



HIGHFIELD
Residents Association

Minutes of HRA Committee Meeting

Tuesday 13 February 2024 Highfield Church Halls 19:00h

Annex 1 Links on the HRA website to papers for Portswood Broadway Next Steps

Annex 2 SCC Cabinet Decision Portswood Broadway Next Steps Decision Making 16/01/2024

Annex 3 Text of Letter to Cllr Keogh decision approved by the HRA Committee (Agenda item 6)

Annex 4 HRA Crime WhatsApp group for Highfield (Agenda item 9)

Annex 5. Report from NORA Chair Zofia Lovel, South Farnham (Agenda item 10)

Present Committee: Roger Brown (Chair), Jerry Gillen, Ken Burtenshaw, Nadine Johnson, Karen Edwards, Stephen Connolly, Christine Rawnsley, Martin Benning,

Others: Councillor Savage, Jon Walsh (University), Ron Meldrum, Tim Baldwin

- 1. Welcome and opening remarks:** Roger gave a brief introduction and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He said that the subjects of Portswood Broadway and Southern Water would be raised during the meeting. Tim Baldwin, an HRA member was particularly welcome to his first HRA Committee Meeting.
- 2. Apologies:** Nicolla Martin, Jane Tamlyn, Cllr Barbour, Cllr Fielker, Cllr Finn, Malcolm White, Pete Errington, Dave White
- 3. Declaration of interests:** none
- 4. Approval of minutes from the Committee Meeting 9 January 2024:**

The minutes had been reissued to include Ron Meldrum as an attendee and circulated before the meeting
- 5. Matters arising not covered elsewhere:**
 - a. Outer Avenue Residents Association had been contacted by Roger following the January Cttee Meeting with regard to co-operating with HRA by submitting evidence to the SCC Scrutiny Enquiry into the Private Rented Sector in Southampton but they had not replied. He had hoped an HRA Committee member might take on this responsibility but none had done so. Christine volunteered and Roger confirmed he would send the details to Christine so that she would be able to decide how to proceed.
 - b. Roger was still waiting on a response from Councillor Fielker to his letter of 2 January about the problems with SCC Consultations.
 - c. Roger had chaired a meeting between residents of St Denys and Southern Water for Councillor Savage. This would be covered in the Councillors' Report.

- d. Although an email contact address had been provided after the last Committee Meeting for UniLink buses, Roger asked if Jon Walsh could provide a name of someone in senior management so that comments about the cutting of the service to the Central Station south-side could be made directly. (Action: Jon Walsh to provide)
- e. Following Ken's report of damage to two benches on the Little Common at a previous Committee Meeting, the HonSec had contacted the Lead Ranger who indicated that the benches were more likely to be removed if dangerous as there was no funding for replacement or replacement.
- f. Roger reported that he had contacted the new Chief Executive, Andrew Travers, suggesting an introductory meeting but there had been no response as yet.

6. Portswood Broadway Next Steps

Roger thanked the HonSec for preparing the paper, 'HRA Anticipating the Next Phase' which had been circulated with the Agenda in preparation for the discussion. Additionally, a summary, 'Main Points from the Information Paper' was distributed at the meeting and read out by the HonSec. Roger commented that the Council should receive a copy of the papers. Links to these had now been published on the HRA website. The link can be found in Annex 1. (Post meeting note – thanks to Nadine and Ross for organising this).

Roger asked Councillor Savage to clarify who / which roads had received the letter from Portswood Labour Ward Councillors about the trial improvements planned for the Broadway. Cllr Savage said that Councillors only had an allowance of a certain number of letters they could send and so it had only been possible to send letters to a selection; some roads chosen and some not. Roger replied that this was significant and rather unhelpful. He hoped the next stage would be better for all residents affected.

Roger commented that two significant amendments to the scheme had been approved by Cabinet (16/01/24) that had not been part of any Phase 1 or Phase 2 consultation. These were the part-time Bus-gate, where hours would be reduced to between 7am-10am and 4pm-7pm, and a reduction in length of the no-car zone (although on checking post-meeting this is not mentioned in the Cabinet Paper). See Annex 2 for the Cabinet decision details (extract).

