

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan presentation

Stonesfield Village Hall, Monday 28 March 2022

Text to accompany the PDF file of the presentation

Phil McArdell, Chair Parish Council

The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan (SNP) Steering Group is a sub-committee of Stonesfield Parish Council as defined in section 102(4) of the Local Government Planning Act 1972.

The SNP Steering Group will develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Stonesfield in accordance with The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017. The Plan will form a significant part of the planning policy for the Parish. It will agree priorities identified by the community considering all representations made during the plan-making process, and having regard to all relevant existing plans and evidence.

Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan will be developed within the constraints of the WODC Local Plan 2031 and the National Planning Policy Framework. More about this in the presentation that follows.

The Steering Group is established having full-delegated authority from the PC to deliver the Plan up to and including publication of the draft Plan. The Group will report monthly to the PC setting out progress on its work.

The PC will approve the Submission Draft Plan prior to publication for consultation and independent examination.

Introduction to the Neighbourhood Plan presentation

Richard Morris Chair of the Steering Group.

Its great to see so many people here. It clearly shows people are interested, concerned about how our village is going to develop in the next few years. The purpose of this meeting is to introduce the Steering Group to all of you, to explain what a Neighbourhood Plan is, and how it fits with other planning legislation.

We also want to sign up as many people as possible to help with making the village Plan. I can't hide the fact that it will entail quite a lot of work, but many hands make light work.

We will give the results of the March short survey which gives a quick 'snap-shot' of what villagers are concerned about and defines the areas that we must focus on in the Plan.

Lastly, there will be ample time for people to ask questions.

Let me first introduce the members of the Steering Group

Caroline Friend, SUSTO Committee member

Alan Kendal, SUSTO Committee member

Jim Astle, SUSTO Committee member

Wendy Gould, PC representative

Simon Powell, SUSTO Committee member

Susan Rudlin, Back the White Horse committee member

Philippa Lowe, SUSTO Committee member (absent)

Richard Morris, Chair of SUSTO, former chair of Stonesfield PC

2011 Community Plan

Some of you here today may have been involved in the Community Plan back around 2010 and be wondering whatever happened to it. I wasn't part of that project and until very recently didn't really know much about it. I have recently seen the volume of work that was done. For whatever reason it wasn't taken forward, but I wanted to recognise the hard work that went into it.

There are lessons to be learnt, but sadly it is now 11 years old and the data is out of date, so we need to start again. I should also say that it was a *Community Plan* not a *Neighbourhood Plan*, and they are very different.

Why should SUSTO get involved in the NP?

In 2017 West Oxfordshire was finalizing its Local Plan. The Local Plan that would be in force until 2031. The Plan was allocating a site on the Woodstock Road for a major housing development with the potential for other sites.

- We alerted the village to the large-scale developments that could be coming to Stonesfield, most notably Cala Homes' plan to build 68 houses.
- We made representations to WODC Local Plan 2031 public inquiry, persuading the Inspector to remove large developments in Stonesfield from the Local Plan.
- Cala persisted with their planning application. We successfully campaigned against it, with massive support from residents and the PC, at a WODC planning committee meeting and at the subsequent appeal, both before a Planning Inspector and later in the High Court.
- Pye homes (now part of Blenheim) removed their application to build more houses off the Combe road as a result of the changes to the LP and Cala's failure to secure permission.
- We successfully campaigned to get Stockey Woods designated as a 'Village Green', again with great support from residents and the PC.

We see developing an NP as the next logical step for Stonesfield to have a say in how the village develops and how the surrounding countryside is protected in the years to come. We should not be in any doubt that the developers will be back when the current Local Plan ends. There is some urgency to get our NP completed and adopted before the LP expires in 2031.

This our chance to say what type of housing residents want and need, not what developers think will make them the most money.

I'm now going to ask Jim Astle to explain what a Neighbourhood Plan is.

Jim Astle

What is a neighbourhood plan?

