

PUBLIC FORUM - 10TH June 2023 – PRESENTATION NOTES

Neighbourhood plans seem quite controversial, comments are 'it won't make any difference', they hold no power,

In 2011 Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister of State for Decentralisation believed:
'The time has come to disperse power more widely in Britain today- a shift of power from central government to local people and communities'.

And as such created the Localism Act 2011

Localism is the belief that services should be controlled and provided, or goods produced and bought, within a local area for the benefit of the people in that area.

New Freedoms and flexibilities for local government

New rights and power for communities and individuals

Reform to make the planning system more democratic and effective

Reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally

Neighbourhood Plan's we're not initially adopted, maybe people believed they wouldn't make a difference, but now there are over 2,000 adopted NHP.

You can make a difference, as stated in the Localism Act - people should not feel DONE TO/IMPOSED UPON but instead they should feel PARTICIPATION/ INVOLVEMENT

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That said residents need to be aware that the Localism Act does not give us carte blanche on decisions about development and housing. We cannot make random policies, NHP policies need to conform to the strategic local policies within the NPPF and the present and emerging FDC LPP

Be compatible with EU obligations..

Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development

A NHP is a formal planning document containing a number of Planning Policies. Policies that can define where new developments should take place or should not be allowed. Policies that can also describe the nature of those developments and the protections afforded to the existing built and natural environment.

These policies can also identify the key infrastructure improvements that should accompany any major development.

They can include action and advocacy as well as policies.

BUT

Policies cannot stop development

They can help in decisions as to what gets built where, they can designate local green spaces, buildings of historic, heritage value, and assets of community

value. The NHP would enable our community to identify projects and proposals that it would like to see delivered in the coming years.

Once adopted, planning applications will have to take account of policies contained within the NHP. It will provide local people with a say in how land use and buildings can develop over time, such as protecting open spaces, heritage buildings and improving local character.

The village of Sutton produced their NP in 2017 – theirs contained 12 Local Policies which ranged from:

- Protecting and maintaining features of landscape and Biodiversity Value
- Land Development Specifications
- Protecting existing services and facilities

Parson Drove produced their NP in 2019 containing 5 main policies:

- Housing Growth
- Scale of Housing Development
- Affordable Housing
- Maintaining Separation of the Parishes
- Road and Pedestrian Safety

Whittlesey and March have also recently produced NP's that are being adopted by Fenland District Council once adopted their NP's run alongside FDC's Local Planning Policies.

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A small group local residents volunteered to help and applied for a Government grant via Locality, this was granted in late 2022 and then the Phase 1 began. Our neighbourhood area was designated by FDC and our Steering Group began work in earnest to create a NHP. The public survey was delivered to every household in the Parish and available online for those that wish to complete it through media, an information event was held in the village hall and a second consultation event showing consolidated results of the survey.

We are now well into Phase 2 having completed a local survey and collated the results, we are here today to gather your views about the Vision, Aims and Aspirations for your local Parish, we are also in the process of identifying and contacting local stakeholders and businesses to identify their views, aims and aspirations for both their businesses and the Parish's future. From this we will prepare a draft NHP which will take us through to Phase 3

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The data gathered at various events helps to evidence local resident's views, aims and aspirations before a draft NHP is started.

We have enlisted the help of a consultant who has been involved in the preparation of a number of NHP which have been developed by small villages and towns. Once the evidence has been gathered she will then put together the draft NHP and this will be submitted to local residents for consultation, this is over a period of 6 weeks. Any comments after this period will need to be

reviewed and if needed changes made to the draft NHP - if major changes are made then we would have to repeat the consultation again.

Stage 4 is to submit the completed NHP to the FDC, this will be checked by the Strategic Planning Team to ensure that it contains all the necessary information to be published.

Then FDC will publish the NHP for a further 6 week consultation. Once this has been completed the NHP will be sent for external examination.

Stage 5 – Independent Examination

Once examined by a suitably qualified independent examiner a decision will be made and if the NHP meets all basic conditions it will proceed to the next stage.

Stage 6 – Referendum and Adoption

Local residents will decide whether the NHP should be used in making planning decisions by voting 'YES' or 'NO'. If the plan gains 50% of votes for 'YES' then the council will adopt the plan at the earliest possible opportunity. Making the NHP part of the development plan for this area, it will then be used in conjunction with the FDC's Local Planning Policies.

So we are here today ask for your views on the following aspects of the NHP so far, there are a few sections for us to explain to you and we would ask that individuals jot down any questions they would like to put forward at the end of the presentation.

