

CHESIL BANK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN: A REVIEW OF PROGRESS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was established in December 2018 and the serious work started in early April 2019. We were cautioned at the outset that it would be a long and difficult road, and so it has proven. Of course, our progress has been slowed by the extraordinary times we find ourselves in with COVID restrictions. We suspended work in March 2020 for almost 2 months and have had to manage with Zoom calls since May 2020. We have not met face to face since February 2020 and this has made progress more difficult, since Zoom calls are not conducive to constructive discussions and generation of ideas.

2. OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

With the exception of Michele who had experience of working with Lodders on their Neighbourhood Plan and Jo Witherden who joined our group in the early summer of 2019 as our Professional Planning consultant, we have all been on a steep learning curve, trying to understand what is required of us and how we should go about it. There is a great deal of information out there on the Internet which at times can be very helpful, but at the same time it can be overwhelming! One of the first things we wanted to do of course was to try and alert the community to the fact that we were “on the case”, and this was done initially by presentations to the Local Parish Meetings in May 2019 and to the WI in Portesham and then subsequently through the launch of the first survey and the publication of Newsletters. We also had a stall at the Chesil Fayre in August 2019 which has been our only opportunity to engage informally with the community.

Since that time, we have released further surveys on Employment and to businesses in the area, which were well received. However, the most recent surveys to both the community and to Young People have been less successful in terms of the number of responses. The results of those surveys will be shared with the wider community at the public events. In the meantime, we are changing our approach to gathering feedback from the Young People in our community. A pilot has already been carried out and was thought to be successful.

Following the Call for Sites initiative we opened a dialogue with Locality/AECOM on both Design Codes and Sites Assessment, and we now have two very detailed and comprehensive reports, which will be the foundations for our engagement with the wider community. The Design Codes report is likely to be especially useful.

Our original target for getting the Neighbourhood Plan made was early summer 2022 but given that progress has been hampered by the consequential impacts of the pandemic, then there is a risk of further delay, yet to be quantified. If we can return to face-face meetings in a few months, then we would expect the pace of progress to accelerate. At that time, we can regroup and carry out a comprehensive re-plan.

For a detailed history of the various activities of NPSG please take a look at the Appendix.

3. LOOKING FORWARD TO 2021/2022

Dorset Council have released an early draft of the Local Plan, which is going to have a significant impact on the Neighbourhood Plan going forward. The Neighbourhood Plan needs to reflect the 6 Strategic Priorities of the Plan. These are as follows: -

- Provision of suitable housing (33 additional homes by 2038 across CBPC)
- Driving Economic Growth (21000 new jobs across Dorset)
- Preservation of our unique environment
- Building strong healthy communities
- Staying safe and well
- Addressing the climate and ecological emergency

We have already attempted to gather data on some of the above through the surveys we have carried out already, notably in the areas of housing, economic growth, preservation of our heritage and environment and such things as renewable energy, but there remains a great deal to be done. We need to ensure that as the Local Plan moves forward during 2021/2022, that we are in tune with it. Unfortunately, it could slow the progress of our work so the best thing we can do is to track it as it progresses and hope that we are not diverging from it.

In terms of a key objective for 2021/2022, we must find a way of having a greater dialogue with the various communities. This will not be easy since despite the rollout of the vaccination programme, there will probably be no relaxation of the COVID-19 policies regarding getting people together, until June/July. We need to redouble our efforts and find creative ways of engaging with people. We cannot continue to do this through surveys. Without these Public Consultations it will be impossible to develop policies which reflect the views of the community. This is where we intend to focus our efforts during the first half of 2021/2022.

In order to start the ball rolling we have provisionally booked the PVH for Saturday 26th June 2021. The intention is that this would be the first of a number of pre-consultation events across the Chesil Bank Parish. Work is underway to design the events and to apply for budget cover from Locality.

APPENDIX

1. 22/10/2018: Public meeting to discuss if a Neighbourhood Plan activity should be launched.
2. 10/12/18: First Meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG). Since that first meeting a further 13 meetings were held during 2019 and early 2020. Work was suspended because of COVID-19 during March and April, but in May 2020 work was restarted through Zoom Meetings and a further 10 Zoom meetings have been held through to the end of March 2021, making a total of 25 SG Meetings.
3. Regular reports have been made to CBPC since March 2019, firstly through the Parish Councillors represented on the NPSG and subsequently by the NPSG Chairman (16 in all).
4. Two Annual budgets prepared and submitted to Locality, with the budget for 2021/22 in preparation.
5. 7 Newsletters have been either distributed to each household, been made available on the web site and/or featured in The Chesil.

6. 5 Surveys have been issued to the community, with the first in September 2019, a Business Survey and Employment Survey in February 2020 and a 3rd Survey and Young Persons' Survey in October 2020. Opinions were also sought from the community on Highway Safety in September 2019. In addition, interviews were held with a number of Local Businesses in the Parish including in Abbotsbury the Bride Valley Farm Shop, The Spa Shop and the Abbotsbury Tourist Board; in Portesham, The Kings Arms and in Langton Herring, Character Farm Cottages/Lower Farm.
7. Meetings have also been held with Magna Housing and Ilchester Estates.
8. Sent comments on Government White Paper to Locality.
9. Sent comments on Dorset Council Local Plan to DC.

Report prepared by Derek Troughton, Chair NPSG

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