**REPORT
ON ELMSWELL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN MEETING**

***14.03.23 refers***

**HELD AT THE BLACKBOURNE**

**THURSDAY 27th FEBRUARY 2014**

Specifically invited

John Jowitt *Consultant to EPC* **JJ**

Sarah Mansel *MSDC Ward Member* **SM**David Sparkes *MSDC* **DS**

Jane Storey *SCC / MSDC Ward Member* **JS**

David Barker *Chairman EPC* **DBa**Gillian Benjamin *CAS* **GB**Jonathan Free MSDC **JF**
Peter Freer MSDC **PF**

Attended

Parish Clerk Peter Dow **PD**

138 members of the public

Glossary

BF Bacon Factory – the redundant Harris site currently awaiting a Planning application

CAS Community Action Suffolk – used to be Suffolk ACRE, advisers to community groups in Suffolk
E Elmswell

EPC Elmswell Parish Council

MSDC Mid Suffolk District Council...often in close partnership with Babergh District Council

NP Neighbourhood Plan – introduced as part of the Government’s 2011 Localism Act
NPPF National Planning Policy Framework - a recent simplified set of Government guidelines on Planning

SG Steering Group – comprising volunteers & councillors to take the scheme forward

T&PC Town and Parish Councils

1 DBa Welcome & introduce invited contributors. Village Plan was progressing but superseded by legislation establishing the NP process. This meeting a ‘broad brush’ approach to outlining the new process and the priorities. Although led by EPC, it the Plan does not necessarily reflect the Council’s views. It seeks to reflect the views of the community as a whole as broadly and comprehensively as possible.

2 GB Explains the position of CAS as advisers re NP supporting EPC and the SG including the provision of data handling and analysis.

3 DS Explains the Planning Policy position...NPPF now the ruling document encouraging sustainable growth...shortcomings in strategic policy planning (including NP’s) can leave MSDC open to a claim for presumption in favour of development, ie the Developer has a free hand. A NP becomes Planning Policy, ie the law, after a rigorous process including independent examination & local referendum.

4 PF MSDC supports, assists & facilitates NP’s for T&PC’s, currently 5 plans in process. EPC have registered and the boundary consultation, which defines the area covered as the boundary of the civil parish, has thrown up interest but no problems, therefore the area approved on 14.01.14. MSDC will ensure that whole community is involved and consulted and that a comprehensive range of issues is addressed.

5 GB Three steps to the process of consultation: (a) Steering Group formed and other volunteers with relevant skills, experience, or contacts identified (b) SG looks at community issues, networks with community and forms the basis of the questionnaire (c) Questionnaire processed so that data available as the basis for a Plan.

6 JJ Explains his role with previous owners working towards satisfying community aspirations, key one being a RR, spur for this provided in their plans and since adopted by current owners. As, ‘poacher turned gamekeeper’, convinced that NP a crucial tool in the community’s fight for balanced development and adequate infrastructure.

7 SM There is no mention of RR in MSDC Policy so the community must develop its own policy through NP. Development is inevitable. The only way the community can shape it is through NP.