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The vision for the Parish

*(Question 19 – How would you like our village to be described in 15 years' time?
– Accessible 35% - Affordable 30% - Attractive 80+% - Prosperous 38% - Safe 85% - Tranquil 50% - Traditional 48% - Vibrant 19% - Unchanged 17%)*

Responses were:

Friendly, welcoming, community spirited

A nice relaxing village which is not too busy with traffic

A nice, quiet, safe, peaceful place to live

Innovative in forward planning

Our flora and fauna should be protected, creating a happier, healthy lifestyle

Sustainable with good access to the countryside

Keep our village a village, not supersized

Desirable place to live

More social activities

Inclusive with a friendly community

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Planning Policies to be addressed in our NHP

The following sections are the aspects of our NHP policies that we would

like you, the local residents to comment on, to give your views, your aspirations so please jot down any questions that you would like to put to the Steering Group at the end of this presentation, or alternatively message anyone of us at a later date.

Rural Character

Rural - the natural environment (landform, flora and fauna), the cultural environment (field patterns, historic buildings), aesthetic and perceptual qualities (views, tranquillity) a sense of place. These are things that an NHP needs to preserve.

Our local survey and open events highlighted, by those that responded/ attended, they are passionate about the rural character of our villages', those that have lived here all their lives and those that have chosen to move here do so because of the rural environment.

Biodiversity

(The different kinds of life you'll find in one area –animals, plants, fungi and even microorganisms)

A very, very poignant issue here within our rural environment. Erosion of natural habitats within local area is of major concern to many of the local residents. It is imperative that further development enhances Biodiversity, providing habitats for the wildlife, natural corridors and spaces. Destruction of hedgerows, ploughing up of acres of agricultural fields and the felling of mature health trees impacts on the ecology of our landscape and its natural heritage.

Not just the impact of development at ground level has effect on the natural ecology, light and noise pollution has as much of an impact on habitats as other aspects of development.

There are a large number of arable assemblage farmland birds as well as grassland birds within our area:

Corn bunting

Curlew

Grey partridge

Lapwing

Tree sparrow

Turtle doves

Yellow wagtail

Owls

Bats (all species are protected under the EU Protected species license)

Birds of prey

Within local ponds, both natural and manmade, dykes, ditches and water ways there have been sightings of:

Great Crested Newts (also protected)

Water voles (also protected)

Protected trees around the village helps maintain the history of our area and

this is another issue that can be addressed through policies.

Planning applications now require that an ecological survey and assessment is done of the area to be developed, the Environment Act of 2021 makes biodiversity net gain mandatory for all but small sites. Net gain – means contributing at least 10% towards the recovery of nature, making sure that at least 10% of the natural habitat for wildlife is in a better state than it was before development.

Non-Designated heritage assets

Historic features, buildings and ROW that need to be protected. The impact of development which harms the historic character, the natural environment, the open views and our villages' identities should be questioned and protected.

(Question 8 – 90% +)

Heritage preservation

Historical features

Without them our villages' would lose their character

(Wendy's presentation)

Value is shown by listing buildings and areas of outstanding significance that need protecting.

We have a list of buildings and structures that have been formally listed, eg Angela's thatched cottage, Stonea Camp etc

It is essential that the location and design of new development pays regard to our historic buildings and structures.

Born in Lincoln with a huge number of historical assets then moving to a new town with very little to no heritage assets. Retirement drove me to a more peaceful, rural setting and lockdown left me exploring the village as part of daily exercise.

But there are many buildings and areas in the village that are of significant historical interest that are not listed. It is important that we don't restrict anyone's property by listing them but these can be noted in our NHP as NON-DESIGNATED heritage assets.

By compiling a list of non designated assets for our plan our views on what we feel are important assets to the village will be taken into account when making planning decisions.

There are many houses with dates or designations on the front of them. These are not listed but have historical importance to our village. Many have modern extensions to the rear but their front facades have been respected and valued by their owners. They are an important part of the character of our village.

We have houses and structures that used to be local pubs, a toll house, station house, ticket office, dairy, etc

These buildings can be shown on our list of non-designated heritage assets within our NHP so they can be taken into account by the Local and District Councils and the planners.

Not just structures, we also have community facilities that need recognition and protecting too. Eg the pub, Parkfields, golf range, Parish Hall, Memorial park, etc. we can list them in our plan and ensure they are given due consideration

when any planning decision is made.

