

Minutes from Neighbourhood Meeting at the Royal Oak, 1st February 2018.

Present:

Adam Fairbrother

Ian Pettitt

Jo Lofthouse

Andrew Peachey

Tony Oakes (Parish Council chairman)

Candida Wingate

David Alchin

John Worthington (chair)

The meeting opened with expressions of great sadness and shock at the news that Ian Williams had died suddenly and unexpectedly at the weekend: he will be sorely missed.

In the context of the Neighbourhood Plan, it was acknowledged that his contribution was massive and invaluable, particularly regarding maintaining and developing the web site, collecting and collating information and generally supporting the aims of the group.

It was untimely to ask for details of the work he had in progress on his computer. Nick Woodhouse (Parish Clerk) would deal with some of the Parish Council's business, but did not have time to take on additional work for the Neighbourhood Planning Group.

It was suggested that we do a callout for anyone who might be able to offer us help with maintaining the web site, if only in the short term.

Jo confirmed that she had the spreadsheet of local businesses that Ian had produced, so we are able to continue updating that information.

David, Andrew and Tony had met to consider physical assets, and had identified farms in the parish, although the owners of two (?) of them were unknown and, possibly, unknowable.

Physical assets in terms of land are pertinent, in that it would be useful to know where there are pockets of land that might be used for housing and also to consider if land is being under-used.

A general conversation ensued, in which several plots of land and their availability/unavailability for development were discussed.

At this point it was noted that if we only focus on housing, to the exclusion of other assets in the village, then we will only be dealing with part of the story.

Ian explained the current situation regarding planning decisions in relation to housing developments.

In summary, and in Laxfield, as Mid Suffolk cannot demonstrate a deliverable five year supply of land, there is a presumption in favour of "sustainable development" unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The National Planning Policy Framework does not provide a definition of "sustainable" which in a planning context is usually considered to embrace economic, social and environmental factors.

(Please see below for a full explanation, as provided by Ian)

Mid Suffolk is in the process of establishing a five year supply of land, but this may take 18 – 24 months to complete, i.e. we might complete the Plan before they had established the land supply.

It was agreed that there was a value in engaging in the process of creating a Neighbourhood Plan, even if ultimately it carried little weight with the authorities.

The group was advised by the PC Chairman to keep the process as simple as possible and avoid becoming too 'bogged down'.

The PC is dealing with the official business of notifying MSDC that we wish to develop a Neighbourhood Plan and that it relates to the parish of Laxfield only.

Adam produced a written explanation of what the group hopes to achieve – i.e. we wish to find out what makes Laxfield 'Laxfield' and try to ensure it evolves but retains its identity and values.

(Please see below for a full explanation, as provided by Adam)

A brief conversation followed about numbers of houses that might be expected to be built in Laxfield (452), the number of people who live here (700) and existing properties (350).

We need to stress that the Plan is about what people want for the village, but we need to manage expectations.

We can't control what's happening right now, but we want to make sure that the village infrastructure can support future developments.

The group asked the PC to produce a statement about the housing plans they know are about to take place or are in the pipeline.

John (Chairman) suggested we use the Village Appraisal as a starting point for our work. It was suggested that the views of the Under 16's and the Over 60's were of vital importance – because if they're satisfied then the age ranges in between would, by definition, be satisfied.

We talked about what sort of questions we might ask, to raise awareness of the Neighbourhood Plan and the questionnaire we will produce in the coming months.

ACTIONS

- Jo will revise the format of the spreadsheet of local businesses, to try and make it more readable.
- The group will take a stall at the Market on March 3rd, to engage public debate and also to invite people to get involved in the process. We will start to collect a list of talents and skills that could support the work, e.g. graphic designers, IT-savvy people, etc.
- Candida, Jo, Adam and David will meet on 7th February, to discuss arrangements for a stall at the Market. We will use it as a 'dry run' to find out what sort of things we're asked by the public, and how best we can engage residents in this process, particularly different interest groups. *(Market Stall booked, also church gazebo, if we need it. CW)*
- Tony will supply a map (of potential housing sites?), and statement about housing plans of which they're aware, and send it to Adam.
- Ian and John will meet to plot out our future moves, to identify the timings on what we need to do and by when, to keep on track for meeting all the requirements for achieving the Plan.

The meeting closed at about 9:15, but without having agreed a date for the next meeting.

National Planning Policy Framework

Clause 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which became effective in March 2012, said that in circumstances where a local authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites, there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development and “any relevant policies for the supply of housing” should be considered out of date and disregarded.

In May 2017, the Supreme Court in the case of Suffolk Coastal District Council v Hopkins Homes Ltd, handed down a judgement that turned on the meaning of the words “any relevant policies for the supply of housing”. They decided that they meant all and any policies that could affect housing supply, not just policies specifically categorised as relating to housing. Any shortfall in the supply of land is enough to trigger the operation of clause 14 of the NPPF which provides a presumption in favour of sustainable development “unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits”.

What I did not say, but probably should have, is that the court, decided that a non-housing policy which has the effect of restricting the supply of housing (e.g. in relation to the Green Belt or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) is not deemed to be out-of-date by paragraph 49 of the NPPF. Nonetheless, they decided that “the weight to be given to it alongside other material considerations, within the balance set by paragraph 14, remains a matter for the decision-maker in accordance with ordinary principles” i. e. the planning authority.

In summary, and in Laxfield, as Mid Suffolk cannot demonstrate a deliverable five year supply of land, there is a presumption in favour of “sustainable development” unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. The NPPF does not provide a definition of “sustainable” which in a planning context is usually considered to embrace economic, social and environmental factors.

LAXFIELD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Laxfields future: Our chance to say what we want, than be told what we must have.

At the end of 2017 Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils consulted on the new Joint Local Plan.

This document will provide the strategy for the growth of the Districts, setting out what and where development will take place up to 2036.

The new Joint Local Plan will replace the existing local planning policies for both Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

It has been assessed that Mid Suffolk alone will need 9951 new homes / dwelling to be built between 2014 and 2036 at an average yearly rate of 452 and that every Town, Village and Hamlet will do its bit to ensure these targets are met. Laxfield included.

This Local Plan is open to interpretation and if the right piece of land becomes available with backing from developers nothing will stop the councils from meeting their housing targets as has been displayed by new plans such as are happening in Fressingfield.

If villages such as Laxfield can produce a neighbourhood plan this will be consulted to help planning applications in the future to hopefully be in line with what you the residents want.

“It is always better to say what you would like, than be told what you will have”

The Laxfield Neighbourhood plan. The who's and What's.

We are a working committee comprising of parish councillors and residents who want to ensure Laxfield can embrace the coming years and grow in a suitable way in keeping with what local residents want.

Planning of new homes is and will always be a contentious issue, but the plan can be a guide as to what is needed, where they should be, size of developments, catering to who, styles/design and so on.

The neighbourhood plan can also be so much more than just planning. It can incorporate whatever you as a community feel is important to Laxfield. This could be green areas, paths and bridleways, high speed broadband, local services including doctors surgery to name a few.

We are here to find out what makes Laxfield, Laxfield and try to ensure it evolves but retains its identity and values.