

East Dean & Friston Neighbourhood Plan



Shaping East Dean, Friston, Birling Gap and Crowlink for the future

Minutes of a Meeting of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held in the East Dean and Friston Village (Small) Hall on Monday 9th January 2023 starting at 6.30 pm.

NPSG Members Present: Cllr Michael Bustard (NPSG Chairman and Parish Councillor), Cllr Chris Lees (Parish Councillor), Cllr Hollie Milligan (Parish Councillor), Peter Williamson and Gina Zelent.

In attendance: Alison Eardley (Planning Consultant), Cllr. Paul Seeley (Parish Council Chairman), Cllr. Philip Hill (Parish Councillor) and Debbie Picknell (Administration Officer)

Apologies: Lesley D'Urso (NPSG Vice Chair and Residents' Association Chair), Cllr G Fowler (NPSG member and Parish Councillor) and Jonathan Timberlake (NPSG member).

No members of the public were present.

MB thanked everyone for attending and asked them to introduce themselves to Alison Eardley who was invited to the meeting to give a presentation. She is a very experienced Neighbourhood Planner and has been involved with more than 80 Neighbourhood Plans.

MB advised members that some in attendance may be hard of hearing and asked everyone to bear this in mind when speaking.

- 1. Minutes of the previous meeting** - The Minutes of the meeting held on the 14th November 2022 were confirmed and signed by the NPSG Chairman.
- 2. Declarations of Interest** - None
- 3. Civility and Respect Pledge** – The Pledge was signed by NPSG members present if they had not already done so.
- 4. Presentation by Planning Consultant**

AE thanked the NPSG for inviting her to the meeting. She advised that she is an independent town planner, has worked in planning for 15 years, previously in local government, economic development and moved to the Civil Service working on local government strategy in what was The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In the third sector she worked with communities on town and parish planning. She lives in Kent and works with towns, parishes and groups across the whole of the South of England.

AE advised members that in 2011 The Localism Act came along and that saw the beginning of Neighbourhood Planning as a tool to give local communities teeth within the local planning system.

She gave a PowerPoint presentation which covered background to the planning system and an introduction to Neighbourhood Planning and how this may apply to the Parish of East Dean and Friston.

AE advised members that a Town or Parish Council can influence what happens in 'Planning' by lobbying for policy change at a national level, actively taking part in the South Downs Local Plan process, developing a Neighbourhood Plan (writing your own policies) and proactively inputting into the planning applications, quoting the policies and monitoring outcomes. She suggested members keep a good dialogue with stakeholders such as the Local Planning Authority Officers, local landowners and developers. to be aware of what may be happening in the area.

AE advised there are different policy levels.

Top level: are two main planning frameworks operating in England.

- The Planning Act (2008) only relevant to very large scale developments (e.g. solar farms and national infrastructure projects).
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which is more relevant to Neighbourhood Planning. It is a document developed by government used for most planning decisions. Focused on delivering sustainable development it provides guidance on the development of local plans and neighbourhood plans.

The NPPF document aims to ensure that any development balances its environment impacts against its social impacts with a particular focus on the economic impact. This document and the present government is pro house building.

Next level down: is the Local Plan which must conform with the rules in the NPPF document in terms of green belt, design and supply of homes.

AE advised that there are 3 pillars of sustainability – Taking into consideration the environment, local community and the economic benefit and sways toward the economic side.

The Local Plan is a document developed by the District Council, Borough Council or National Park Authority which sets out the development they anticipate happening over a 20/30 year period in their area.

Local Authorities have to produce Local Plans which have to be up to date, some are not which is a national problem. The Local Plan **must conform with the policies/rules set out in the NPPF** and sets out how development happens at a more local strategic level.

AE advised that this Parish is fortunate to have the South Downs National Park Authority as its direct Local Planning Authority as the SDNPA has an up to date award winning Local Plan which is being updated.

She advised that neighbouring Wealden District Council is in the early stage of developing a Neighbourhood Plan as their previously adopted plan is out of date.