High quality design

The Steering Group have enlisted the help of AECOM to produce a Design Code and Housing Needs Assessment report that has highlighted the type of housing, the design, material and infrastructure within our community, this will be explored further later in this presentation

(Question 5 – How Important is it that new development are sympathetic to the following? Scale of surrounding buildings – 70%, Character and position of surrounding buildings – 70%, Design of the surrounding buildings 50+%, the material of the surrounding buildings 40+%, the open space character of our villages’ - 80+%)

Comments at open events raised concerns about the design of houses, excessively out of character with the surrounding area. This is another aspect of planning development that can be addressed through a NHP.

Sustainable buildings

Sustainable development means:

Of an appropriate size and location where it would support the community

Of a high design reflecting the character of the surroundings

Contributing towards community infrastructure where possible

Energy efficiency, water management, flood mitigation, SuDs

Located and designed to enable safe walking to local facilities

(Question 16 – support for alternative energy sources – solar power - 80%, wind turbines – 50+%, other sources – 25%)

Again concerns rose with regards to the large developments, large properties being out of character, inappropriate size and location, sustainable, contributing towards energy efficiency, water management and flood mitigation.

The survey and open meetings raised major concerns regarding flood mitigation, water management.

Safe pedestrian walkways are also of major importance.

Housing within the settlement boundary

The Housing Need Assessment, which will be discussed more during this presentation, highlights the type of housing that is needed within our settlement boundary. It is of importance that we retain the settlement boundary and discourage development outside of that boundary line.

ROW network including Woodman's Way

Throughout the village and close surrounding areas there is a number of different public ROW:

Footpaths (public right of way giving individuals the right to pass along linear routes over land at all times)

Bridleways (for pedestrians and horse riders as well as cyclists who must give way to people on foot or horseback)

Byways (a rural track where it is legal to drive any type of vehicle, horses, pedal bikes or by foot)

Restricted byways (for any transport without a motor)

Most of the PPROW within the Parish are footpaths, we have one designated bridleway and a few byways. The historic Woodman's Way, which circumnavigates Wimblington and March via footpaths, byways and road, taking in the open fields, flora and fauna, as well as the history and heritage of our local environment, is by far the most popular. There is a need to ensure that the open landscape is not interfered with, open views are maintained or that sufficient screening of trees, hedges, flora and fauna are re-established.

(Question 8 – 80% and Question 7 – 80% highlighted the Woodman's Way, Blue lane, Bridge Lane and Manea Road)

Community Facilities

Facilities in the Parish need to be retained and supported, new small businesses encouraged to a degree.

The main facilities regularly used are the shop/post office, the local recreational areas and sports field, the local pub but by far our local byways and ROW are the most popular facility.

Services and facilities are of value to the local community and need to be enhanced, supported and improved.

Developments should provide infrastructure which should include footpaths, street lighting and cycle pathways. *(Question 10 – 94% raised concern)*

Transportation is important within the neighbourhood area as there are limited amenities for local residents, hence the need to travel. Supermarkets, pharmacies, dentists, etc. Our local bus service is drastically reduced and we need to ensure that the roads in the Parish are safe and accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorists.

Local Green Spaces

Green spaces benefit the local community, socially, economically and environmentally. Places where informal interaction can take place, sports and physical activities, pathways connecting the village, events, growing local food (village allotments and orchards) but predominately providing attractive settings and outlooks for surrounding residents.

Question 7 – 80% agreed that green spaces should be protected because of their beauty, historic significance and wildlife value. Highlighting a number of areas that were of importance:

Current green spaces

The Woodman's Way

Blue Lane, Bridge Lane, Manea Road

Addison Road field

Parkfield and Memorial Park

All green walks and as much of the countryside as possible

Agricultural field next to March Road

Open fields, parks, walks, tree and pastures

The current green spaces and agricultural fields surrounding our village should be preserved (*Question 9 also referred to open views and historic landscape - 90% agreed*)

Historically our landscape characterisation was predominately enclosed agriculture land but this is slowly being eroded especially within the settlement boundary. It is important that local residents identify the open spaces, green space, recreational spaces and public Rights of Way.

Planning to include green spaces needs to be an integral part of the wider planning for the area. It is also important that any development maintains open spaces to enhance the visual impact of the development.

Sites of specific interest and scheduled monuments that are registered with DEFRA and as such protected, Stonea Camp and Stonea farm.

Local Business

With regards to local business development there was a strong vote against any further development, 40+%, in comparison to expansion of businesses, type of business and sustainable businesses.