Cllr Savage added that the trial could last 18 months under a Traffic Regulation Order. If not successful it could be extended or implemented as was. He was asked about whether 'part-time' would create confusion, to which Cllr Savage replied that the Officers in the SCC Transport Department were not in favour of part-time for that very reason. The Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, had recently indicated that residents throughout the country should not be inconvenienced by traffic schemes to which they objected. The part-time decision could therefore have been a political one. The truncated scheme could have been made due to business pressures. He added that it was very difficult to capture pollution data.

Karen Edwards asked Cllr Savage if it would not have been better to start with an enforced 20mph everywhere and prohibit cars making U-turns or parking illegally in the Broadway.

Roger said he had some concerns about the co-design process. He also raised the issue of the role of bodies like HRA, not just individuals who might or might not live in the ATZ Zone or Highfield; as without representative input, the process could lead to great division in the community.

Tim Baldwin was asked his opinion and he replied that he was in favour of leaving the status quo in the ATZ to see what impact the scheme would have.

Jon Walsh also noted that the timing of the co-designs should take account of when the students were in the city, as one of the 'concerns' raised in the SCC 'You Said We Did' document, had been related to the 'Age-related trends in results'. There had been marked differences between age groups, younger to older, on several key questions in the Phase 2 Consultation and it was right that younger age groups should have the opportunity for representation in any co-design.

Roger concluded with the comment that there should be a representative steering group, to filter results from public meetings and that anti-social behaviour and security were key issues.

Karen Edwards commented that she agreed.

Barbara also agreed with this approach and said it was going to be difficult to look at all 10 co-designs at the same time as they represented different needs. She agreed to look at the ATZ proposals and thought it might be necessary to have a separate co-design to focus on ATZ options

After much constructive discussion, the Committee agreed that Roger should write again to Cllr Keogh, copied in to Ward Councillors and Wade Holmes, requesting urgent further information about timescales and co-design format.

Nadine congratulated Barbara on the papers.

(Post meeting comment: Committee member Dave White, who was absent for the meeting due to work commitments, emailed the following comments:

"Your consolidated notes are a very useful briefing on the long documents from council. It looks like the council is taking the consultation seriously, with the positive suggestions from the community (e.g. continued access for residents across the ATZ) appearing to be on the table.

Some of the ATZ options, if run with ANPR, look like they would mean negligible increase in both passing traffic and also journey lengths for locals (including specifically the PRG roads). I don't yet see in the documents an attempt at quantifying the impact on the SCC net zero plan as requested by the committee of the cabinet member and officers (Annex 2 point (iv)).

Higher bus use and faster buses would be a big plus for this, as well as supporting more people to cycle etc, but longer drives by everyone in Highfield to get around the ATZ (if it didn't have ANPR or similar) would be a negative."

See Annex 3 for the text of the letter to Councillor Keogh

7. Information from Councillors:

Councillor Savage reported on the recent meeting he had co-ordinated between Southern Water and local residents, mostly from St Denys, which he had asked Roger to Chair. Issues discussed included the smell from the Portswood Treatment Plant and the pollution in the River Itchen. Knowledgeable questions were put to SW but their Public Relations Team were not equipped to deal with more technical issues.

Roger added that it was significant that Cllr Savage had managed to arrange a face-to-face meeting between SW and residents as this was rare. He expressed his appreciation to Cllr Savage.

Another item reported concerned a difficulty that some bin crews had in accepting new, union approved, terms of work which would lead to safer practices.

Cllr Barbour provided a written report for HRA Meeting: Issues to note

"Waste collection, the new system is taking time to bed in and this is causing issues for residents, mostly in St Denys who have had long delays in both bin collections

13 Grosvenor Road, work is being done on the property, it looks like it was being used as a store for furniture for other properties. I have contacted the owner on 3 occasions and got no response. I have asked the planning enforcement team to pursue.

