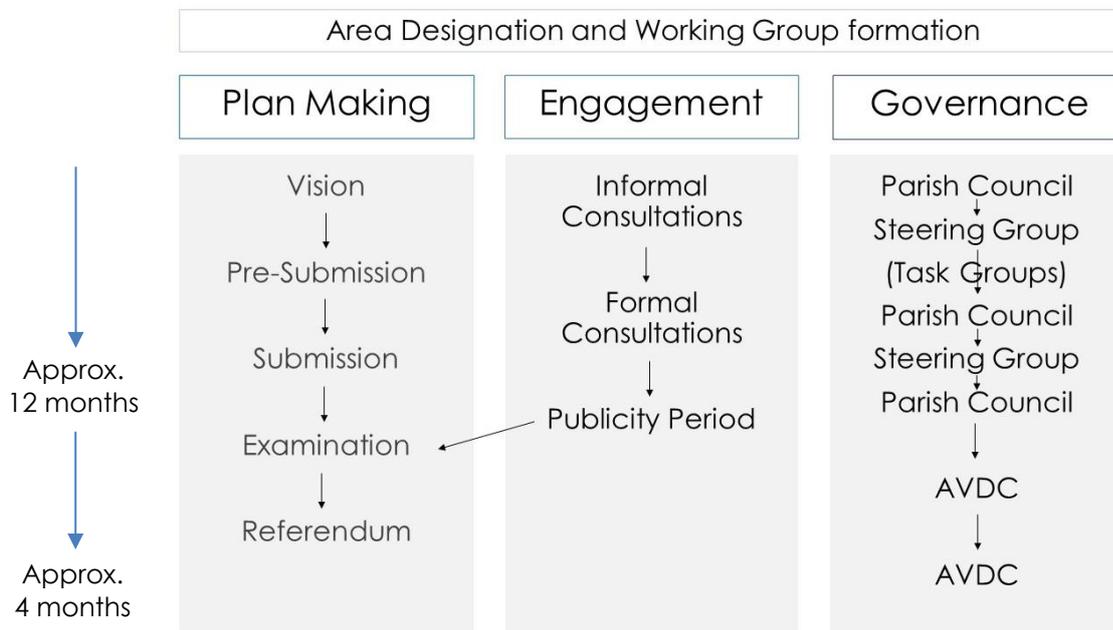
Key points raised during the discussion:

- Managing expectations of what a Neighbourhood Plan can and can't do is important, particularly given that a higher turnout at referendum is likely (as the voting population is relatively small)

- A Neighbourhood Plan is tested against a number of basic conditions. In essence, the conditions are:

  o Is the Plan consistent with the national planning policy?
  o Is the Plan consistent with local planning policy?
  o Does the plan promote the principles of sustainable development?
  o as the process of making the plan met the requirements of European law?

The Planning Policy Context

The Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) of 2019. Strategic policy is set out in the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) which is expected to be adopted in 2020 (i.e. prior to the Neighbourhood Plan examination) with a consultation on minor modifications expected in the very near future.

Key points raised during the discussion:

- The revised NPPF places greater emphasis on the role of neighbourhood planning and now contains additional protection against speculative development for communities who have prepared a Neighbourhood Plan and made allocations (§14)
- The NPPF has also introduced additional housing delivery tests for Local Planning Authorities and penalties when these and housing supply tests are not being met (§73 - §76)
- AVDC's current housing supply is above 5 years, but this is regularly challenged by speculative housing applications aiming to prove that this is no longer the case
- Policy D3 in the latest version of VALP confirms that small villages, such as Westbury, do not have an indicative housing target
- Neighbourhood Plan policies once made will carry the same weight as VALP policies
- The new Bucks Council (unitary authority replacing AVDC and others) has to have a new Local Plan in place by 2024 so will need to start work on it before the end of 2020 – it seems inevitable in such a large and diverse county that it will need to encourage neighbourhood planning to handle non-strategic policy so it can stick to a smaller number of strategic policies (i.e. unlike VALP which includes small site allocations)
- There are other strategic initiatives that may influence how that new plan takes shape in this part of the county, e.g. the Oxford Cambridge Corridor and expressway