AE advised what is **not** included in the Local Plan are services like health, education and highways which are the responsibility of other agencies. East Sussex County Council is the highways authority, for the non-strategic roads network and the education. Primary Care Trusts and GP's have their own modelling systems for health.

She advised that 'Planning' is about land use policy and planning applications for land designation.

Lower level: is the Localism Act that came out 10 years ago and introduced a new planning document called the 'Neighbourhood Plan' with the idea that communities should have a say in how their area is developed and a say in policies that influence and shape development. AE advised that you can add additional local detail that may not be included in the National Policy or the South Downs Local Plan.

Any policies within the Neighbourhood Plan have to conform with all National policy and the strategic policies of the Local Plan i.e. all the levels above.

AE advised that there is no legal requirement to produce a NP but it is obligatory for the SDNPA to produce a Local Plan and update it to conform with National Policy.

AE advised that there is an algorithm at national government level as to how much housing that ideally should be delivered in a local community area called 'An Objectively Assessed Housing Need' and based on the forecast of population, migration, jobs and the house market for the area.

She advised that the current South Downs Local Plan for East Dean and Friston states: -

- Policy SD25 (Development Strategy) development is supported in East Dean and Friston (Dip Slope), in accordance with various criteria.
- Policy SD26 (Supply of homes) The National Park Authority will make overall provision for approximately 4,750 net additional homes over a 19 year period between 2014 and 2033. EDF considered appropriate for approx. 11 dwellings (which have been met already, so **there are no allocations in the local plan**). NDPs will be supported to deliver additional housing, where this is assessed as suitable and appropriate.
- Policy SD47 (Local Green Spaces) Designates The Horsefield and Went Way Allotments as Local Green Spaces.

AE advised that there has been a 'Call for Sites from the SDNPA and any proposed sites would be graded based on availability and suitability. When asked if the number of properties supplied in the area could change she advised that it is too early to know and this will depend on whether the provision for additional homes across the SDNPA is being met in neighbouring areas. The SDNPA already has their strategy for supply of homes in place and an up to date Local Plan so this Parish is at low risk of development.

AE advised that if land is designated as a Local Green Space it becomes part of the Green Belt in the planning system where inappropriate development is not permitted.

The pros and cons of developing a Neighbourhood Plan were discussed.

Members asked if a Village Design Statement is enough. AE advised that a VDS is worth having as it can be referred to but it does not carry the same weight as a planning policy within a Neighbourhood Plan.

Members asked what is included in a NP and raised concerns over the length of time a NP would take to develop and questioned the benefits of a NP for this Parish.

AE gave examples of what may be included in a Neighbourhood Plan as follows:-

Housing

- Setting out where development should be directed
- Housing mix, type, tenure, affordability

The natural environment

- Identifying 'special' green spaces and protecting them in perpetuity
- Mapping out 'green/blue spaces and corridors' and identifying areas that should be improved/better linked
- Safeguarding special views and viewpoints from development
- Tackling flood risk
- Promoting sustainability – e.g. community-scale energy schemes etc.

The built environment

- Design of development - to reflect local character, include sustainable design features, wildlife friendly features
- Identifying buildings/structures that are historically important

Community facilities

- Identifying where additional provision/ expansion is needed

Getting around

- Identifying where improvements might be made to walking / cycling paths to encourage more people to walk/cycle locally – 10 minute town / village concept
- Car parking – provision, electric charging points

Local economy

- Promoting sustainable tourism
- Safeguarding important employment sites
- Supporting opportunities for flexible working / start-ups etc.

AE advised members that the SDNPA support Neighbourhood Development Plans within the Park. The Neighbourhood Development Plan has to align with strategic policies contained in the adopted Local Plan and it is important to note that the focus of NDPs is on guiding development rather than stopping it.

If any home were to be developed in the area the SDNPA would work with the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group to ensure these were delivered in a sustainable way.

