

Houghton News – March 2017

Neighbourhood Plan: step in the right direction

It is now a year since we distributed the questionnaire asking for the views of residents on a range of issues important for the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for Houghton.

The excellent response we had involved a great deal of work to analyse and digest the information gathered. Residents have also had the opportunity to respond to the draft plan made available last summer.

Since then the Neighbourhood Plan Working Party (NPWP) has been modifying the plan, writing responses to the comments made on the draft and preparing other documents that must be submitted as supporting evidence. Replying to comments made on the draft plan was a significant task and has resulted in a 70-page document providing responses to each comment made and outlining the action that has been taken as a result.

Several NPWP members have been busy over the past month editing the draft plan in preparation for submission to Harborough District Council (HDC). Three of us met recently with Helen Chadwick, Matt Bills and Nicola Parry at HDC to discuss the form of the draft plan and to obtain guidance on dealing with various uncertainties that currently plague us. We were encouraged to learn that the draft plan is considered to contain no serious flaws and is developing in the right direction.

Flaws

Before we get to the point where the plan can be sent to HDC for approval and consultation it will be sent to our planning consultant who will advise us on any remaining inconsistencies, flaws and elements that need more evidence, and help us to cast our text into formal 'planning jargon' where necessary. After a final edit the plan will be submitted to HDC, hopefully by the end of March.

Once the plan has been seen by HDC it will be publicised by them for six weeks, then sent to an independent examiner who will check that the policies are appropriately worded, that we have provided enough evidence and that the plan complies with the legalities of the Planning Law framework within which it will be used by HDC to make future planning decisions. It will then be necessary to edit the plan in the light of the examiner's comments. Finally,

all residents will be offered a chance to vote on whether to accept the plan in a referendum organised by HDC.

There is no doubt that the process of producing the Neighbourhood Plan is convoluted and takes considerable time, especially since it relies on volunteers giving their time to the task.

Rush of developers

In Houghton's case, the imminent arrival of a plan has attracted a rush of developers keen to get planning approval for their proposed developments before the NP comes into force.

Once in place developers will have to conform to the Village Design Statement which specifies the design requirements for new developments and will have to take note of the areas of the village designated for new homes. Taking a cynical perspective their current activity is being carried out in the hope that their planning applications will be approved before these constraints come into play!

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