Quiz night to raise funds for Portswood Rec, Thursday 29th February at the Drummond, do come along and bring a team

I am still getting lots of email about Portswood Broadway and on the doorstep it is the main topic raised. Someone suggested introducing 20mph speed limits along the Broadway. I still have not seen the data to show that this measure will reduce the CO2 footprint of the area and there is limited greening of the Broadway by this scheme. I cannot support the scheme until this data and some modification to the design are supplied.

The community engagement team held a planning meeting about a 'Love Where you Live' event in 2024 and other councillors can update on this as both were present.

PACT meeting coming up later this month."

8. University Liaison

Jon Walsh said that tickets for the Science and Engineering Fair (16 March) would be available soon. <https://www.sotsef.co.uk/>

9. HRA Crime WhatsApp group for Highfield

a. Reported incidents by representatives in the WhatsApp Group

There were **at least** 20 incidents reported in the WhatsApp Group between 9 January and 13 February 2024. This was an increase of 15 in comparison to the previous report of 9 January. The full detailed report in Annex 3. Roger thanked Nadine for all of this important information.

b. Police and Community Together (PACT) Meeting - Portswood

This is on Tuesday 27 February from 6.30pm to 8pm at Portswood Church, Portswood Road. All welcome.

Nadine Johnson Digital Comms

10. Planning

- a. Yellow Door solar panels – no objections were raised but there were no plans available as yet. BC to reply. Karen Edwards (HRA and PRG) asked to be copied in to the reply to Yellow Door.
- b. 112 Upper Shaftesbury Avenue – a message from an HRA member confirmed that 112 USA conversion would be for 7 bedrooms without a Sui Generis Planning Application. In addition, new areas of brickwork had not been constructed with a pebbledash finish. Planning Enforcement (Gavin Greyer) had been contacted and agreed to pass these comments back to the Planning Officer, Craig Morrison. Both the HRA member and the HRA Chair had twice contacted Craig Morrison but no replies had been forthcoming to date.
- c. Sam Store 72 Portswood Road – ‘Sale or supply of alcohol prohibited until DPS specified’. Not sure what this means. BC will contact Licensing to find out.
- d. Publication of the Local Plan
This was important but no date for publication of the date for the submission to the Secretary of State had been announced.
- e. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Ref:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a11af7e8f5ec000f1f8c46/NPPF_December_2023.pdf

Jerry Commented that he had received a helpful summary of the current situation from the Chair of NORA Zofia Lovell, South Farnham (See Annex 4).

He made the following points from his own perspective after reading the Document

The housing shortage directly correlates to the lack of social housing, which neither the Govt accepts or seems willing to take responsibility for

“Right to buy” only further exacerbates this shortfall

“Affordable housing” is a misnomer. The main reason for so many people not having their own homes is a matter of finance and not necessarily a lack of available housing. The ratio for a mortgage is now seven or eight times salary

A more equitable formula has to be applied to the value of land for housing

It seems there are no longer the number of skilled trades people available to build 300,000 new houses a year; so greater use of ‘Modular Construction’ is required and might be an ideal format for social housing However, mortgage lenders seem not to like them.

11. Reports

a. Finance – Business Reserve Account - £20,023; Business Current Account - £3,395.57. The Fighting Fund target (Reserve Acc.) had been achieved.

Income since the last meeting - £51 including additional cards

Expenditure since the last meeting - £34.54 (including £25 annual Sub to NORA)

The HRA annual Insurance premium (Zurich) had been £120.31 (in 2022 £142.71) paid in November 2023

Martin Benning Treasurer

b. Membership (BC for NM) – Thanks to Nadine for holding the fort when both Nicolla and Barbara were away. Technology was helping to make the Membership job quicker and easier e.g. Barbara could send WhatsApp copy photo of membership forms, screen shots to confirm bank payments and had even paid in a cheque digitally. Since December there had been 15 subscriptions - 9 New Members and 6 Renewing Members. 2 renewing members paid by cheque and one new member. The remaining 12 subscriptions all paid via BACS which makes the whole membership process much easier, quicker and safer.

