**FNDP Steering Group** Minutes of meeting (via video link) 14-04-21, 4.30pm

Present: David Cornish (chair) Roland Cundy Graham Jukes

Andy Pearce Roger Marshallsay

Allan Gibson Pauline Grainger

AGENDA

The following summary from AG, of the current FNDP position, will constitute the sole agenda item for the meeting of the Steering Group next Wednesday 14th at 4.30pm.

DC and AG sent Liz Alexander the substantive Reg 14 responses and then met with her via Zoom on Thursday. The purpose of that meeting was to:

* Report on our meeting with WBC
* Undertake a strategic milestone assessment taking into account:
  + the Reg 14 responses
  + the demise of Grazeley and WBC’s need to revisit their LPU, find alternative sites, undertake a further public consultation
  + potential changes to the national planning context which the government has been signposting
* Discuss how to respond to the more substantial Reg 14 submissions and complete the work for our Consultation Statement
* Consider the potential impact of adjustments to the project timeline

The consultation with Liz was helpful. The big issue, of course, was whether we should adapt our plan to include site allocations in the light of the indications given by James at our last meeting.

Liz advised that we were faced with a key decision. She stated that we could choose not to identify any sites in our plan and argue that we were in conformity with the existing local strategic plan. However, it was clear from what WBC were indicating that such an approach would not be in conformity with the likely approach that the strategic authority would be taking. If we took this course she said that we might get our plan through but it would have ‘short shelf life’ and would be overtaken by WBC’s LPU. We would lose the benefit of identifying our preferred sites and would be at greater risk of sites being imposed on us.

The alternative approach was for us to consider including sites in our plan. This would require us to review the call for sites work we did over a year ago, taking into account any new sites/ new information identified through the Reg 14 consultation. We would need to demonstrate an evidence-based, policy-informed, decision making process. We would have the benefit of our developed suite of policies in the FNDP. If we did this, it would require us to write up the methodology in a topic paper and undertake a further focussed Reg 14 consultation [advice that James also gave us].

AG pressed Liz to come off the fence and to give her view about the best way forward. She came down on the side of including our own sites as this would give us more influence and extend the shelf life of our plan.

Liz stated that we should be putting pressure on WBC to give us an indicative figure of what the parish would be required to accommodate in terms of additional housing numbers for the planning period. She referred us to paragraphs 65/66 of the NPPF which states that the strategic authority should provide this information to the local planning body. This is something we will need to follow up - James mentioned ‘more than 50’, a very loose and non-committal statement, in our last meeting.

Liz described our Reg 14 submissions from developers as typical of what they invariably say in response to NDP consultations. She was quite relaxed about them and stated that we did not need to respond to individual submissions but needed to show how we considered and responded to feedback.

From our discussions, it became clear that there would be slippage in the project timeline - maybe in the order of 6 months if we undertake a further focussed Reg 14 consultation.

DISCUSSION

DC commenced the discussion by advising the group that a decision was required as to how to move forward with the plan following the further information provided by LA as above. There is a full Parish Council meeting tomorrow evening and it is important that a decision is carried to the meeting.

He advised that it seems there are three actions to be considered:

* Review the objective of the FNDP
* Agree a strategy
* Tactics to influence the strategy

DC believed the objective of the FNDP was to protect green spaces and gaps and he felt the best way to do this was to work with WBC and agree a housing allocation to ensure our plan aligned with the WBC LPU but accepted there was sensitivity around this in respect of the residents if we change course.

The discussion raised the following points:

The housing needs of Finchampstead have not changed and Finchwood Park still covers these needs so the problem lies with WBC and not Finchampstead – Finchampstead is delivering the homes it needs through Finchwood Park and Gorse rejuvenation. Finchampstead has more houses than it needs.

The “brown group” have looked at some sites previously discussed when they did a review of the WBC call for sites and felt there were sites which could be offered up; if nothing is offered WBC will impose.

Offer up one large site to offer alignment with WBC LPU to ensure a smooth passage for the plan.

One large site would create issues but in only one area, specifically traffic.

Small multiple locations would cause less impact on the Parish and residents overall.

Not advisable to pay a professional for advice and then ignore what they say.

Acceding to WBC demands is letting the residents down and we need the community to support a plan for it to get passed and adopted.

If WBC turns the plan down they are going to have to give reasons why and specify a housing allocation. We shouldn’t voluntarily offer up sites.

It would be unpopular to produce a plan that has a shorter shelf-life than the time taken to produce the plan.

LA’s advice was to include a housing allocation. We would be in control of sites for development and the intention of the plan was never to stop more housing but to direct where it should go. Infill, backfill etc could provide the number of homes required and this would be consistent with our policies. This is presented to the residents as a necessity.

There is an inevitability of settlement boundaries being extended or new settlements formed if we agree now to additional housing.

Write to WBC advising we will not change our plan to include a housing allocation and wait for a response; this could cause a long delay. It could however illicit a formal reply rejecting our plan. A formal rejection is required to enable comfortably going back to the community with a revised plan with a housing allocation.

Alternatively meet with WBC and argue strongly for provision of the number of houses they will require in Finchampstead. Concern they are no more likely to give a number under these circumstances than at meeting with them a few weeks back. There was always a risk there would be a requirement for new houses and if we push too hard /too soon we might be given a “precautionary figure” rather than an exact figure for new homes.

WBC is accelerating their consultation on local green spaces so we should do something quickly. If we offer resistance perhaps they would steer a course of least resistance away from us.

Strongest case for a successful FNDP is to work with WBC

As far as residents are concerned we are not doing anything wrong putting in a housing allocation – we are within the bounds of the broad brush plan; the plan is not to stop development but put it where residents want.

By including additional housing allocation we are not sticking to plan as presented in Reg 14 consultation. It would require a repeat of the Reg 14 consultation and this would expose changes. Inclusion of sites will entail going through most of the processes again.

Push ahead with plan as is because if it gets through it puts us in a stronger position to argue our case in a public enquiry if WBC force housing on us. We have strong policies to counter additional settlements /extension to existing settlements and should stick to what we’ve done.

Advised by a planning officer that under new planning regulations NDP’s are not going to carry the weight that was intended 3 or 4 years ago.

Whatever action we take there is a lot more work involved and there was a concern that volunteers are going to move away from project. GM has indicated he no longer has the time for FNDP due to the growth of other charitable/voluntary work. Thought that if we have to re draft, re issue, re consult more volunteers will fall by the wayside.

General acceptance that there will be the requirement for more houses at some point but the meeting disagreed on when that was. Some felt it should not be now.

Addition to the plan of a site will give 2 years protection against housing supply; there only needs to be a 3 year housing supply as opposed to five years.

If meeting agrees to a housing allocation would need to consult with Parish Council and PMG on basis;

* need more house (demise of Grazeley)
* how many are we prepared to offer
* how can we get residents to understand this is a WBC directive and not the choice of the FNDP team

There was a suggestion to ask Parish Council to make decision on way to proceed but overall it was felt that was the role of the SG. It is a resident’s plan and the PC are there in the capacity to advise via SG.

DC summarised by posing the following question, in order for the meeting to make a decision which could be relayed to PC tomorrow and the PMG next week.

Do we submit plan as it is or accept inevitability of more housing and introduce a housing allocation now to the plan?

The decision, by 4 votes to 3, was to amend the plan according to the feedback from the Reg 14 consultation and then re submit to WBC without a housing allocation.

Meeting closed 17.55pm

Signed as a true record of the meeting: ………………………………………… Date:…………………………