

BOTESDALE AND RICKINGHALL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - Open Meeting

Wednesday 18 January 2017

Rickinghall Village Hall

SUMMARY:

- Around 80 people attended this initial meeting to identify how the community could influence housing development in Botesdale and Rickinghall. The meeting was called by four local residents with the support of the Parish Councils. Attendees included representatives of both Parish Councils and of several local community groups and services.
- The meeting was addressed by Bill Newman, Corporate Manager Strategic Planning at Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils. Bill answered a variety of questions asked by residents (see below).
- The meeting agreed to establish a Neighbourhood Forum, including representation from the two Parish Councils. Nearly half of attendees expressed interest in being a part of a Forum for Botesdale & Rickinghall. The Forum will identify common community goals and prepare a Neighbourhood Plan which can be adopted by the District Council for inclusion in the local planning strategy.
- The two Rickinghall Parishes and Botesdale Parish were suggested as the geography to be covered by the Plan. This would allow the green space outside of built-up areas to also be included.
- The next meeting will be held at 7.30 pm on 30th January at Botesdale Village Hall. This meeting will focus on establishing Forum membership and a Steering Group, the proposed geography to be covered by the plan, and discuss the Forum Constitution.
- As well as being Forum or Steering Group members, residents can get involved in other ways. Progress will be shared using the Parish Council websites, the Parish Magazine etc.

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:

1. LOCAL PLANNING

The current planning application for up to 42 new dwellings off Garden House Lane drew considerable opposition, with no clear view of what constituted reasonable development. It was recognised that without an approved local plan and an established 5-year land supply, there could be several planning applications adjacent to the current settlement boundary, which would be considered each in isolation, without comparison of the relative merits of alternative sites. The process now available to communities of preparing Neighbourhood Plans allows for a local input into the achievement of the housing targets of the National and Local Plans, to best meet the needs of our villages.

The following points were noted:

- i. It is essential that Neighbourhood plans are consistent with national and district planning policies, since they are covered by statute.
- ii. At national level the National Planning Policy Framework document was issued in March 2012 and runs to 60 pages.
- iv. Neighbourhood Plans are the process recommended by local government for communities to influence the planning of the area in which they live and work. It can be used to develop a shared vision for the neighbourhood; choose where new homes, shops offices and other development should be built; identify and protect important local green spaces; and influence what new buildings should look like and propose proportions of affordable and social housing. There are guidance documents available to assist community forums with the process.
- v. Constraints – Neighbourhood plans must be consistent with National Guidance, the District Council’s Local Plan, and Neighbourhood Planning Regulations. To test that this is achieved the plan is assessed by the District Council, and finally put to a local referendum to ensure that it is representative of the whole community. Over 50% of voters in the referendum must vote for the Plan for it to be adopted.

2. MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL LOCAL PLAN

i. The District Council is required under law to provide for development. At district level the last approved Local Plan was issued in 1998, and identified a settlement boundary round the villages where sites within the settlement could be considered for development. There were few significant potential sites, as illustrated by the limited development that has occurred since then. Several strategy documents have been approved by MS District Council in preparation for the issue of a new local plan. There is currently a strategic housing land availability assessment underway in response to a request to landowners to identify land they deemed suitable for consideration for development. In Botesdale and Rickinghall, this identified four large sites adjacent to the current settlement, assessed in combination to potentially yield up to a maximum of 320 dwellings.

ii. A new Local Plan being developed by MDSC, to provide for housing needs for up to 15 years. The evidence base for this plan will be completed by end of 2017 and include housing need, land capacity etc. A Neighbourhood Plan for Botesdale and Rickinghall, even one in preparation, would be taken account of by MDSC in developing the Local Plan.

3. QUESTIONS

A variety of questions were asked and answered, including:

- The availability of land can be surveyed. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment identifies sites of over 2 hectares. A smaller site survey is underway and will be published in

2017. The Plan needs to be realistic and reflect land likely to be made available by Landowners.

- It is likely to take at least 18 months to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, but it depends to some extent on the level of support and action from local residents and other organisations. MSDC will allocate a Senior Planning Officer to advise on the Plan development.
- Grants are available to fund professional consultancy support, and the Forum will look at applying for funding as an early action.
- Sustainable infrastructure is key to a realistic Plan and one of the 4 tests includes a Sustainability Assessment.
- The Plan must provide for a 5 year supply of housing, and if it doesn't the District Council still has a duty to deliver a 5 year supply over and above what is in the Plan. What constitutes reasonable 5 year development will need to be determined in developing the Plan, and depends on a variety of things including supporting infrastructure, access to transport etc. MSDC are currently finalising a Strategic Housing market Assessment which will help. The villages can also repeat the Housing Need Survey last carried out by the Parish Councils. The Plan may need to be refreshed every 5 years.
- Residents noted that affordable and social housing was needed in the villages. A % of development to be affordable or social housing can be included in the Plan, and stipulations on future disposal of eg shared ownership housing can be made. It was suggested that working with Housing Association/s would be useful.
- The success and utility of Neighbourhood Plans was discussed. In MS and Babergh, 16 are under development, 2 have been agreed with a further due to go to referendum. Mr Newman knew of only 1 that had been abandoned. A recent High Court case concerning East Bergholt shows that Neighbourhood Plans can be successful and have legal standing.

4. STAGES OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN DEVELOPMENT (from CPRE guidance)

- a. Getting Started – understanding the process and the constraints
- b. Identifying the issues – economic, social and environmental
- c. Develop a vision and objectives – from key National Planning Policy Framework, and Local Plan Policy Objectives
- d. Develop the Sustainability Framework (Objectives and Criteria)
- e. Generate Options – Appraise the options using the Sustainability Framework
- f. Draft your Neighbourhood Plan – Appraise the draft policies using the Sustainability Framework
- g. Consultation and Submission – Prepare the Sustainability Appraisal Report

- h. Independent Examination – by Mid Suffolk District Council
- i. Referendum and Adoption