Barbara Claridge (for Nicolla Martin)

c. Digital Communications (NJ)

Facebook/Website

We now have 1064 followers on the HRA Facebook page, an increase of 14 since HRA Committee Meeting of 9 January 2024.

Thank you to Ken, Pete and Barbara for their recent photos.

A separate section has been created on the About Us page of the website entitled: 'Portswood Ward Councillor Surgeries'. This includes dates, times and venues for all Portswood Ward Councillors.

There is a new addition to the Crime information sharing WhatsApp Group drop-down menu entitled: 'Crime Prevention Advice'. This will be updated progressively. The other titles in the drop-down menu include: general information about the WhatsApp Group, Terms of Use, Police Liaison Meetings, Reporting a crime or intelligence, and Crime incidents & info.

January 2024 e-news - This was sent to members and non-member Committee attendees on 23 January 2024.

Discounts and local business update

Iceland Portswood will be closing down at 4 pm on 17 February. Portswood Shopping Centre was acquired from the previous owner Portswood Centre Ltd by Tri7 in January 2024 for £10m.

There is a new Chinese supermarket in Portswood called 'T-Rex Supermarket and Bubble Tea'.

We now have a discount of 10% on books with October Books and it is possible to order online and have books delivered.

Clare Diaper, who runs October Books, is going off on a sabbatical from end March to end June. She/they are looking to co-opt people onto the October Books Committee for while she is away, particularly people with skills and expertise in running a business and the governance of organisations. She has asked if we could spread the word to any one we felt might be suitable. This would be a short-term commitment just to cover her absence. Any suggestions and/or ideas would be welcome.

Nadine Johnson Digital Comms

12. A.O.B.

Newsletter – Ken and Barbara informed the meeting that it was hoped a printed Newsletter would be ready by spring. Ken advised that it would be best if there was a theme. Roger concluded that it would be important to include up to date information on Portswood Broadway.

Meeting closed at 8.50pm

Annex 1 Links on the HRA website to papers for Portswood Broadway Next Steps

The Hot Topics side-banner on the HRA Website Home Page has been restructured so that relevant papers and documents can be found in the same place.

<https://www.highfieldresidents.org.uk/portswood-broadway-next-steps/>

Annex 2. SCC Cabinet Decision Portswood Broadway Next Steps Decision Making 16/01/2024

Para 12. As part of a package of mitigation for the works on Portswood Broadway that is likely to see some displacement of traffic, an Active Travel Zone in the Highfield area to the north-west is proposed. This would be developed through co-design with the local community to ensure buy-in and includes the following key objectives

- Improve road safety
- Reduce the amount of through route traffic on local roads
- Improve air quality
- Encourage walking, wheeling and cycling as a mode of transport.

Para 21. Following the consultation, it is proposed to amend the Portswood Broadway scheme as follows:

- Establish detail design of a viable scheme trial for measures to limit through traffic in the area
- Limit the amount of through route traffic passing through Portswood Broadway via the use of a bus gate / motor vehicle restriction, accompanied with measures to limit the impact on adjacent streets via an Active Travel Zone. The bus gate / motor vehicle restriction should be part time to allow some access for delivery and some vehicle access at some times of day
- The part time bus gate / motor vehicle restriction is to be 7am to 10am, 4pm – 7pm to allow maximum benefit for bus journey times, during peak commuter hours, but still allow access to the Broadway outside of these times for other modes
- Access for loading HGVs will be retained through Portswood Broadway from south – north, with a loading bay proposed for St Denys Road spur road to allow for loading to happen from St Denys Road (details to be subject to co-design group)
- A co-design group is established to inform design decisions for Portswood Broadway (including trial) to address issues raised from the consultation. The co-design group is to be made up of representatives from resident associations, retailers / traders, representatives from lobby groups such as elderly / people with disabilities and mobility issues, and local residents.

