

Delivering a brighter, greener future for all

Minutes of
Neighbourhood Plan Review – Steering Group Meeting
Thursday 15th December 2022
Warminster Civic Centre

1. Attendees:

In Person: Cllr Fraser – Chair (Cllr SF), Cllr Keeble (Cllr PK), Cllr Allensby (Cllr SA), Cllr Brett (Cllr DB), Harriet James (HJ), Jon Ellis (JE), Jeremy Stadward (JS), Tom Dommett (TD) – Warminster Town Council (WTC), Clare Collier (CC).

Online: Georgina Perry (GP) – Place Studio, Len Turner (LT), Nick Pearne (NPe).

Apologies – Nick Parker

2. Agreement of Note Taker

Clare Collier agreed to be note taker.

3. Declarations of Interest

None raised.

4. Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of were approved.

5. Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Working Draft Template

GP gave an overview of the NP working draft. The main new content of this document is the first draft of the planning policies which have been produced by Place Studio. Details of the policies and supporting text will need to be developed by Place Studio and the Topic Groups over the next couple of months. The structure of the NP will include a main introduction – i.e., purpose/process/why is a review being undertaken. Each themed topic area will need introductory text and will include the associated planning policies. This introductory text is to be written by the Steering and Topic Groups.

JE felt the draft Getting Around policies had been watered down and were weak. Policy 3 – ‘align with the Local Plan’. This was noted by GP who reiterated that these policies are at the first draft stage. JE said the policies need to be inspiring, positive and meaningful for them to be relatable and engaging.

Action: Steering and Topic Groups to commence draft wording for introductory text in NP.

JS commented the traffic survey conducted by Persimmon using the Wiltshire Council strategic modelling tool was flawed and thought it did not give a true representation of the movement of traffic.

Cllr PK questioned why one of the titles in the draft NP is referred to as 'Land Planning Policies' when not all the policies relate to land use. GP agreed this title could be changed to Planning Policies.

NPe questioned the breadth of the remit of the NP. GP responded by stating the NP policies are related only to planning issues. If the community identify there are important projects/activities to be undertaken to achieve the overall vision for the town, these can be included in the NP. JS referred to the Steering Group's meeting with Sophie Davies, the NP Link Officer from Wiltshire Council. He felt that the Warminster NP could potentially be ignored by Wiltshire Council and therefore it is imperative that all evidence gathered is robust. LT stated that in his experience of working with local planning officers, they do in fact take notice of the NP (as it has planning status) and are required to reference the policies within the NP when considering planning applications. HJ reminded the Group that the Link Officer had suggested that an appendix or supporting document could be included in the NP to list non-land based issues.

Cllr PK suggested that the recent briefing note received from Michael Gove on Levelling Up, Regeneration Bill and Planning System Reform, if adopted, would mean a far greater emphasis on NPs and will give local communities more influence on planning decisions. Cllr DB thought this would take a long time to implement, by which time, there could be another party in government.

LT confirmed that once the NP has gone through all the legal processes, and it is adopted by Wiltshire Council then the policies are accepted until the NP expires or is replaced with a revised NP. LT stated that the problem with the made NP was that it wasn't robust and lacked the evidence to back the policies. JS asked how to avoid this happening again. GP confirmed Place Studio role is to help the Topic Groups collect evidence to ensure the policies are robust for them to be able to stand-up to scrutiny. In the development of the NP, there are many opportunities for stakeholders such as Wiltshire Council to comment on the wording and make appropriate amendments. GP suggested the Steering Group may wish to consider applying for a NP health check (similar to a practice examination). This is free of charge for the Steering Group and can be accessed through a Locality technical support package. The Steering Group didn't feel this was necessary considering Place Studio have been appointed to help provide the Group with producing the NP review.

JE volunteered to take on the role of NP editor on the condition that other members of the group contribute. It was agreed that the role of editor would be to check the consistency of style and to ensure the content is correct. The Topic Group chairs (or a nominated person) are to write the

copy together with Place Studio. The Steering Group can review the content. The policies and NP draft are to be completed by the end of February with the NP document production taking place during February and March. Evidence gathering should be completed by end of January.

Action: Topic Group chairs to start adding text to the NP working draft on SharePoint.

A discussion followed regarding whether the made NP was being reviewed or a new NP was being produced. GP confirmed that the work carried out to date has identified a number of issues that need to be addressed in the NP and therefore the review has evolved into a re-write. Over the past 6 years there have been several changes with regards to the planning context. LT confirmed we are making a new NP; this will make reference to the made NP.

6. Communication and Consultation Plan

GP discussed the Communication and Consultation Plan document which had been shared with the Steering Group prior to the meeting. The Steering Group need to decide the best approach for consulting the public – one survey or several mini surveys could be considered.

Cllr PK has produced a question set. He is concerned about how best to interpret, analyse and present the findings as acceptable evidence.

Action: GP to find out what response rates would be deemed as statistically valid for Warminster.

JE suggested the designated NP website should be used as the main platform for obtaining the public feedback for the consultation. Website analytics to be used to benchmark present use and effectiveness of website – hence be able to provide evidence around future engagement with the website.