Members wished to know if smaller housing units could be delivered. AE advised that this may be done in a number of ways. If done through a NP policy the allocated sites are bounded by landowners coming forward and attract development for a profit. Without a NP it can be done by finding a windfall site in a settlement area outside of the main village boundary that would not normally be developed.

Members discussed how to provide evidence for housing needs. AE advised that as part of the NP it would be possible to take evidence of surveys done by the SDNPA and there is technical support available from the government to prepare a local housing needs assessment. She advised that Action in Rural Sussex does a local survey and may be able to help.

Members discussed the possibility of a NP with a design policy that could incorporate the Village Design Statement.

Members asked if NP policy could be of improving footpaths and roads, particularly for access to Birling Gap. AE advised that any NP policy on improvement of footpaths and roads would be if sites were allocated for development. It was agreed as the road to Birling Gap was outside the Parish Boundary having a NP policy would not resolve the problem.

Community Infrastructure Levy funds were discussed and AE advised that as part of a NP for community engagement there could be a chapter on infrastructure priorities such as biodiversity or education.

AE advised that the main benefits of a NP are:-

- Adding greater detail to the Local Plan
- Allocating sites for development where there will be funding to deliver local needs and this would have to be based on evidence.

It is a lengthy process being: -

- Designate the Neighbourhood Area(April 2019) and assemble a team to lead the project
- Gather facts and evidence – including from the local community – set out vision and objectives
- Consider policies to address objectives including potential sites to deliver this
- Engage on emerging options for inclusion in the Plan
- Draft the Plan and consult on it
- Amend the Plan bearing in mind comments from the local community
- Submit the Plan to SDNPA who will consult on it a second time
- The Plan is examined and will be the subject of a Public Referendum

and takes at least 18 months to deliver, requires significant volunteer time input and costs may go above that available via grants/technical support. If there was only one policy with an updated VDS this may take less time.

In summary:

- AE suggested that the Parish Council may wish to wait to see what is in the emerging South Downs Local Plan before preparing a Neighbourhood Plan.
- She advised that funding is available if the Parish Council and the Steering Group wished to proceed with a NP.
- A Neighbourhood Plan design policy that incorporated the Village Design Statement would take less time to produce but still have to go through the same process.
- AE advised members that an alternative to cover issues not addressed in the Local Plan is to have a traditional Parish Plan which is not planning related. This would be a set of aspirations for the community.

MB thanked AE for an excellent presentation. Members unanimously agreed that she is extremely knowledgeable on the planning process and that her presentation was very informative.

AE agreed that her presentation may be circulated to members of the Parish Council and the Steering Group.

5. Next Steps

Members discussed the best way forward and agreed on the following:-

- Parish Council to arrange a meeting with the SDNPA to discuss their thoughts for planning
- Circulate the draft Village Design Statement to the Steering Group with a view to update
- Defer proceeding with a Neighbourhood Plan waiting for further information
- Members to familiarise themselves with the South Downs Local Plan policies

6. NPSG Terms of Reference

MB advised members that the NPSG Terms of Reference has been approved by the Parish Council.

7. Matters arising from the 14th November meeting and AOB

MB advised on the following: -

- The SDNPA advised that they did not have resources to support the Steering Group
- The Chair of the Parish Council Planning Committee was invited but unable to attend.
- Mr. G Johnson is unable to offer support to the Steering Group.
- Action in Rural Sussex (AirS) was approached to do a talk about their services and had not responded fully in time to help. The door however had been left open.
- Ditchling Parish Council was unable to offer a Councillor to attend the NPSG meeting.
- Rogate and Rake Neighbourhood Development Plan was adopted by the SDNPA and worthy of review.
- The Locality website is helpful and may be difficult to access.

8. Date of the Next Meeting: Monday, 20th February 2023 starting at 6.30 pm in the East Dean and Friston Village (Small) Hall, Village Green Lane, East Dean, BN20 0DR.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.40 pm

Signed.....(NPSG Chair)

Date.....