

## Neighbourhood Plan Project Management Group

Meeting: Friends (Quaker) Meeting House 7.30pm, East Gardens, Ditchling

### Notes of Meeting Wednesday August 26th 2015

**Present:** Mike Burr, Tom Dufty (Chair), Don McBeth, Richard Flack, Tony Gedge, Tom Jones, Rob Mills (Wsestmeston), Todd Ford (Westmeston)

**1. Advance Apologies:** Amy Tyler-Jones, Trevor Kirby, Edwina Rowling

**2. Declarations of interest:** None

**3. Correspondence received/pending:** Tom reported that he had circulated the PMG with draft letters, for comment, to the owners of land and buildings offered for potential development that would not be assessed for suitability or included in the final plan because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the Local Plans. He had had substantive comments back from the representatives of Westmeston and Streat Parishes and would take these into account in a redraft. It was agreed that it was important that the letters should clearly come from the NP Project and not from individual parish councils...

**4. Locality:** Tom reported that at the request of the conservation focus group he had purchased a large scale (1:2500) digital map of the Ditchling settlement together with four A1 size print copies at a total cost of £691.08. Since this item was not included in the original Locality grant application he had obtained permission from Locality to pay for it out of the current grant allocation (£4,100) subject to giving Locality details. Locality is now open to a grant top-up application later in the Autumn if necessary.

**5. Keymer Rd strategic gap:** For information: Tom reported that outside his NP role he was leading an investigation into the feasibility of a community purchase of some of the land off the Keymer Rd. Although outside his NP role he was using the authority of the residents' response to the Household Survey 2014 to justify the attempt. The 52 acres of land had come on the market at least a month earlier than anticipated and in 3 Lots the smallest being 4.25 acres nearest to the Ditchling settlement @ c £65,000. The purpose was to conserve the land in perpetuity by putting it into the hands of an appropriate local conservation body or by creating one. This would involve raising funds. However time was running short. The agent had reported that day that an offer had already been received for the whole above the asking price; that they were waiting on confirmation of an offer for Lots 1 & 2; and hoped to complete the sale by the end of the following week.

**6.** Richard reported that the Conservation Focus Group was investigating, in a NP context, the possibility of designating some of the land as 'protected green space'.

**7. Traffic & Transport:** Tom reported that he, Mike, Don and Shirley Crowther (Ditchling

Society) had met with Andrew Lee, SDNPA Director of Strategy & Partnerships, Andy Burgess (Mgr People & Places) and Amy in Midhurst to discuss traffic & transport issues. It had been a very productive meeting and they came away with a draft copy of a guide policy document outlining the ways in which the SDNPA and Highway authorities intended to work in partnership to 'Enhance the safety and quality of roads and places in the National Park'. Key points arising from the meeting were:

- \* The ability to provide matched local funding for any highway project is a key factor in getting priority from a highway authority for 'something to be done'. It is also very important to be able to demonstrate cohesive community support for any project. The latter is particularly important for any Quiet Lane initiative.

- \* The recent formation of a local Business Consortium was a positive development because it helped to provide the economic case for 'something to be done'.

- \* The SDNPA can allocate CIL revenue out of its own pot for highway projects. However it needs costings. NB We mentioned the proposed Quiet Lanes Project for Spatham Lane, Streat Lane & Beacon Rd and the approach we had made to MSDC for discretionary allocation of its CIL funds. Although MSDC had replied positively it stressed that we needed first to talk to ESCC and obtain its agreement to conduct a feasibility study and to provide costings. The SDNPA position was the same. It was suggested that we should also apply to Brighton & Hove for discretionary CIL revenue.

- \* The SDNPA is prepared to join with us in a meeting with ESCC Councillors/officers

- \* We were offered strong advice not to major on the purpose of any project being to 'reduce the volume of traffic' because this inevitably infers offloading it onto neighbouring communities which they and the highway authority are likely strongly to resist. Instead we should major on other factors such as safety, speed, conservation inter alia the remedy for which might have the secondary advantage of reducing traffic volume.

Mike confirmed that having read the draft document it provided all the positive support needed for the T & T policies he and his focus group have drafted. In subsequent discussion it was agreed that the NP Project group would take the lead in seeking allocation of discretionary CIL revenue from developments in surrounding Districts.