Para 22. Next Steps Following the completion of the review by officers the timeline for the project is anticipated as:

- Work with Community Co-design options in Spring 2024 to inform the design and feasibility of the scheme trial
- Confirm any mitigation measures, if required in Summer 2024
- Formal consultation on any required Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) Summer 2024
- Any construction of the scheme trial at Portswood Broadway in Winter 2024/25

Para 23. A trial is proposed for the part time bus gate / motor vehicle restriction in accordance with Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders. The trial will have a review point of six months initially, and an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order can run for 18 months. The measures of a trial will include pre / post traffic flows on roads, the use of air quality monitors, resident / retail / visitor feedback. Measures will also be taken in relation to business activity – footfall counters, engagement with businesses on spend / profit, and spend profiles of visitors to the area.

Following this cabinet decision, the final details of the trial including the design will be finalised with input from the co-design working group. The trial can proceed with delegation given to the Executive Director Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member Environment and Transport to progress associated Traffic Regulation Orders to enable the implementation of the scheme trial and Active Travel Zone.

The impacts would be monitored by SCC and reported back after 1 year and 5 years from completion if the scheme is made permanent, and as part of the DfT's National TCF Monitoring & Evaluation programme.

Ref: Relevant Extracts from

<https://www.southampton.gov.uk/modernGov/documents/s69102/Portswood%20Broadway%20Next%20Steps.pdf>

Annex 3. Text of Letter to Cllr Keogh decision approved by the HRA Committee (Agenda item 6)

At their meeting on Tuesday, 13 February, the HRA Committee discussed the current position on PB with the help of three papers compiled by the HRA Hon Sec (attached). We were very grateful to Wade Holmes for some of the explanation information.

The Committee appreciate your personal commitment to ensuring that the scheme has the maximum amount of buy-in from local residents and businesses. They therefore instructed me to write to you to express their concern at the fact that – more than a month after the Cabinet decisions - we still do not have firm information about the timescale, organisation or projected outcomes. In particular, those for the community-led co-design process for the various ‘concerns’ identified by the SCC Integrated Transport Team in the, ‘You Said We Did’ document.

At the very least, it would be helpful to have an indication of the planned timescale both for the co-design meetings and for the implementation of the Bus-gate.

HRA is very willing to continue to engage with the Council on the scheme. However, the lack of this information is making our position very difficult and certainly doing nothing to alleviate the concerns that many of our members continue to feel about the scheme’s potential impact on them and the Highfield community.

Annex 4. HRA Crime WhatsApp group for Highfield (Agenda Item 9)

1. Reported incidents by representatives in the WhatsApp Group (total: 20 incidents):

- **1** house break-in, Abbots Way. The residents were not in. Police and forensics attended.
- **7 (at least)** break-ins or attempted break-ins of cars and one van. Highfield Close, Oakmount Triangle, Highfield Lane and Welbeck Avenue. Some people captured on CCTV.
- **4 (at least)** break-ins or attempted break-ins of garages in Oakmount Triangle and Abbots Way. Some people captured on CCTV.
- **3 (at least)** incidents of someone with a bolt cutter prowling round Orchards Way and caught on CCTV, trying gates and, in one case, cutting through one gate chain. No sign of theft or damage. Some CCTV footage. A separate incident of a prowler in Brookvale Road.
- **One** incident, a person trying to shoot at two dogs with a pellet gun round the back of the tennis courts, Avenue Campus.
- **One** incident - two nitrous oxide canisters found in Portswood Residents' Gardens' Meadow.
- **One** incident - a smashed up/vandalised car on Cemetery Road.
- **One** suspicious behaviour/intelligence report - potential shop lifter in Boots, Portswood.
- **One** abandoned bike in Orchards Way.