8 GB then invited questions / comments from the floor and directed them appropriately. They are all represented here:

* Why is development / growth ‘inevitable’?
*SM NPPF encourages growth. E has the facilities to support housing, it is identified as such by MSDC which has to find sites for housing as directed by Government. Plus there is a large brownfield site in the middle of the village.*
* The increase in rail freightfrom the Felixstowe / Nuneaton expansion scheme makes the Station Road crossing an increasing problem. Meetings in the early days of the scheme spoke of ‘down the line’ projects, to deal with consequential problems. Surely this is one such?
*JJ A RR is essential. A NP offers an opportunity to address this as a key factor.*
*PD There was talk when the RR was first mooted under JG Land, the previous owners, of a contribution from the Haven Gateway Partnership, the umbrella organisation for the Felixstowe – Nuneaton scheme. This was revisited in discussions re the Village Plan in 2012, since abandoned in favour of the NP. It is one of the sources of funding which could be added to developer contributions towards realising a RR if that is what the NP identifies as what is wanted / needed.
SM NP is the only way around the crossing problem which can only get worse.*
* What is the situation re BF in relation to how long a NP will take before it is in place?
*PF NP will take 18 months – 2 years. Meanwhile it carries no weight against the Developer argument of, ‘prematurity’, which Government seems minded to support.*
* Is the only way to get infrastructure via housing?
*DS The days are gone when there was Government money for by-passes etc. Now developer contributions form the core funding for infrastructure. A NP identifies priorities and could safeguard the route of RR.*
* The traffic pressures of more housing on top of the pressures on Ashfield Road poses an appaling prospect. Most RR support come from people south of the railway.
*SM As an Ashfield Road resident I see the RR as being best for the village as a whole. A lifting of the HGV ban on A1088 would help and this should be in the NP.*
* The RR seems to be a consistent theme, but the BF development will happen before the NP has effect
*JJ Yes, we are planning for the future. Meanwhile current policies maintain.*
* We are a ‘sustainable’ village, but for how long if we keep having houses piled on us?
*DS It is all about balance and a NP can prioritise and make best use of the developer contributions available
JF E is a large rural community & attractive to developers who have a fair chance of succeeding under the constraints of current policies, eg NPPF, which are pro-growth. You are a prime target in Mid Suffolk. You are right to be nervous about the level of development needed to support a RR, but that development will come anyway – MSDC can’t say ‘no’. E needs muscle via a NP. There is currently no policy including a RR. NP could provide that. The reality of Government policies must be managed or development will simply be done to you.*
* How will the SG work?
*GB It takes the form that the volunteer members see as appropriate.
PF 10 – 12 people linking with other volunteers / working groups who can help with specific aspects.*
* It took Stowmarket a long time to get a RR, bridge etc. EPC / MSDC must be honest about the number of houses necessary...hundreds and hundreds...we wouldn’t recognise this community. The whole process is hung up on a RR being achievable. The new RR does nothing for Stowmarket.
*SM Of course the E of the future won’t look like the E of today. The housing is inevitable. It is far better if we manage this change through our NP.
JF Stowmarket can in no way be compared with E in Planning terms. The vast majority of housing in Mid Suffolk is targeted at Stowmarket. Developer contributions are not the only source of funding and NP puts components in place allowing for appropriate funding and land allocation. It is grossly mis-reading the situation to assume growth at the level of Stowmarket. This could not happen within the MSDC District Plan.*
* There must be provision for appropriate housing for older residents – a retirement complex or similar.
* Are the terms of reference of the SG set in advance? What about Policing problems as the village grows?
*PF The group is formed with help & advice fromm MSDC / CAS. Policing would be one of the legitimate factors for the NP to take into account.*
* We need an honest appraisal of what might happen to E if it does not take the opportunity to have some control...how many houses would we end up with?
*JF Numbers are difficult. The NPPF and recent economic trends have rendered earlier constraints & assessments meaningless – Regional Housing Targets have been swept away. E remains an extremely attractive prospect for developers – it is a magnet.
JJ JG Land looked at the RR aspiration and had it professionally costed at £3.5m. These costings are being professionally updated. Meanwhile, if a developer sees a sustainable location and no policies, the developer wins. In a recent case 30 houses as initially proposed became 200 with very little infrastructure because there was no Planning policy to stop it.*
* How do we gauge the views of the whole village – not just this meeting?
*GB The SG constructs the questionnaire which goes out to everyone.*
* There have been no new ideas tonight, just lots of talking amongst just 100 people. There is a small cabal with no open forum and nothing will change. At the next general election all the policies will change. We will need 1,000 houses to pay for a road.
*GB Others will be involved in the process as it develops.
JF The public referendum at the end of the process requires consensus for there to be the majority needed for the NP to succeed. This is the safety net which should reassure sceptics.*
* It is imperative that the NP process is begun or we have no opportunity at all of controlling our destiny.
* Does the ‘development envelope’ still exist?
*DS Yes in the 1998 Local Plan. A proportion of the BF is inside it, but any new boundary could be set by the NP.
JJ Developers will argue ‘sustainability’ via the NPPF and development could ensue without further control unless the community establishes a NP.*
* Where will the process capture the views of young people?
*SM This is most important. Schools will be involved and there may well be a questionnaire seeking the specific views of young people.
PF As an example, Mendlesham’s SG had sessions in their school designing the village of the future and parents joined in.*
* The TV programme, ‘The Planners’ shows Planning officers as running scared of the Appeal process and running scared of developers. This does not inspire confidence.
*SM This is far removed from an accurate representation of the real process as witnessed at MSDC.*

9 GB Reminds all present that their comments are invited on the response sheets issued prior to the meeting and that full contact details are on that sheet for subsequent comment / question or volunteering towards possible involvement.

10 DBa The NP process has started and the input and participation shown tonight is encouraging. There is more to the exercise than just, ‘do we want a RR?’ There are exciting possibilities for appropriate development. Development will happen anyway given E’s designation as a Key Service Centre. The NP process allows community input to and control of that development.
Thanks to all concerned, both public and the professionals who have dealt with the questions. It is to be hoped that all will go away and encourage others to become interested and involved.

11 Close at 9.10pm.

Peter Dow

Clerk to EPC
11.03.14