

Why are we doing a Parish Neighbourhood Plan?

As part of Wycombe District Council's (WDC) review of its Local Plan, it undertook consultation and held a drop-in event in October 2014. Consultants Tibbalds had been engaged to look at how Longwick might develop in the future, and if there was any capacity for the village to grow, what would be the best way forward for that to happen. The intention was that WDC would use the findings from this "Longwick Capacity Study" to help inform the consideration of planning applications and to feed into the Local Plan.

The consultation drew extensive and remarkably consistent comments from the community. The main response indicated that some modest additional housing could be acceptable, especially if spread across several small sites rather than concentrated on one large site. This reflected the considerable objections submitted to an application for up to 175 dwellings with access from Boxer Road and Barn Road (off Chestnut Way).

The Parish Council did not wish to see Longwick or the wider Parish change in response to speculative planning applications. A public meeting was arranged by the Parish Council on 13th January 2015 to consider whether a Neighbourhood Plan should be prepared.

Planning Officers from WDC attended the meeting to explain how a Neighbourhood Plan might assist. The meeting was very well attended: about 140 people filled the Village Hall. The Planning Officers explained that the District Council has a shortfall in its 'Five Year Housing Land Supply'. Essentially insufficient permission for housing development had been granted in the District to meet new government targets. Whilst WDC was working on reducing that shortfall, rural areas outside the Green Belt and Chilterns' Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty were particularly vulnerable to speculative planning applications.

The aim of a Neighbourhood Plan is that a community agrees a framework for development, subject to certain conditions such as new open space and amenities, improved road junctions, footways and cycle routes, and contributions to other community projects. In other words, how we would like to see the community develop, rather than development be almost imposed on us from speculative applications where we would have little influence.

Those present at the meeting gave almost unanimous support for the Parish Council to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council applied to WDC for the designation of the whole Parish as a Neighbourhood Planning Area, and after due consultation period on this, WDC confirmed the application on 2nd March.

Meanwhile WDC had published the final report of the Longwick Capacity Study. This is available from:
<http://www.wycombe.gov.uk/council-services/planning-and-buildings/planning-policy/new-local-plan/our-rural-areas.aspx>

A Steering Group was convened from three Parish Councillors and three co-opted members of the community, to carry out preliminary work and make recommendations to the full Parish Council on the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Parish Council agreed to use the sites and site criteria shown in the Capacity Study for inclusion in the Draft Plan.

During March and April, the Steering Group engaged with hamlets and stakeholders. The hamlets had not been within scope of the WDC Capacity Study. A good response was received through this engagement and a summary is included in the April edition of the Neighbourhood Plan Update, available separately.

Professional support is being commissioned to assist in the Neighbourhood Plan work. The next steps are very important.

These are: Draft Plan prepared and Parish Council to consider approval in May; publication of Draft Plan and six week consultation period in June and July; revisions considered and included in Submission version of Plan; publication of Submission version by WDC and six week consultation period in late July and August; independent 'examination' in September; six week referendum period in October and November.

The process will culminate with a decision shortly after the end of the referendum period. A simple majority of those that vote will carry the day - whether the Plan is 'made' or not. If there is a majority in favour, the Plan will be made and will become part of the 'Development Plan' framework. This means that any subsequent planning applications must conform to the policies of the Plan, along with the policies of the District Council's Local Plan and other current planning policy.

The Parish Council encourages all residents and businesses within the Parish to be involved and contribute to the Plan. It realises that for some, ideally there would be no development at all. However that is not an option for us. Some development is inevitable and the Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared to help us have control over how and where this happens. It also allows us to specify where benefits need to be included with or associated with development.