

Neighbourhood Plan Meeting – 7pm, Tuesday 22nd October 2019

Present: Vice Chairman, Ian Kinloch; Cllrs, Peter Lord, Frank Eve; Clerk, Laura Crump; West Suffolk Council Senior Planning Officer, Amy Wright and around 18 parishioners.

Cllr Kinloch welcomed the parishioners to the meeting and introduced the members of the Parish Council and Amy Wright.

Amy Wright had put together a presentation which she delivered on the subject of Neighbourhood Plans.

The audience was invited to ask questions during and after the presentation.

An overview of what was discussed:

- Neighbourhood Plans can be made for an entire parish or just the central village – this decision is up to the parish to make.
- Disadvantages of making a Neighbourhood Plan – time consuming and lengthy process.
- The existing (St Edmundsbury) plan is being superseded by a new West Suffolk Plan with the result that:
 - The new plan will be reviewing new housing numbers and housing needs. Infrastructure will be considered. Housing requirements are informed by government policy at national level.
 - The ‘Vision’ has to be adhered to but it is only a general perspective.
 - It will take about 3 years for the West Suffolk new plan to be made. The first consultation is in January 2020.
 - It is not planned that conservation areas will be changed; however, all will be reviewed in the new plan. The settlement area is determined by the district.
- Settlement boundaries are set by the District Council and are currently being reviewed and could change – something to consider when making the Neighbourhood Plan.
- In the unlikely event of a discrepancy, the latest plan will have the greatest weight.
- A Neighbourhood Plan is a dynamic item and would need to be kept under review to correctly reflect the prevailing requirements.
- The PC want to know what features the parish would want to protect/promote/change e.g. the agricultural areas which surround the village which could be ripe for development.
- The Joint Development Management Policy Document, which can be found on the West Suffolk Council website gives more specific information than ‘Vision 2031’.
https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/local_plans/upload/JDMPPD-FINAL-for-website-error-amended.pdf
- The West Suffolk Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) is an essential piece of evidence which is required to support the local plan process. It is a technical assessment which considers sites for housing and economic (for example retail, leisure, cultural, office, warehousing) development in the West Suffolk area over the plan period. The results of the SHELAA will inform the West Suffolk Local Plan preparation.
- It would also inform on trees in a conservation area, where application is required for alterations.
- Grant process for Neighbourhood Plan – locality.org.uk offers all information needed for this.

Amy Wright left. The PC and parishioners discussed things further. Overview:

- Thoughts discussed about the changing local plan - whether it would be worthwhile Withersfield putting together a Neighbourhood Plan beforehand. It was agreed that we would need to start new but evolve it over time and West Suffolk wouldn't agree anything which was likely to be changed in the upcoming local plan.
- Concerns over it being a lot of work and whether there would be enough people volunteering to help develop the plan.
- Having a Neighbourhood Plan for the whole parish could work to the advantage of the village as there are currently plans to build more housing on the Arboretum side of the village.
- Is a Neighbourhood Plan just about housing? No, but we could lean heavily on the character of the parish with the hope that this would colour the way for any future planning applications. Development has to happen and with a plan it can be controlled.
- There is some funding available for a grant for a professional consultant to help develop the Neighbourhood Plan.
- How do we formulate opinion? We would take advice from a planning consultant. Perhaps online surveys, which could be advertised in the parish and door-to-door canvassing. Need to formulate specific proposals prior to asking for the opinions of parishioners.
- Hargrave have successfully created a Neighbourhood Plan and we could use this as a guideline to follow and tailor to the needs of Withersfield.

CLlr Kinloch asked for a show of hands for those in favour of having a Neighbourhood Plan, which resulted in the majority of the room voting "for".

It was felt that it would be better to have a plan which would become a material planning consideration for West Suffolk, than nothing at all.

Another meeting would be called at some point in the future for the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The meeting closed at 8:28pm.