

Watlington Neighbourhood Plan Forum

Development Sites Group: minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25th July 2016.

Present: Tony Powell (Facilitator), Gill Bindoff, Keith Jackson, Terry Jackson, Tony Williamson, Robin Wilson. David Cotterell attended as Facilitator of the Forum Traffic Group.

1. Apologies for absence: Rob Field, Nick Greaves, Ian Hill, Luke Johnson

2. Minutes of the meeting of 26th May 2016. It was noted that meetings had not been held in June because of pressure of work associated with the Roadshows (which had been held from 11th to 15th June) and also holiday absences of Group members.

The minutes were agreed to be a correct record. KJ will send them to Rachel Gill to put on the NP website.

3. Traffic Group update:

3.1. DC briefed the Group on work to prepare a specification for some professional support. The NP Steering Committee has been closely involved and has now signed off the specification.

3.2. DC has had preliminary conversations with 4 different consultancies and the brief has been sent off to them. The next stage is for further communication between DC and the consultants to ensure that they have the information they need before submitting estimates of costs for the work required.

3.3. The estimates will be used to apply for grant funding to cover the costs.

3.4. The details of the specification were discussed, with a focus on the links between housing development and the provision of an alternative route for traffic.

3.5. The complexities of the problem of achieving the best balance between an alternative route which meets the needs of Watlington, and the number of new homes needed to fund it, were explored in some detail. The view of the Group which emerged was that an assessment of the benefits and disadvantages of a new route needed to be carried out before any decisions could be made on housing. This information is needed before the selection of sites can be finalised. When data is available it is possible that a new route could be shown not to deliver the benefits required.

3.6. It was agreed that speculation about the number of new homes needed to fund an alternative route is unhelpful. The actual numbers will emerge as further information becomes available and the best sites can be identified.

4. Progress on site selection process:

4.1. The sites spreadsheet, as a working document, has been updated to reflect new information and recent Steering Committee decisions. Site 3 is now included in the list of 'available' sites. Sites which can accommodate 5 or more new homes will be included in the list as well.

4.2. It was confirmed that all sites will be assessed against the same criteria, including sustainability objectives and impact on traffic flows (when and where available). Further advice will be sought from Peter Canavan as to whether final site selection will consider only 'available' sites (as per NPPF Guidelines) or all sites. (Action: TP)

4.2. Record sheets summarising the features of each site are still to be completed. (Action: GB)

4.3. Commentaries on each site will be prepared following the SODC model when all the information needed to complete the site selection process is available. The Kirkham Landscape report on SHLAA sites is also a useful example to follow. It was agreed that

SODC exemplars of this part of the process will be circulated and that members of the Group will draft sample commentaries based on the information currently available. This is in order to test the process before it is applied to all sites.

4.4. It was noted that feedback from the Roadshows on the site selection criteria and the site selection process had been very positive.

4.5. When all the data is available to complete the site selection process there will be a workshop session for members of the Forum DS Group, the Coordination Group and the Steering Committee.

5. Sustainability objectives:

5.1. The objectives had also received very positive feedback from the Roadshows.

5.2. Sites can now be reviewed against these objectives.

5.3. A spreadsheet has been produced which allows review of all 22 sustainability objectives against each site. It is proposed that the Group review this spreadsheet and consider initial responses on a site-by-site basis during the next DSG meeting.

6. SODC Local Plan Preferred Options consultation:

6.1. The Preferred Options include a strategic development of 3500 new homes on the site of Chalgrove airfield. This has very considerable implications for Watlington and the NP. The Forum is aiming to keep in close touch with neighbouring communities and with the Homes and Communities Agency (which has had/will have the land transferred to it's ownership from the MoD).

6.2. In spite of local opposition we understand that there is a good chance that this development will go ahead because the HCA is a Government agency which is tasked with developing as many sites as possible to meet the national shortfall in house building.

6.3. Major infrastructure works will be required, especially regarding highways. The Forum aims to ensure that the HCA is aware of the issues in and around Watlington, and makes good provision to ensure that the town and surrounding villages are not disadvantaged by the new town built on their doorstep.

6.4. The forum will respond to the consultation. Action GB.

7. Update on meetings with developers:

7.1. Meetings had been held with two further developers/agents on 20th June. The arrangements were the same as the previous meetings. Notes were taken at the meetings and an audio recording was also made.

7.2. As before, the meetings were a very useful opportunity to exchange information.

7.3. It had been made clear that the meetings were not part of the site selection process.

7.4. Notes of the meetings have been sent to the respective developers/agents for their information and to give them the opportunity to amend any incorrect details. The Steering Committee has authorised Rachel to post them on the website when all the responses have been received.

8. Date of next meeting:

The next meeting will be on Thursday 4 August 2016 at 7.30pm. at the Community Office.