It is a set of Town & Country Planning policies specifically applicable to a “neighbourhood” like Stonesfield.

Why is it important?

Because a Local Planning Authority must “have regard” to it in determining any planning application for development within the relevant neighbourhood.

What happens if there is no neighbourhood plan?

- A planning application for development within the relevant neighbourhood is determined with regard to the Local District Plan, national planning policy and “any other material consideration.”
- These are all matters which are highly likely to relate to any planning application within the district, West Oxfordshire, or to any planning application nationally; not Stonesfield specifically.

Is it compulsory to have a neighbourhood plan?

No it is not. Many settlements like Stonesfield don't have one.

Charlbury, Hayley, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Shilton and South Leigh do have one.

Others, e.g. Woodstock, are preparing one.

What are the advantages of having a neighbourhood plan?

Central government introduced neighbourhood plans in the Localism Act 2011, saying that they would give increased control to local communities over the kind of development allowed in their neighbourhood.

Are there limits on the extent of that control local communities gain from having a neighbourhood plan?

- Yes. Policies in a neighbourhood plan must be consistent with district-wide policies contained in the local plan for the neighbourhood: in our case West Oxfordshire District Plan.
- They must also be consistent with national planning policy, e.g. the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Therefore, for example if the local plan were to say “X number of houses will be built in Stonesfield within the period of the local plan” then a neighbourhood plan could not prevent this.
- On the other hand if Stonesfield residents wanted to allocate the “Cala site” for the building of 68 very expensive houses that could not be included in the neighbourhood plan because the NPPF, which is “a material consideration” to which regard must be had in determining planning applications, says: “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in..... AONBs.... Planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.” Moreover, this is incorporated in the local plan.
- Another example is the Cotswolds AONB “Dark Skies Policy.” The AONB policies are “other material considerations” and therefore the neighbourhood plan would have to be consistent with them so that Stonesfield could not have a policy in favour of widespread street lighting.

So why do we need one?

- Neighbourhood plans can contain positive policies which the residents of the neighbourhood want to be implemented, in addition to policies in the local plan and the national planning documents.
- When someone makes an application for planning permission in the neighbourhood, in determining it, the local planning authority must “have regard” to the “development plan.”
- Where there is no neighbourhood plan, the “development plan” is simply the local plan.
- Where there is a neighbourhood plan, “the development plan” is both the local plan and the neighbourhood plan, so the local planning authority must “have regard” to the neighbourhood plan in determining any planning application relating to land in the neighbourhood.

What kind of positive policies might a neighbourhood plan contain?

Examples of policies in other neighbourhood plans, already adopted within West Oxfordshire, include: –

- a policy designating a list of Local Green Spaces in which development will not be permitted except in very special circumstances;
- a policy requiring development proposals to have regard to design features which contribute significantly to the special character and appearance of the settlement or part of it – in Stonesfield’s case this could be its character and heritage as a one-time slate mining and agricultural community;
- a policy supporting in principle proposals which would meet a clearly identified local need for affordable housing on suitable sites;
- a policy to protect and improve existing community services and facilities such as the village hall, the sports field, the pub and the children’s playground;
- a policy to protect and enhance public rights of way;
- a policy to promote and enable safe and attractive walking and cycling routes;
- a policy that development proposals should take into account the need to maintain and enhance public transport links;
- a policy requiring all new dwellings to incorporate ducting capable of accepting full fibre broadband connections.

Where are we now in the neighbourhood plan process?

- We are right at the beginning. The Parish Council has established a steering group which is legally a subcommittee of the PC with co-opted members.
- The PC has successfully applied to West Oxfordshire District Council to designate the parish of Stonesfield as the “neighbourhood area” for the purposes of the plan.
- We are now looking to involve the community in preparation of the draft plan. This meeting and the preliminary survey we have already carried out are the first steps in involving the community.

What happens when we have drafted the plan?

