

Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Forum

Meeting to discuss social sustainability held on 10th December 2015 at the West Room, Old School Place at 7.30p.m.

Present: Roger Beattie, Gill Bindoff (Facilitator), Debbie Hemmins, Helen Rints, Adam Stevenson, Mandy Strubel, Simon Tilley, Tony Williamson

Apology for absence: Jo Read

This was the first meeting of the group and covered a broad range of social issues affecting people in Watlington. The aim of the group is to produce key criteria for social sustainability to be included in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, to be part of the selection criteria for development sites and to test emerging NP policies. In the National Planning Policy Framework, the government makes clear that all new development must be sustainable and have regard to environmental, social and economic sustainability. The social role of planning is: 'supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being'. The NP will respond to this requirement and also have regard to the sustainability criteria comprised in South Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan.

The group identified five aspects which make an essential contribution to the wellbeing of the community:

- (1). Good opportunities for social integration between all groups
- (2). Sufficient supply of housing which is affordable to all economic groups
- (3). Good access to local public transport
- (4). Good traffic management which enables people to feel safe using pedestrian routes around the town and on local country roads
- (5). Good social (and recreational) opportunities for young people

(1). It was agreed that there is a good community spirit in Watlington with lots of opportunities for people to meet together and socialise.

- *. Many people comment on the friendliness in the town and feel welcomed into the community
- *. There are lots of opportunities for people 'to get involved'
- *. Generally people feel safe from crime
- *. There are problems of social isolation affecting some families on low incomes and families in need. The area (South Oxfordshire) is generally regarded as one of the most wealthy in the country but this masks some poverty in rural communities.
- *. There are some good voluntary support groups - for example, the Watlington Volunteer Drivers
- *. The Watlington helpers scheme is still small scale but there is a need for 'community befrienders' and other local voluntary support for people in need.

(2). The supply of 'affordable' homes is not adequate to meet local need.

- *. Many young people are unable to find somewhere to live in Watlington.
- *. It is very difficult to find a larger affordable home when a family grows.
- *. There is a slow turnover of homes because people tend not to leave once they have settled in

Watlington

- *. Market rents and house sale prices are very high
- *. The problem of finding somewhere to live which they can afford is leading to a change in the make up of the community as members of families which have lived in Watlington for several generations are moving out of the area.
- *. Some older people are having to move out of the area as well because they can't find accommodation in Watlington which suits their needs, either for 'downsizing' or to meet health/mobility needs.
- *. Shortage of affordable homes is a problem for local businesses. Many people who work in Watlington are having to travel long distances by car.

(3). There is not good access to public transport in Watlington.

- *. It is very difficult to use local buses to get to and from work outside Watlington
- *. Lack of good local services limits people's ability to get around and can be isolating
- *. The impact on families/individuals without access to a car is significant
- *. A healthy community needs to be well connected with local towns
- *. Alternative provision of public transport, e.g. use of Post Buses could be explored

(4). Getting around in Watlington can be a problem

- *. Good access into the town for cyclists and pedestrians is vital
- *. Many pedestrians/pavement users have access problems because of uneven surfaces and narrow pavements - this disproportionately affects older people and carers with young children
- *. Many people feel unsafe using the pavements because of the 'overlap' by vehicles which travel very close to the edge of the highway or drive on the pavement.
- *. Drivers parking on the pavements also create problems for people

5. Opportunities for young people are limited

- *. More after school clubs are needed
- *. Play areas need to be part of new development. - they provide very good opportunities for communities to mix.
- *. Young people, especially teenagers, are keen to have improved and additional sports facilities
- *. Local youth groups want their own building
- *. There are very few social opportunities for young people to meet together

6. Additional points raised:

- *. There are problems connecting with minority groups
- *. Improved contact with the universities in Oxford would bring a cultural benefit
- *. People have access to a range of shops for everyday use although some families find them too expensive. (Co-Op, chemist, butcher, ironmonger, fish and chips, post office)
- *. The Chiltern Surgery has capacity to care for a larger population
- *. Opportunities to connect with the surrounding countryside contribute to people's sense of wellbeing

Notes taken by Gill Bindoff