Westbury Village

Key points raised during the discussion:

- The national infrastructure project HS2 is likely to have an effect on the parish
- Part of the HS2 project proposes 'Hedgerow habitat creation' on field boundaries at land to the west of Westbury as part of its SANG mitigation

- The village has grown over the last 10 – 20 years, which has doubled its population
- This growth has been seen as generally positive in terms of how it has revitalised the village by balancing its demographics to a certain extent, the last phase of which was about 4 years ago
- Whilst there is a mix of housing types in the village, future development should reflect the need to continue this healthy mix to support first time buyers and older residents who may wish to downsize
- The A422 physically separates the village into two
- Historically, the Parish Council has been working in partnership with other relevant bodies to deal with crossing the A422 which remains a major issue
- The village is very fortunate in sustaining a range of community facilities, including Beachborough Prep School
- The use of these facilities provides a challenge in managing parking, congestion and speeding traffic within the village
- New facilities that the Parish Council have discussed in the past may include additional burial space and new allotments for example

Defining a vision and objectives

There is still some thinking to do in terms of what a successful Westbury will look like in 2050. It will be helpful to consider the 'art of the possible' in how the parish might change in the coming years if different visions and key objectives (or success measures) are pursued. These need to be explored within the opportunities and constraints of the village.

Constraints

o Technical constraints, such as the Conservation Area, listed buildings, landscape sensitivity, priority habitats, the physical layout and topography of the village etc. and the availability of developable land
o Political constraints, such as the need to secure a majority support from the local community at the plan referendum

Opportunities

o These are those presented by the availability and ownership of land that may have some development potential with the assumption that high quality schemes can be ensured through allocation policies

AVDC's last HELAA (of January 2017) indicated what land had been made available for AVDC to access, but much of that land has now been delivered as housing development and it is known that there may be other land that could become available later in the plan period. The ownership of land by the Parish Council may also enable opportunities to be delivered in a way that the planning system alone cannot.

To inform the choice of vision and key objectives, it is often helpful to identify future scenarios that show what might be possible for the community to achieve through

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its plan. We have identified three potential scenarios for different scales of growth and describe what they may involve below. None are right or wrong, but each shows a different future if certain choices are made about allocation strategy.

Scenario 1 – Incremental growth

This scenario assumes that the village grows as it has done in the past, with a small number of small sites (i.e. 6-9 homes) dotted around the village. It is primarily a defensive strategy to anticipate and plan for more homes that AVDC needs from its 'small villages' in the 2026 – 2040 period. With only small sites being allocated, there can be no affordable homes delivered (as per national policy) unless a landowner is willing to offer such a scheme.

If securing affordable housing (and especially genuine affordable) is going to be part of the vision, then an alternative approach will be needed in this scenario. There may therefore be opportunities presented by under-utilised Parish Council land to deliver a small scheme to be financed and managed by a Community Land Trust (CLT) or similarly constituted, Locally Approved Affordable Housing Provider.

This scenario would not be able to deliver new community facilities or traffic management improvements, but it could identify locations for development that will have the least impact on the existing traffic issues.

Scenario 2 – Affordable Homes

Here, the goal is for the village to secure affordable housing, including a CLT-type scheme, if it is not possible or desirable to use Parish Council owned land. The scenario therefore seeks to allocate more housing on a larger area of land in order to negotiate the release of land for the delivery of a CLT affordable housing scheme, as well as their own affordable housing.

The scenario may also be able to deliver some traffic management improvements, subject to viability, but as with Scenario 1 it could identify locations for development that will have the least impact on the existing traffic issues.

Scenario 3 – New Community Facilities

The scenario seeks to secure suitable land to provide the community with additional community facilities deemed needed in the Parish e.g. additional burial land and new allotments. This scenario would therefore need to allocate more housing on a larger area of land in order to negotiate the release of land for the delivery of new community facilities.

Again, the scenario would rely on opportunities presented by under-utilised Parish Council land to deliver a CLT scheme if delivering 'genuine affordable housing' is going to form part of the vision. It may be able to deliver some traffic management improvements, subject to viability, but as with other scenarios it could identify locations for development that will have the least impact on the existing traffic issues.