- It must be submitted to the local planning authority, West Oxfordshire District Council, for it to consider and approve or reject.
- WODC must then appoint a suitably qualified “independent examiner” to consider and report on the draft plan.
- It must by law meet the “basic conditions” i.e.
 - have regard to national policies and advice of the Secretary of State;
 - have special regard to the desirability of observing or enhancing the character or appearance of any conservation area;
 - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;

- generally conform with the strategic policies in the development plan i.e. West Oxfordshire District Plan;
 - be compatible with retained EU obligations;
 - meet any prescribed conditions central government may have laid down at the relevant time.
- The independent examiner may decide to hold a public hearing where residents and others can make representations about the proposed policies.
 - The independent examiner will report and may make recommendations for modification of the plan and/or acceptance or rejection of the plan. He/she must give reasons.
 - Then the WODC must consider the recommendations and reasons and decide whether or not the proposed neighbourhood plan, modified if necessary, is suitable to be adopted.
 - If it considers it suitable, it must arrange a referendum within the neighbourhood area.
 - Anyone on the electoral roll living in the area may vote.
 - If more than 50% of those voting are in favour of the draft plan, it will then become the neighbourhood development plan within 8 weeks of the referendum.

Richard Morris report on the March survey

The short survey we have just conducted in the Slate is the first example of how we are giving residents the opportunity to say what they think about our village.

We will be conducting a much more extensive survey in the summer.

Here are the results.

160 people completed the survey, a response rate a little over 12%

141 people responded online, 19 on paper. This has a clear implication on how we run the summer survey. Whilst online will be most important, we have to give people the opportunity to complete it in paper form.

The numbers at the bottom are the number of people mentioning each aspect out of a total of 160. The following are random quotes that are representative of many respondents views.

What do you like about the village?

A friendly community, no street lights, easy access to countryside, a village school, a good mix of people, active community and sports groups, a well stocked village shop and post office.

What do you want to protect

The village pub. All remaining green spaces, footpaths and access to the countryside. A river that is 'alive' rather than dead from pollution. Our streetlight-free night sky. Our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is in danger of being lost due to constituency boundary changes. Our Library.

No further multi-residence housing developments ... The architectural integrity of an old and historic village.

What don't you like about Stonesfield

Current lack of pub Threat of more inappropriate housing Lack of affordable homes for young local people

What changes would you like to see?

Return of some light industry, affordable houses for young people, bungalows for elderly residents. No more large houses for people who don't support the local school. White Horse re-opening.

A bloody coup d'etat at the White Horse.

Caroline Friend, next steps and a call for volunteers

What will the work of developing our Plan involve?

There are **four key areas** of information we need to collect:

- Historical background
- Buildings
- Natural environment
- Sustainability

Venn diagram

And here you can see all the many aspects of village life that fall under those headings. It's a huge range, but here are just two examples:

- Landscape; employing an Independent Landscape consultant as we did for the successful CALA appeals
- Design codes; restricting building materials to those that are sympathetic to the historic old village and vernacular architecture

Preparing the Plan will involve surveys and research

- Here I'm going over the ground that Jim introduced when he described the 'positive policies' our plan could contain
- what kind of housing is there a "need" for in Stonesfield, what size, what price; and what should they look like, as well as where could they reasonably be sited
- which "local green spaces" should we list for protection from development and how do those spaces satisfy the requirements for listing: we'll need to show proximity to the community, and why they are special e.g. because of beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, richness of wildlife.
- what kind of transport links are needed to reduce private car travel – the NPPF says "all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development" including "minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy"; how might we get additional public transport provision, or at least keep what we've got?
- what support is there for the White Horse and how might its future be assured; if we can get our views into the plan, that will be strong evidence of how much we want it protected from change of use by developers
- how could we better support community facilities such as the School, the Village Hall, the playing fields, the St James's Centre;

- what demand is there for cycle tracks and how might we get them within the village and linking us to other nearby settlements;

Could you or your group help?

We are looking for people who might help with research into any of the areas we showed on our diagram, and help us draft questions for the survey. We'll probably invite volunteers to a workshop at which we'll map out the work and divide up the tasks.

