

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE

On 1st March, the Oxspring Neighbourhood Planning (ONP) group held its first consultative workshop with local residents. This was to launch the start of the Plan's preparation. We are grateful to all the residents who took time to attend and participate at this event, and of course, we look forward to meeting and talking to more residents at future events. The session included a number of activities designed to make residents aware of the Neighbourhood Plan programme and to encourage residents to engage with the process, as well as to start identifying and recording key issues, priorities and aspirations for the future of the Parish.

The event included a discussion panel with a wide range of participants including Angela Smith our local MP, Councillors Robert Barnard, J M Wilson and Paul Hand-Davis from BMBC, the Vice Chair of the Campaign for the protection of Rural England and a cooperative and eco housing expert. Other local groups such as Barnsley Biodiversity Group and Friends of the Earth were also present at this event and have offered further support for our Plan preparation. The full panel discussion and a summary transcript can be viewed as a download from www.oxspringplan.org.uk

This was the start of a lengthy dialogue with residents of Oxspring and both the Parish Council and the Oxspring Neighbourhood Plan Group will continue to do their utmost to respond to any questions, concerns and issues raised by residents and other parties. Some questions and issues were highlighted at a recent meeting with a small group of concerned residents and it was felt that it would be helpful, at this stage, to dispel some of the rumours and misunderstandings that seem to have arisen.

Question: Why do we need a Neighbourhood Plan and can we just say that we don't want any building in the village?

Answer: Creeping, and arguably poorly planned-for housing growth is evident in the village. Within the last 30 years, this has included developments such as Fieldsend and Brookfield, Milhouses, Longley Ings, Wood cottages (Sheffield Road) & older schemes such as Mayfield, Old Manor Drive and Fox Fields. Oxspring's population has consequently, increased dramatically since 1991 and unfortunately there has been limited, and in certain instances loss of, community services, facilities & amenities for the village to meet this growth.

The Parish Council and residents have, in the past, repeatedly objected to further unsustainable development for the schemes mentioned above. (Please refer to the most recent objection made to BMBC with regards to proposed housing land allocation at West Wind and Vale View off Roughburchworth Lane). Notwithstanding this, over the years, the Parish has had to absorb further housing growth. We will continue to object to unsustainable growth and development in our Parish through the planning process. However, we also need to take a pragmatic stand and ensure that any future development has a 'positive' and 'less harmful' effect for all Parish residents now and in years to come, and that it will enhance the Parish's much loved and unique rural environment.

There is a new process put in place by the Coalition government which allows local communities to prepare their own NP. This means that we collectively decide, plan for, and prepare proposals and policies which set out what type of development we want and where such development should go. This means that it is not decided by developers or the local authority independently from local residents. A NP by definition is not a tool against development but it certainly puts local people 'in

control'. There are additional advantages to following this process. For example, it is a more democratic approach to local planning, as it is subject to a local referendum and it becomes a statutory document when accepted and adopted.

Furthermore, the Parish will benefit directly from developers' contributions (a charge for development). These are called Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL) and moneys raised (25% of CIL) can be used on priorities identified in the Plan. For example, we could fund a new sports hall in the football field if that is what residents decide is a priority for our NP. The idea is that we can aim to support all members of the community, and residents, with the priorities we 'collectively' identify as key and viable for the Parish.

Question: Are the Steering Committee for the Neighbourhood Plan deciding what type and how many houses we want in the village?

Answer: The Parish Council has drawn upon the support of local volunteers to set up working groups to progress the NP preparation. These groups are answerable to the Parish Council through the Steering committee and therefore are taking no independent or single decisions. We welcome, and ask, as many residents as possible to join and support the various groups in order to complete this significant task. (If you are interested in helping please complete the NP Volunteers' Form which is available on www.oxspringplan.org.uk.)

The NP needs to meet a set of basic conditions and criteria. These involve providing evidence and proof that the local community (i.e. residents and stakeholders) have participated in developing all aspects of the plan and that they have been given the opportunity to set out its objectives and aims, including any allocation for housing sites and the type of homes required. However, a further basic condition of the plan is that it needs to be in general conformity with strategic policies set in the Local Authority's planning department. We can challenge, shape and set the allocation of housing numbers and housing tenure (affordable, executive, one bedroom etc.) and first and foremost we need to meet the needs of our Parish residents.

This could mean providing first time homes for our young residents, or homes suitable for our older population to downsize. It is therefore most important that all residents complete the various questionnaires and take part in all the surveys that we will be undertaking through the NP process in the coming months.

There are further basic conditions the Plan is required to meet. These include:

- Contributing to the achievement of 'sustainable development'
- Having regards to the National Policies
- Being compatible with the EU obligations and EU convention of Human Rights

Question: Can the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee complete a Neighbourhood Plan without appropriate consultation with village residents?

Answer: The consultation and engagement process for the Plan preparation is at the very early stages. A draft community consultation, and engagement documents for the NP can be downloaded from the NP site on www.oxspringplan.org.uk. The NP will be the subject of a local Referendum and an independent examination and, as

already indicated, the external examiner reviewing the draft NP will have to be satisfied that the NP process has met the required and appropriate levels of consultation with residents and key stakeholders for the Parish. We would welcome all residents and local groups to contact the Parish Council and the Steering Committee with their suggestions and support to secure maximum community involvement and representation. The Referendum will take place at the end of the Plan preparation and will require 50% + 1 of the residents who turn up to vote, to be in favour of the NP. All residents who are registered on the Parish's electoral role will be eligible to vote.

Question: Have the Steering Committee already identified pieces of land that could be used for development?

Answer: We are at the very early stage of the Plan preparation which requires us to gather baseline information. A starting point therefore has been to identify, i.e. to mark on a plan, the land available (not developed) in the village and the Parish. The second task will involve the evaluation of the potential of all sites and their viability against set criteria. This criteria is drawn from BMBC's planning department and best planning guidance on land assessment. Running alongside this, our first objective is to identify the type of housing and or other amenities and developments which will be required for the Parish for the next 15 to 20 years and then to set those needs against the best, and more viable land for development. So for example, it would not be best practice or sustainable to allocate land that is within a flood zone or land that might have, or create, problems with access for future development.

The plans showing land availability were used to support two training sessions. The first was led by Planning Aid England and attended by the Parish Council, the Steering Group and volunteer members from the 'specialist groups'. The second workshop was held at the community event on March 1st and members of the community were asked to comment on, and to consider, the various sites and also to identify any other sites that might be available. No decisions have been made, nor can they be made about any preferred sites, prior to classifying and establishing future needs for the Parish.

A NP cannot set an agenda against development and change. There is a housing crisis across the Country, let's not turn it into a crisis for our village or for our Parish. We will not turn the tide against housing growth set by Central and Local Governments, but if we work together we can find a solution that could improve all of our lives young and old, now and in years to come. The challenge is for us all to create our NP .

We need your support and we need you to talk to us. You can contact us with questions as follows:

Parish Council meetings - there is a session at the beginning of each Parish Council meeting where you can ask questions that hopefully the Parish Council members will be able to answer. If they can't they will make a note of your question and get back to you.

Twitter: Oxspring Village
Facebook: Oxspring Neighbourhood Plan
Web page: www.oxspringplan.co.uk - There is a question and answer facility