All incidents are logged here: <https://www.highfieldresidents.org.uk/crime-incidents/>

2. Increase in incidents reported in the WhatsApp Group

Given the increase in the number of 'low level' crimes/ASBs being committed in our area, I reported these to our Police Community Support Officer, Hayley Morrison, on 30/01/24 who said that she was on duty that evening and would do a patrol of the area. However, she did say that "encouraging people to report is what we need".

Within the Group we continue to encourage reporting of all incidents, however small, even if there is no theft or damage. We understand that there is an offence of 'tampering' with a motor vehicle.

With regard to suspicious behaviour and intelligence reporting where no crimes are involved, 101 and the current reporting form* are not ideal, and we have tried the Community Partnership Information (CPI) form but have been told that this is for "business/professional partners" and not meant for general public use.

Cllr Finn contacted PC Adam O'Neill (see below) who said that residents could email him to action such information. However, as he could be off duty, sick and forget to log the information, it was therefore recommended that people use the website* first - there is a section at the bottom of the front page 'Tell us about' where you can select 'Something you've seen or heard'. If that didn't work for them, then they should email PC O'Neill. They could do both of course. His email: adam.oneill@hampshire.police.uk

* <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/ro/report>

All incidents were logged here: <https://www.highfieldresidents.org.uk/crime-incidents/>

3. New Bobby for Portswood, Swaythling and Bassett - PC Adam O'Neill

I understand from PCSO Hayley Morrison that Adam is a Police Officer working with the PCSOs out and about in the community and is a point of contact for the area. His title is: Community Engagement and Liaison Officer. He is contactable but not for people to report crimes/ASB incidents to. These would still have to be reported through 101 or on the website. I have invited him to one of our HRA Committee meetings but he is not on duty then. I have therefore written to him suggesting a meeting.

4. CCTV in Portswood

Following up on my query at the last HRA Committee Meeting, Cllr Finn has confirmed that the CCTV outside Sainsburys which currently needs recommissioning is in fact two CCTVs on the roof of Sainsburys, and that they were installed by Sainsburys as part of the Sec 106 agreement from when the store was built. The Council had access to them (a live feed) but when they stopped working, Sainsburys were unaware of where the power is fed from etc. The Council has visited the store recently and are working with them on a few ideas to get the CCTVs back online.

The other CCTVs are two new ones being installed in Portswood High Street - one outside Roebridge farm shop facing Westridge Rd and one outside the Library opposite St Denys Rd, and an existing one outside Coffee#1.

Nadine Johnson Digital Comms

Annex 5. Report from NORA Chair Zofia Lovel, South Farnham (Agenda item 10 Planning)

In December 2023 our government published its much-delayed new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England.

The focus is on housing delivery, but it does include several other provisions and the main provisions of interest to NORA members are summarised below:

- **Plan Making** – Preparing and maintaining up-to-date locally prepared plans (Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans etc.) is a priority and providing sufficient housing and other development in a sustainable manner is the main objective.
- **Calculating Housing Need** – The standard method for calculating housing need in a local authority is an **advisory starting point** but adds that exceptional circumstances could enable an alternative method. Local authorities with an up-to-date local plan will no longer need to continually show a deliverable five-year housing land supply.
- **Housing Land Supply Buffers** – The 5% and 10% buffers that can be applied to local authority housing land supply calculations have been removed, but where there is a history of under delivery of housing a 20% buffer may be applied.
- **Housing Need** – Older people have been added to the list of specific groups for which local authorities must consider meeting their housing need.
- **Neighbourhood Plans** – Includes greater protection for them where proposed housing development conflicts with a neighbourhood plan.
- **Green Belt** – The previous requirement, that their boundaries should be reviewed when local plans are being prepared or updated, has been replaced. Local authorities may choose to review and alter Green Belt boundaries in exceptional circumstances, with changes made through the plan-making process.
- **Affordable Housing / Community-led Development** – All references to entry-level housing, exception sites or similar have been replaced with community-led developments or similar, (the glossary accompanying the NPPF includes a definition of community-led development, which is assumed to include town and parish councils). Other text has been amended to encourage community-led development and not only in terms of housing.
- **Agricultural Land** – Emphasises that its availability and quality should be considered when allocating agricultural land for development.
- **Density of Development** – Significant uplifts in the average density of residential development are inappropriate where it would be wholly out of character with the existing area.
- **Design and Local Design Codes** – **Emphasises the use of local design codes** prepared in line with the National Model Design Code as well as beautiful and well-designed places.
- **Planning Conditions** – They should refer to clear and accurate plans and drawings.
- **Energy Efficiency** – Significant weight should be given to energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic.
- **Plans** – For any plans reaching pre-submission consultation after 19 March 2024, the policies in the new NPPF will apply. Plans that reach pre-submission consultation on or before this date will be examined under the previous version of the NPPF.