The main concerns raised are the amount of heavy traffic travelling through the village, along roads that are not designed for this type of excessive heavy traffic. Also the safety of pedestrians, especially during peak times and school times, was a big issue. Even those roads with weight limits can still be used for drop off or collection of goods from various businesses. Other rural NHP's have highlighted the need to resist further development of industries that involve additional HGV or heavy vehicles preferring to support small light industries.

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Aims

Having given a brief presentation regarding the possible planning policies that could be addressed in our NHP the aims of the finished document would be as follows and it is you, local residents, which we need input, views and support from.

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Housing Needs Assessment Findings

AECOM, an independent consultancy firm, created both a Housing Need Assessment and a Design Code report.

The Housing Need Assessment is a rather long report, 87 pages, that many of you may question but it can only be based on statistic and relevant Government agency figures, it does try to give a general overall picture of the housing needs within our designated area. I will try to give a brief consolidated report on the assessment:

Privately owned homes are above average within the Neighbourhood Area, 77.4% of households with a fewer than average number of private or social rented properties.

House prices rose steadily between 2012-2021, middle priced houses peaking in 2021 at £297,000, lower quartile houses peaking at £225,000. Semi-detached properties experienced the greatest growth of 90.5%.

The study also highlights the need for different types and sizes of homes in the NA, there are a greater proportion of larger properties than in comparator areas. 1-bedroom dwellings, semi-detached and terraces are below average having a smaller percentage than Fenland and England. Yet we have a larger than average proportion of bungalows in comparison to Fenland (25.2%) and England (9.2%), the proportion of flats considerably lower than England.

Population age range in 2011 census was 45-64 – the greatest proportion, it grew slightly between 2011 and 2020. The older population, 65-84 notable increased and so did the 85+ age group but there was a decrease in the younger age population.

This reflects in the household composition, in 2021 Wimblington and Stonea had a smaller proportion of single person households than Fenland and England although the percentage of single person households aged 66+ was slightly above the national level which indicates an older skew to Wimblington and Stonea, 23.2% of total households having no children living in the household, above the levels of Fenland and England.

The study estimates that between 2022-2040 Wimblington and Stonea would be required to provide around 119.6 affordable rented houses and 82.4 affordable home ownership units.

Affordable homes in Wimblington and Stonea are unavailable especially to those on an average income unless they have the advantage of a large deposit, even those on a higher than average incomes are unlikely to afford houses.

The HNA gives recommendations regarding the various options that should be made available for First Home ownership and affordable housing in order to provide for people on various incomes. . There is fewer than average number of private or social rented properties within the villages.

AECOM modelling suggests that by 2040 there should be a greater proportion

of smaller 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings, 53.5% of development, and a smaller proportion of mid-sized and larger dwellings

Specialist accommodation for older people is currently 22 units, available for social renting. During the NHP period, 2022 to 2040 it is anticipated that the 75+ age group will increase by 201 individuals taking it to 416 by 2040. If the increase is as predicted then 50 – 78 specialist units might be required during the NHP period, at least some of this need could be met through adaptations or through ensuring that all new housing is adaptable and accessible for people with lower support needs.

This said Question 3 – type of housing shows that the local population are in favour of detached houses – 42%, then family homes – 36%, followed by starter homes – 31%

Question 4 – type of occupation shows privately owned – 82%, then affordable next at 31%

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Design Code

This is another report compiled by AECOM. Two of their consultants came and spoke to the Steering Group then took a walk around Wimblington and a drive to Stonea in order to establish the overall built aspect of our villages'. From this visit they have put together a consolidated, constructive view of the designs that should be incorporated within our area and from this we can influence the development of further dwellings.

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Heritage Assets

Wendy

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Green Spaces and Infrastructure

There is a need to identify what Green spaces there are in the village, the type of green space, the quality and the condition of the space and the value and benefit that the green space gives to the community. Once the villages' Green Spaces have been identified they need to be designated and protected.

Some of the green spaces here in our Parish are;

Parks – flexible for recreation, where social interaction can take place, local cultural events

Sports fields – supporting physical activities

PROW – enabling movement between and through areas of the Parish

Open space – providing an attractive outlook for residential and commercial

Allotments/Orchards – giving the opportunity to grown local food

Attenuation ponds – helping as part of flood mitigation

Cemetery

It is also important to ensure that further developments include new green spaces to make the area an attractive area in which to live, giving value to the local community, local environment and local economy.

The NPPF criteria has to be taken into consideration when designating Local Green Space, so we have to evidence that the local green space identified by local people are special, hold a particular significance be it historic, beauty, tranquillity, recreational value, wildlife or other reasons. So again we need input from the local residents of our Parish.