Action: Mike to set up meeting asap with ESCC on the specific subject of the Quiet Lane Project.

## **8. Focus Group: Conservation Group feedback**

**8.1.** Richard reported that the focus group was now into its 4th draft report. It is progressing under two headings:

**8.2. Built Environment** This covered such things as listed buildings; archaeological remains; and registered parks & gardens It is recording these and using it as a base for producing a 'design policy' which would seek to protect them from damage by development etc. we are

currently missing an area 'design statement' and the group is trying to it itself with the help of prospective resident Delia Forester, retiring Lecturer in the Built Environment Brighton University. All the Conservation Areas within the area have had a recent Character Appraisal with the exception of Streat. One of the policies might be for example that these appraisals are completed and their recommendations implemented. The group is also looking at defining 'Character Areas' outside the existing designated Conservation Areas of Ditchling, Streat and Westmeston Conservation Areas cover the great majority of their respective built up areas, such that much of their special character is already determined by their historic nature and the individual features of each designated area.

**8.4. Natural Heritage** The group is covering this under main headings;

**8.5) Ecology & Biodiversity** Establishing ecological 'networks' for the whole plan area .and policies to preserve the integrity of the networks. However this is quite well accounted for in the Joint Core Strategy and draft SDNPA Local Plan so developing a policy won't be too difficult.

**8.5.1. Landscape & views;** This is currently lagging behind the other work. The focus group has had no help from the SDNPA Landscape Officer. A 'Viewshed Analysis' is being produced by the SDNPA and should be available from September. The focus group intends to walk the area to identify key landscapes/views. It can also call on a plethora of landscape studies by ESCC and SDNPA

**8.5.2. Green Infrastructure:** the group is focusing on open spaces that the public has access to and the need to preserve them. It also wants to see a higher level of protection applied to Local Green Spaces adjacent to important historic buildings. The group has identified 18 – 20 such spaces and assessed them against national criteria. If eventually the Local Green Spaces appear in the Plan and it is approved by the Independent Examiner it will in effect have accorded them the highest level of protection.

**8.5.3. Strategic gaps:** There is a chequered history to the concept of preserving such gaps. Independent Examiners have in some areas rejected the concept because they don't appear in Local Plans with which the NP must conform. That is the case in point with the draft Joint Core Strategy – it doesn't include a gap policy. However the emerging SDNP Local Plan does contain a provision to protect settlement gaps (Policy SD5) and we must rely on this as a foundation for our own policy to protect the gap between Ditchling and Keymer. A key message is not to refer to them as 'Strategic' gaps but to 'Local' gaps. In answer to a query as to whether such a gap could extend on the west side as far as to Fragbarrow Lane, Richard said it was necessary for the focus group to propose realistic boundaries to the gaps if they were to have chance of approval.

**8.5.4.** Todd asked whether a strategic gap policy could be applied between Ditchling & Westmeston. Richard said it would require convincing evidence of the need for a gap between the two, what the potential threats are and identification of what constitutes 'the gap' A large area of open countryside does not qualify a gap

**8.5.5.** All the available studies point to the Keymer Rd 'gap'; being the most critical and under potential long term threat.

**8.5.6.** The Cuckfield Plan provides a good example of a gap policy. The group will use it.

**Action: Richard's** focus group to continue with its work and produce a draft report for the PMG by the end of September latest

**Tom** to provide Richard with the SDNPA Landscape officer's report on the Rugby Club application

## **9. Other Focus Groups:**

**9.1. Community Infrastructure:** It was pointed out that there was once a bowling green at the bottom of Lodge Hill (alongside Boddington's Lane) now overgrown and now part of the Turner - Dumbrell Foundation land. Any chance of it being reinstated?

**9.2.** Also there does not seem to be a comprehensive list of the area's recreational assets on any website?

**9.3. Signposting:** Tom reported that the new Business Consortium was looking at installing signposts to key venues and facilities around the area. It is important that the thoughts of the focus group and the consortium should be coordinated so there is no duplication and that there is consistency.

**Action: Phil** and his focus group to consider/follow up.