Also, and please note

- Several changes which were proposed in the consultation version of the NPPF have **not** been carried through into the final one.

These include amending the ‘soundness’ test for the preparation of Local Plans & Neighbourhood Plans

... and also missing - that the past “irresponsible planning behaviour” by applicants could in future be taken into account when determining planning applications.

- There are further consultations to follow : on climate change adaptation; flood-risk management; provision of social homes and electric vehicle charging points.
- Guidance clarifying some aspects of the reforms is due, for example, on where brownfield development in the Green Belt can occur provided the openness of the Green Belt is not harmed.

Below is a link to the document National Planning Policy Framework 2024

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Pre application engagement and public consultations have been given a very small upgrade in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) update as follows :

NPPF Paragraph 39. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre- application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

NPPF Paragraph 40. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.

These policies have existed for some time, but frequently have not been properly applied, with very limited framing of questions and community comments on, for example, Infrastructure: traffic; flooding; school places; and NHS facilities.

The following is a question to one LPA and the answer.

1. “When is the first opportunity for recognised Residents Associations to get involved and how can the Officers help us achieve that?”

Answer: Having reviewed the current pre-application arrangements there is no specific reference to when residents’ associations or other interested parties can get involved. It is important that residents and other

interested parties are involved in shaping schemes at an early stage. The Council will be reviewing its pre-application offer in the next few months to ensure, amongst other things, that both officers of the planning department, ward members and communities are involved wherever possible. It does, however, need to be recognised that pre-application engagement is not mandatory and the Council cannot insist, can only encourage engagement.

As stated, Councils cannot insist that developers engage early with communities - only encourage. Perhaps this needs to change?

Planning Appeals and the Planning Inspectorate

This is where many conflicts arise.

Some Planning Appeal Decisions conflict with Neighbourhood Plans and Local Plans largely due to a lack of a 5-year housing Land supply or because a Local Plan / Neighbourhood Plan is out of date.

A Neighbourhood Plan is not just about “ is it five years old or not”?

It is about the Community view of where housing is wanted, how we protect the environment and the willingness of the community to support it. To Residents it is about the principle on which it stands. Failure to look at the detail beyond the “timescale” is its greatest flaw.

Residents are well aware that housing is very much top of the agenda with all political parties, so the pressure will be high for affordable housing, budgets, land supply and delivery, but if we are to commit to a Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan, Residents need the assurance that it is worthwhile in the making.

Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in the UK) in December 2022:

“My changes will instruct the Planning Inspectorate that they should no longer override sensible local decision making, which is sensitive to and reflects local constraints and concerns. Overall, this amounts to a rebalancing of the relationship between local councils and the Planning Inspectorate and will give local communities a greater say in what is built in their neighbourhood.”

‘It’s so important we ensure houses are built - but we must make sure it’s in the right locations, with the right infrastructure in place and with the majority consent of local people. These changes to the NPPF and strengthening the protections of Neighbourhood Plans are a big step forward in ensuring this happens’.

Let’s see if any of that happens?

Your feedback:

Please would you email the NORA Treasurer Marianne Pitts
Marianne.pitts@gmail.com

...with any issues that your Residents’ Association would like NORA to research and pursue.