Do you have any of the following skills: and here, maybe think about what you do or have done at work and also at home -

- Planning experience (Town and Country or development planning)
- Experience in sustainability
- Project management skills
- IT skills to set up a database(s), and store material online
- Social media skills to help us communicate efficiently and effectively with residents. We are dinosaurs on the team – we really need help with this
- Can you write?? Could you imagine drafting parts of the plan with us?

Then we will need typists and administrators and people to help us collate and analyse the results of the mega survey. What might be termed general willingness ...

I wrote in the March Slate: *Without your views, there is no plan*. In fact, it's also true that *Without your help, there will be no plan!* This steering group can't do it all – and we know that loads of you have already told us you want to get involved.

If you'd like to help please fill in the leaflet. You don't have to be an expert – we none of us are – you just have to want to help put this plan together so that you have made a contribution to your community.

We need to make sure that what the village wants for Stonesfield's future is well documented. If we get it right, this Neighbourhood Plan will do its bit towards protecting and enhancing all your favourite aspects of this amazing place.

Q&A at the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan public meeting 28.03.22

When does the plan need to be finished by?

The Local Plan expires in 2031, and WODC will start work on its replacement in the next couple of years, so we need to have the neighbourhood plan ready for confirmation as consistent with the current Local Plan, if possible before work starts on the replacement Local Plan.

How long will it take?

We reckon 3–4 years to get to a final draft and then it's over to WODC to call a referendum so that the village can either ratify or reject it.

How long does it last?

There is no legal sell-by date, but it has to conform to local and national development policies, and once they change, our plan risks being out of date. We would then revise it. (P.S. A neighbourhood development plan must specify the period for which it is to have effect (section 38B(1)(a) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) and central government guidance warns that, whereas there is no requirement to review or update a neighbourhood plan, policies in such a plan may become out of date.)

Are there any costs involved and how will we meet them?

There will be costs – for instance, if we employ experts such as a Landscape Consultant. The PC intends to apply for grants from WODC, and already holds funds that could be allocated to this project. SUSTO have funds left over from the Stocky Woods campaign which could be used for this work.

Should we be fundraising?

There is no pressing, immediate need for that but we shall consider whether it is needed and if/when we should start fundraising.

Will we be capturing demographic information?

Yes. All our stated policies have to be backed by strong evidence, so we will have to be clear on the numbers of people involved in any one area of interest. We can use data contained in the national census due out later in 2022.

Is the summer 2022 survey the end of the public consultation?

No. Although the Q&A exercise will only happen once, we will continue to call public meetings, to appear in the Slate and on the village website and to communicate through social media. It is one of the conditions of the plan succeeding that we show that we have kept the public involved, consulted and informed throughout the process.

Will the plan take future needs into account? Developers will push hard to land on us

We will do our very best to make the plan project into the future so that it takes natural growth into account. We will back all policies with research and evidence.

Is it only over-18s who will be consulted?

No – we will consult children and young people as well, asking the school to help. Voting on the final referendum will be for adults only.

What happens to the work if covid locks us down again?

We resort to zoom, and continue to consult with the residents via the internet. We will make arrangements for those without access to the internet to stay involved in other ways.

Can you make some other NPs available for us to read, so we can see what sort of document it is?

Yes, we'll circulate some links to online copies. If there are any hard copies available, we'll put them in the library.

Can we use our draft plan in any fight against a planning application that appears before the plan is finished?

Yes, our draft plan is a "material consideration" to which the local planning authority would be required to have regard in determining any planning application. The closer the NP is to completion the greater the weight that will be given to it. So, the sooner we get started and the faster we work and the more people there are to call on for help, the sooner we will have that protection.

Where can we see what progress you're making?

The village website has a page dedicated to the Neighbourhood Plan. We will keep it up to date as often as possible.

Thank you for coming – and don't forget to fill in the leaflet

End of meeting