Taking Things Forward

We have focused on describing some of the likely distinctive elements of each scenario, but we have deliberately stopped short of identifying their pros and cons. This is for the steering group, and the wider community and other stakeholders, to consider. There are clearly different technical, political and resource issues to planning for each of the scenarios and each one will come about over a different time horizon.

It is possible there may be other scenarios that the community or others identify and, provided they are plausible, logical and distinct from each other, they may also be explored as the vision and objectives begin to emerge. For each scenario to work however, the opportunities available need to be established through a focussed 'Call for Sites' to all landowners to invite expressions of interest in making land available as per the terms required by the Team (see recommended tasks below). This will update the 2017 HELAA and may bring new sites into consideration.

As further thinking takes place a clear vision will emerge and so the key objectives will be refined to provide a clear framework for the policies. It is also possible that a policy intended to serve one purpose may serve others, e.g. new housing to invest in improving traffic management.

Although it is too soon to specify precisely what these may be, as a result of the scoping discussion there is potential for the Plan to include some or all of the following policies types:

i.   Settlement Boundary – to define a village boundary based on the existing settlement edge (but accommodating any proposed site allocations in the plan) to define where and how proposals in the village and in the countryside will be judged (see indicative boundary map below).
ii. Site specific – either allocating or reserving land for housing and other types of land use (burial ground?) and development and then setting out the key development principles to guide future planning applications
iii. Policies to protect important assets – identifying land and buildings that serve a relatively important purpose for protection from unnecessary loss (e.g. key views, heritage, community facilities)
iv. Policies to shape design quality – identifying key characteristics of distinct areas (e.g. Conservation Area and its setting) and prominent sites to encourage specific design proposals
v.   Policies to improve green infrastructure – requiring relevant development to deliver improvements to open spaces and designated Local Green Spaces for protection

Recommended tasks

We advise that once the Steering Group has been set up, it first needs to decide its and the community's appetite for the scale of change they wish to plan for. We suggest that it sets up two teams – (in addition to the Communications team, see below) a **Development & Traffic** Team and a **Design & Environment** Team – to

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explore and test each of the scenarios and to identify the pros and cons from their particular perspective. It was also established at the vision session if the range of tasks fist well within the responsibilities of a single Steering Group Team, given the size of Westbury, then this should work as well.

The Team(s) should plan to find the relevant evidence/data to help them describe each scenario and its implications, good and bad, and then to draw conclusions to frame the first 'conversation' with the local community and other stakeholders (e.g. the local authorities, land/property owners). We have advised below on what evidence to gather and what to look for. The aim of the conversation is to inform the group on the extent to which there is a consensus on which future vision to plan for.

From that point, the teams should be able to focus their policy ideas to suit the desired vision. This will include looking in detail at the chosen scenario. We can provide other technical support and help with land/property owner liaison as necessary to test the validity and viability of each idea, and then we can draft the policies when ready.

We recommend that there is a second 'conversation' on the essence of the preferred vision, objectives and policy ideas before the group commits to its formal draft plan (the 'Pre-Submission' Plan). That will enable the group to fine tune and revisit policy ideas to ensure the draft plan represents the views of the majority of the community and has a base of technical credibility.

The third 'conversation' will be framed around the formal consultation structure of the Pre-Submission Plan (also known as the Regulation 14 stage). There is a final opportunity for comments to be made before the independent examination of the Plan begins after the final documents have been submitted to Bucks Council later in 2020 (but that is arranged by them and so is not the same kind of 'conversation' as the others).

We strongly recommend the Group sets up a small **Communications Team** – or highlights this as a main responsibility if deciding to form one Steering Group Team – to plan and manage the community engagement work ('the conversations') throughout the project. The Team should decide what form each 'conversation' should take: public events, leaflets, social media content, surveys/questionnaires, exhibitions etc. Each will be designed to suit the timing and purpose of each 'conversation'. Although the third 'conversation' is framed by the statutory regulations, there is nothing to stop the team from planning actions to publicise and to inform those formal consultations.

