

Neighbourhood plan

Looking back to chairman's reports over the past 10 years, they were meeting 4 times a year only 5 years ago.

Now we meet 14 times a year.

The increase in the frequency of these meetings is due partly to the increase in the quantity of planning applications that have occurred in the past 5 years. For a detailed list if you're unfamiliar with all the applications that we have looked at, I urge you to review the historic applications available to see on the east Suffolk website.

So what exactly are we proposing? There are a couple of options available to us. The Neighbourhood plan is a formal planning policy

"A neighbourhood plan puts in place planning policy for a neighbourhood area to guide future development. A neighbourhood plan is about the use and development of land and may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area or providing new facilities, or allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development. It may deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (such as housing, employment, design, heritage and transport) or it may focus on one or two issues only.

These may be issues that are relevant to the whole neighbourhood or just to part of the neighbourhood. It is for those producing the plan to decide on its scope and content as a planning document.

If successful at referendum, a neighbourhood plan will become part of the statutory development plan for the area. This statutory status gives neighbourhood plans far more weight than some other local documents, such as parish plans, community plans and village design statements.

Alternatively we could go down these routes of Neighbourhood Development Orders, Parish Plans or Community Plans. These do not have the same weight in planning decisions being made by ESC. Only a neighbourhood plan is a policy tool.

Considering the aforementioned application caseload, and what is expected to come with the new planning system and the "levelling up" of housing densities across the country, we must expect that the countryside around us will feel more and more pressure to development. Look at the billboards all along the A12 where Hopkins are begging for land to develop.

We have mentioned this before. We can either lead where we want our village to go by having a neighbourhood plan, or we can continue to respond to applications as they dribble in with low chances of successfully opposing them. Even membership of the ESPA is weakened when we haven't made steps to shore up our own defences ourselves.

The government has allocated £45 million between 2018 and 2024 to support the development of Neighbourhood plans and the uptake is understood to have been high. There will be financial aid to help us prepare the plan and ESC must help and guide us through it.

Neighbourhood plans cannot promote LESS development than what is outlined in the local plan, but it can set the timeframe for the period of development ie - 5 10, 15 or 20 years.

Skills will be crucial as will be participation. Everyone with skills in planning will be urged to come forward to participate. We will look to compile a list of local skills to help us get started. Neighbourhood planning involves leadership, project management, organisation, communication, negotiation, analysis and other skills. It also involves compromise, consideration of differing viewpoints and collaborative working. Listening is a key skill. Establishing a balanced team of people with different skills should be the aim.

The largest challenge will be building the evidence. This comprises assessments of housing and development needs, analysis, reports, policies and strategies at all levels of governance that affect us. It will take time and expertise to bring this all together and without it we are unable to apply for designations. This will take time and effort from all of us.

The production of a neighbourhood plan is undoubtedly a tremendous opportunity, but to embark on preparing a plan there needs to be a clear idea of the practical and financial implications. The advantages and opportunities previously mentioned should be weighed against the time and cost implications and other considerations to help make an informed decision.

We propose to call an extraordinary parish council meeting to fully explain the process and call on a referendum for the village to vote on whether or not to proceed. It will require a 50% yes vote to get it started.