Action: Place Studio to provide statistics on current site visits of the NP website.

GP recommended that the Steering Group/Town Council use SmartSurvey as a survey software package. The Steering and Topic Groups and Place Studio to work on the survey content and the Town Council to be responsible to build the surveys. Place Studio to integrate the survey with the NP website. Steering Group and Town Council to collate all the information gained.

Cllr SA and JS to visit schools to obtain pupils' views on the NP proposals.

Action: Topic Groups to compile draft list of questions to be included in the community survey.

Action: Working meeting with Topic Group chairs to be arranged for Friday 6th January, 1pm to finalise questions and approach to be taken with public consultation. TD to book room and send invites to those involved.

7. Strategic Environmental Assessment/Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening (SEAHRA)

All NPs need to go through this process, to assess if the NP policies will have an impact on the local environment. The first stage is screening. Draft NPs need to be screened to determine whether they need a full SEA or HRA. A full SEA/HRA is usually required by NPs that have site allocations or where it is an area of extreme environmental sensitivity. Screening is undertaken by Wiltshire Council and usually takes 6 weeks. Screening is undertaken only on draft planning policies; the screening is undertaken to help inform the policies and takes place before Regulation 14 consultation.

The Steering Group agreed that the current draft policies should be presented to Wiltshire Council immediately in order for SEAHRA screening to be carried out as soon as possible. GP confirmed the HRA screening is undertaken by Wiltshire Council ecologists and SEA screening is carried out by environmental planners. A draft decision will be produced by Wiltshire Council confirming whether full SEA/HRA is required. This draft decision is sent out to statutory consultees (Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency) for their input. HJ thought it would be interesting if a full HRA screening was carried out as Warminster has very sensitive habitats.

Action: GP to contact Sophie Davies week commencing 19/12/22 to enquire if this early approach to the screening process is acceptable to Wiltshire Council, and for confirmation of timescales for screening to be undertaken. If Wiltshire Council are in agreement, then the screening process is to be progressed.

8. Wiltshire Local Plan – timescale.

GP confirmed that earlier this week, Wiltshire Council approved an updated timescale for the progress of the Wiltshire Local Plan. The timescale is slightly delayed. The Local Plan will be finalised at the end of 2024. The draft will be available in August 2023, at this stage, the WNP can be checked to make sure it aligns with the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan.

9. Neighbourhood Project Plan

Currently on schedule.

10. Outstanding Actions

- Locality Update – Arc4 have been allocated as the Housing Needs Assessment consultants. Work will commence early in January 2023. The draft assessment will take approximately 9 weeks with the completed assessment being finalised in 12 weeks. An online survey will be undertaken to get local feedback. A meeting with Arc4 and the Steering Group is to be arranged in the New Year. TD stated that the Westbury Housing Needs Assessment identified the need for 1,200 houses although the Local Plan is looking to allocate 700 homes.
- The Town Centre Master Plan and Design Code applications have been approved this week. Consultant details should be advised within 10 working days.

Action: Meeting between Steering Group and Arc4 to be arranged in January 2023.

11. Topic Group Updates

HJ gave the Environment, Heritage and Design (EHD) Topic Group update. A meeting had been held with Sophie Davies and Mike Kilminster to discuss the potential designation of LGS, as some suggested LGS are currently being assessed for potential allocation in the Wiltshire Council Local Plan. Wiltshire Council confirmed LGS can still be considered by the Warminster NP as long as the reasons for designation are valid. TD confirmed 5 potential sites were being actively looked at by Wiltshire Council, but only because they had been identified in an old document. Wiltshire Council have implied they will be looking at potentially allocating 1 site out of the 5, to allocate 60 houses.

Cllr PK updated the Steering Group on the Economy and Town Centre Topic Group. More work has been carried out on the listing of the employment sites. These have been split into three categories: 1) should be protected e.g. core town centre site; 2) not to be protected e.g. East Street and 3) flexible sites such as Silver Street.

Work is still being undertaken on compiling the question set for the community survey. The Group still need to identify a cross-section of employees to engage with and decide how to engage with them.

Cllr PK also reported that Steve Tonkin from Cranborne Chase AONB will be attending the next Full Council meeting on 16/12/23 to confirm what needs to be done to conform with 'darker skies'. Steve Tonkin has provided specific policies to be included in the NP. Some of these policies conflict with the draft Environment, Heritage and Design NP policies. Cllr PK invited HJ to attend the full council meeting.

Action: Cllr PK to share darker skies policies with HJ.

HJ reported that Mike Heaton has suggested a Heritage Policy relating to shop frontages.

Action: HJ to share heritage policy with the Steering Group

JE mentioned the Getting Around Topic Group have discussed the issue of safe walking during nighttime, this may have some conflict with Environment, Heritage and Design policies. The Getting Around Topic Group are completing their mapping exercise and this will be overlaid with the other Topic Group maps. The Topic Group will be producing a safe cycling and walking map, this will identify where there are gaps in the routes and where future investment is required.

12. Next Steering Group Meeting

Thursday 19th January 2023, 6pm – hybrid meeting.