

Neighbourhood Planning Community Engagement Feedback

What

The Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group (NPSG) hosted the first community engagement meeting, aiming to: inform about neighbourhood planning; provide feedback on the NP survey results; explain how we are going to complete the NP; and to engage with and seek support/volunteers from the community to help us get there.

When

The event was held at 7pm on Wed 13 Sep 23 in the Hall at Weyhill Fairground. Officially it started at 7pm (several attendees arrived early) and the event closed at 9pm (a little later than intended because of the significant community engagement). Light refreshments were available and popular.

How

The event was hosted by Diana Stephenson, Chair of the NPSG and APC councillor. Clare Hemmings and Tim Grimshaw helped organise the event. In addition to the NPSG, several APC councillors attended, including APC's Chair, Chris Harris. The CEO of the Hawk Conservancy used the opportunity to seek responses to their survey and to engage with the community (an observation from the survey feedback)¹. In addition, 27 from the community attended.

We avoided a formal presentation, and this proved to be the right approach but does not preclude doing so subsequently. The *one-on-one* format at the boards meant that people interacted more, as it was not as daunting as the 'stick your hand up' approach and avoided the 'us' and 'them' perception. Whilst the nature of the evening was informal, a loose structure was provided by 'stands', run by the NPSG and its' consultant, Sharon De Bru from Bluestone Planning, welcoming people to the event, and covering survey feedback, issues and next steps. Survey materials and other information 'boards' were displayed on boards or loose on the table for people to browse. These materials will be displayed on the APC website.

The signing-in sheet records the attendance. Feedback was gathered through 'post-it' comments; an unabridged record of the feedback is at Annex A. A hot wash up from NPSG and APC attendees contributed to this record.

¹ Engagement with the Hawk Conservancy at the event, particularly regarding their business needs and their conservation work, helped inform how we could incorporate this into the Neighbourhood Plan.

Overview

- The evening was very well attended, and everyone was positive and engaged; it showed good progress in engaging with the community. The planning consultant advises that the turnout was higher than many similar sized parishes elsewhere. Attendees seemed pleased with the way that the Weyhill community was being included and were happy that the Steering Group had taken this approach. The informality of the event worked well, particularly when we got access to the additional space in the main hall.
- The primary discussions were regarding housing, views, local green spaces and next steps. The focus was largely on Weyhill, with most attendees living in this area. As the survey responses showed, Weyhill residents are concerned at potential housing developments in the village. Some people still believe it's something 'being done to us' and the NPSG must emphasise that we're all working together to produce a good Plan which will help shape the future but also protect certain spaces. There is some historical belief that Amport Parish Council does not consider Weyhill to be part of it (and to a lesser extent, the PC is not engaged with East Cholderton); wider engagement by the PC, including through the NP, must specifically aim to improve this perspective. The recent addition of a Weyhill resident on the Council is a positive move in this regard.

Housing

- There is a degree of alarm amongst Weyhill residents that the process is going to *dump* a huge housing allocation on Weyhill. This comes from the constant reference to the pieces of land in the TVBC SHELAA and to the Borough-wide housing target of approximately 6,000 units, all of which is taken by Andover and Romsey towns.
- Some confidence was provided by explaining that SHELAA sites identified in TVBC's Local Plan are there purely to highlight those areas that landowners and developers would, in an ideal world, wish to see developed. However, this does not mean they will be, and every other Parish also has a similar plan with several developers and landowners doing exactly the same. Every Parish will be in the same position. These plans can be seen on the TVBC website².
- Some have suggested that we need to expand more on the rural housing need, which - as a rural Parish with rural settlements - is where our focus should be; the NPSG should consider whether this could feature more strongly at the next event. Our planning consultant advises that if a parish of this size is to allocate housing (in keeping with other similar-sized Neighbourhood Plan areas), they would generally allocate a small development somewhere in the region of 10-50 houses up to 2040 (or roughly 5-10% of the current housing stock). Equally it may be that the Parish decide not to allocate housing; we must decide during development of the NP.

² <https://www.testvalley.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planningpolicy/evidence-base/strategic-housing-economic-land-availability-assessment-shelaa-2021-call-for-sites>

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- The Neighbourhood Plan can give protections to the area, for example through proactive consideration of where housing would be encouraged and parallel protections from allocating local green spaces and protected views, not least when it comes to poor quality applications being decided by TVBC, as well as planning appeals. In general, attendees seemed happy with the positive aspects of having a Plan in place.

Communications. The NPSG must be more proactive in its communications, for example through social media, where we have made a strong start, and on the APC website. Posting key information is essential to keeping the community informed. The NPSG should consider the planning consultant's suggestion that we open a Survey Monkey or Google Forms page to collect open comments.

Governance. The NPSG must quickly consider how the supporting governance framework is to operate: working groups, specialist groups and engagement with special interest groups such as The Hawk Conservancy.

Location. The first event was in Weyhill deliberately; the Hall was an ideal location but must be booked well in advance. Subsequent events need early forethought, communication and planning. Consideration needs to be given to whether to engage in other areas of the Parish (The Hawk Conservancy and Amport Church, for example) to encourage stronger attendance from Amport and East Cholderton.

Annex:

A. Direct feedback from the event.

Community Feedback at the Event

- Housing
 - 'I have looked at the [housing] proposals and find them hideous. Nothing can persuade me that this is a viable [development].'
 - 'The diversity of proposed development will dilute the existing rural community.'
 - 'Plot 92 – land west of Sarson Lane – can't have another 237 units next to The Hawk Conservancy; the area needs to be preserved for birds.'
 - 'The field [in Weyhill] near the railway and Amesbury Road is not suitable for housing, due to access and light pollution from Lenham storage.'
 - 'Amesbury Road is 'off grid' – no sewage, no gas.'
 - '[The NPSG should] Provide updates on how housing plans are progressing.'

- Transport/Highways
 - 'Amesbury Road is national speed limit – think about that!'
 - '[I have] Concerns re speed limits on Weyhill Road and current volume of traffic.'
 - 'The [condition of the] lane to the Hawk Conservancy needs addressing. Sarson Lane is falling apart.'
 - 'Why has local transport stopped? (little bus service).'
 - 'Protect footpaths.'