Throughout this process, a record of consultation and updates needs to be kept and collated in the final Consultation Statement that will be submitted with the Submission Plan, along with the SEA (see below), and the Basic Conditions Statement (prepared by O'Neill Homer). O'Neill Homer can provide worked examples of a Consultation Statement.

If using Task Teams then ideally, the chairs of each Team should be on the Steering Group and should report progress to each meeting, to enable the Group to spot

any cross-overs or tensions between the teams' work (and to prevent the teams searching for the same data for example). The Teams may be drawn from the Steering Group membership and from others in the local community with an interest or expertise in the subject.

Evidence Gathering

At this stage, the Team(s) should look at published evidence in the VALP evidence base most notably, but also at free sources like Magic Map (www.magic.defra.gov.uk) and the Bucks Historic Environment Record (www.heritagegateway.org.uk, but also contact the HER Officer to obtain a report for the Parish – this is free if used for this purpose).

Development & Traffic

- Review existing (or obtain new) traffic data to understand key flows and to identify locations for development that will have the least impact and/or will enable local traffic management improvements, including A422 crossing and the peak hour effects of the Prep School
- It might also be useful for the team to prepare a report of the existing housing stock of the village by type (detached etc and no. of bedrooms), tenure (market, rented, social) and sales/rental values (relative to neighbouring parishes and the AVDC area – available via www.rightmove.co.uk for example and in the Bucks Housing & Economic Development Needs Assessment of 2017 (at www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/housing-and-economic-development-needsassessment-hedna%E2%80%8B for example). In a small village, this ought to be reasonably easy data to collect and an interesting project to complete.
- As indicated earlier, it will be necessary to understand the extent of opportunities in terms of land availability. The team should therefore also agree any exclusionary criteria for site selection and then issue a 'Call for Sites' to all qualifying landowners to invite expressions of interest in making land available as per the terms required by the Team. Preference criteria (e.g. traffic) are used once the Call has been responded to. The exclusionary criteria are driven by national planning principles and normally comprise:

  o Does the site adjoin the settlement boundary (using a plan showing the existing boundary)?
  o Is the site in Flood Zone 2 or 3?
  o Does the site lie within a designated nature conservation site e.g. SSSI?

- Responses to the Call for Sites will inform the Team how to respond to the chosen future vision.
- Discuss issues with Beachborough Prep School, to understand their future plans and needs.
- Define the future burial ground and allotment land needs with the Parish Council
- Obtain headline costs for A422 crossing

<u>Design & Environment</u>

- Review the 2008 Conservation Area Study (https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/page_downloads/CA-Westbury.pdf) and undertake its own appraisal of the character of the Area and of those parts of the village outside the Area.
- Review all existing publicly available environmental data (e.g. Magic Map, Bucks/MK Historic Environment Record, local ecological surveys) and map all existing assets/designations. Once mapped, identify opportunities to improve environment/footpaths etc. and check for candidates for Local Green Space designation (against tests set out in §100 of the NPPF).

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

If the Plan does not allocate or reserve development sites, then it is very unlikely that AVDC will require an SEA, which is a parallel process designed to show that the Plan will have no significant environmental effects. If it does allocate one or more sites, then this is likely to require an SEA, the support for which can be funded at no cost through Locality Technical Support (with some oversight support from O'Neill Homer needed to advise this process as per item 3.01 on the attached project plan). Once the overall scope of the plan is agreed, then the Group should request an SEA Screening Opinion from AVDC.

Next steps

Although this timetable is in the gift of the Steering Group, some of the follow up tasks and consultation work may also take longer than envisaged to get right and using Locality's technical support package for the preparation of the SEA may take longer than anticipated due to their pressures. However, the project plan shows the sequence of activities and their dependencies, so it can monitor and revise it as necessary.

- Form Steering Group Team to review the Draft Vision Note, advise of any changes necessary and assign actions based on recommended tasks
- Once the final version of the Vision Note is agreed, make it available publicly (published on Parish Council website for example) and send it to AVDC for information
- Form Task Groups and assign actions based on tasks identified in the Vision Note (or assign responsibilities in Steering Group Team)
- Agree communications strategy and arrange first 'Conversation'

Indicative Settlement Boundary