

## Neighbourhood Plan Project Management Group

### Notes of the Meeting held on Wednesday January 7th 2015

**Present:** Tom Dufty (Chairman), Sallie Collard-Watson, Edwina Rowling, Mike Burr, Phil Smith, Amy Tyler-Jones (SDNPA), Richard Flack, Tony Gedge, Craig Mayhew

**1. Apologies received in advance:** Trevor Kirby & Paul Farrands

**3. Declarations of interest:** Tom declared an interest since some of his own property adjoins land farmed by Macs Farm (see agenda item 5). Craig declared an interest since his family are good friends of the owners of Macs Farm.

**5. Correspondence received/pending:** None not on agenda

**7. Expenditure and CDF unused grant repayment:** Tom reminded the meeting that the CDF grant funding came to a close at the end of 2014 and that any unused funds had to be returned to CDF and expenditure accounted for. The original grant received was £4,316 and total expenditure had been £2,839. The latter included expenditure for website hosting in 2015 and the hire of The Friends Meeting House for PMG meetings until August 2015. He had been informed by CDF that the Government's renewal of a grant funding programme was confidently predicted in April 2015 to which we could apply for a new grant to complete our work.

8. Action: Tom to submit the end of grant report

**1. Special Interest Group Engagement with Macs Farm:** Susie & Danny Macmillan, the owners of Macs Farm, together with their friend and Ditchling village resident Julie Middleton. Tom reminded the PMG that input from the residents of the three parishes had been obtained via the residents' questionnaire and that questionnaires had also been sent to public, commercial and voluntary service bodies and organisations ('special interest groups') inviting their input. Three SiGs had indicated a desire to meet with the PMG – The Museum, Macs Farm & The Ditchling Society. This was the first such meeting.

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3. Setting the scene, Tom pointed out that the PMG had no powers to approve/disapprove any future plans SiGs might have nor to reach any conclusions on their merits. These were solely opportunities for SiGs to expand on and clarify their responses to the questionnaire, to identify the issues they face and to contribute their thoughts as to what policies the plan should contain. Likewise the PMG members might gain some insights from them and their situations which could ultimately inform their policy proposals.

5. The Macmillans outlined the tentative plans that they have to diversify their business to provide an alternative revenue stream so as to sustain, economically, their organic poultry farming business. A primary objective of their proposal would be to create a more resilient farm business so that the land remains essentially 'a farm'. They aim to have 'a dialogue' with the

village as their plans develop.

7. Such plans would include visitor/tourism related activities which would include farm education courses and affordable accommodation ( Camping, Lodges, and Hostel), a Tearoom, Farm shop and Forest school on site. They were exploring options to develop a new entrance to the site adjacent to South View to reduce any potential additional impacts on residents in the vicinity of the existing entrance. The geographical location of the new ventures would initially focus on utilisation of the three fields they rent to the north of the poultry farm.

9. The emphasis would be on providing opportunities for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and the landscape in and around the farm and would be of most relevance to those living locally who will be able to access the farm on foot/ by bicycle - as well as by car or local public transport.

11. The intention would be that the ventures would be of a scale and design that is appropriate to its farm/rural setting, supported and enhanced its habitats and wildlife and provided an affordable experience that is accessible by all. They would provide the potential for job creation over time as they become established.

13. In answer to questions they said they would like to see the Neighbourhood Plan contain policies that support the diversification of farm businesses to ensure that they can survive as viable rural businesses in an increasingly competitive market environment. They would also like to see strong support for the retention of farm land for farming or farm related diversification and not for non-rural development. They would also like to see policies that support the values of the countryside and conservation of wildlife habitats.

Asked what local model they were using, if any, they said they had no one model in mind. Unlike many 'open' farms the emphasis would be on farming not on play and it would be commercial only in so far as it was sufficient to sustain, economically, the core organic poultry farming business. A key constraint on what they could do was the fact that much of the land they proposed to use was rented from a landlord who had made it very clear that he/she was unwilling to sell. Whilst this was in one sense a constraint it also meant that they could not place any permanent structures on the site or provide it with additional permanent utility services, thus underpinning the essential rural, rustic, nature of the venture.

Tom thanked them for their contribution. Both parties could get in touch with each other if more information or clarification was needed.

**Action: Tom** to provide the Macmillans and Richard Flack with a copy of Ditchling's original submission report to the National Park Public Inspector

**1. Vision Statement:** Tom asked for comments on the draft vision statement and objectives that had been prepared by the focus group leaders. The principal comments were that the vision statement was too long and lacked an inspirational quality and that the use of the verb 'provide' in one or two of the objectives was inappropriate as the plan confers no additional revenue-raising

powers on parishes to provide anything. Conservation of the values of the SDNP should be written into the vision statement.

**2. Action: Edwina and Sallie** to redraft the vision statement and objectives

4. **Focus Groups:** Tom circulated the list of members. Edwina will sit in as an observer on all group meetings to ensure consistency and a common approach. She should be copied in on all communications with groups and included when arranging meeting dates.

As to timetable it was agreed that Focus Group Leaders would attempt to:

i) make first contact with their membership by mid January

ii) hold their first meeting by the end of January at the latest.

ii) complete all meetings by the end of March latest.

**Action: Tom** to investigate potential meeting venues

**Focus Group Leaders** to contact their groups

**1. SDNPA Memorandum of Understanding:** Amy explained that following the burgeoning number of new neighbourhood plans being developed within the park it had now been decided that there needed to be a MoU between the SDNPA and each body developing one detailing the duties and role of each party. She emphasised that the SDNPA was entirely happy with the way the DSW plan was developing.

**2. Action: Tom** to sign the MoU after discussion with parish council chairmen

