

Minutes of the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan Working Group Meeting 1st October 2015

1. Attendees: Ian Credland; Bill Hatton; Justine Fisher; Sue Hatton; Virginia Pullan; David Withycombe; Georgia Cheshire; Ian Weir.
Claire Tester, Head of Planning MSDC; Graham Glenn Strategic Estates Manager WSCC and Vanessa Cummins School Planning Officer WSCC
Dale Mayhew and Laura Bourke (Consultants Dowsett Mayhew Consultancy); and Jane Bromley (Administration)
2. Apologies: Nick Owens; Frances Gaudencio; Victoria Standfast; Judith Foot; Adrian Batchelor.
3. Declarations of Interest: Ian Credland sites 1 & 2. Justine Fisher site 8; Virginia Pullen site 7. David Withycombe site 12. Local Green Space Declarations of Interest: Ian Credland LGS2; Virginia Pullan LGS5; Justine Fisher LGS5.
4. The minutes of the meeting on 10th September 2015 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
5. Review of action points from 10th September 2015.
 1. JF had prepared a very good power point presentation, sites map and site details for display at the EGM.
 2. VP and DM had altered the site constraints map re the change in Site 15 developable area.
 3. The Clerk had sent out the agenda for 22nd September on 15th September and DM had delivered the documents.
 4. Most of the WG had attended the EGM
 5. The Hall at Downlands had been set up by JF, GC and BH.
 6. All checked and agreed IC's script.
 7. PC Clerk monitored interests and those with interest exited the room when relevant sites came up for discussion.
6. Review of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Parish Council on 22nd September 2015- The recommendations put before the Parish Council at the EGM had been agreed.

Recommendations agreed:

- 1) *Housing Need-*
AGREED the housing number need range of 210-270.
- 2) *Allocation of Sites-*
AGREED sites 10, 13 & 4 (combined) and 15.
- 3) *Allocation of Local Green Spaces (LGS)-*
AGREED LGSs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8

IC went through the recommendations that had been made by the Working Group to the Parish Council and the information that was given about each site to the Parish Council, to enable all present to understand the reasoning behind the recommendations made.

Hassocks School Provision Discussion:

Introductions were made.

Schooling Need Requirement in Hassocks and Method of Provision.

IC confirmed that the previous evening he had received a reply to the letter that had been sent in May 2015 by DOWSETTMAYHEW on behalf of the Working Group to WSCC. The letter asked a series of questions to understand the background to pupil numbers in the Parish and the need, or otherwise, for a new school, and the timing of this. A response was requested by 05th June to enable the feedback to be included in the July public consultation. The response was received on 30th September. It confirmed that Hassocks area needed to plan for another school. 24 children had been allocated schools away from their catchment area this year due to lack of space in Hassocks schools.

VC explained the situation in more detail. Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks schools were expanded in 2013 but they are again over capacity and therefore expansion needs to continue but the sites are at capacity and WSCC would therefore like to identify a site to commission a new primary school of 2 form entry on a site of approximately 2 hectares.

VP asked if further proof of need for schooling was necessary?

VC advised that it was WSCC's statutory function to commission sufficient school places to fulfill need across the community of West Sussex. Local Authorities no longer start new schools as this conflicts with the Government agenda for greater flexibility. Commissioning is addressed through the Regional Schools Commissioner to secure a free school or academy. It is hoped an academy provider who would be a local provider. WSCC would not entirely fund the school, funding would be secured via amongst others, developer contributions and Department for Education.

GG advised that it cost between 6 to 9 million to provide a primary school. This assumes a zero land value.

CT Due to the expense of a new school sites for schools typically only arise where there is the land to be provided free of charge on the back of the development.

IC expressed that the WSCC response to the May 2015 letter was late in coming as the site allocation had now been agreed by the Parish Council and that none of the sites included the provision of land for a school. IC spoke about the commitment the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group had made to the Parish Council and residents to have a draft plan by late summer early autumn and that if school land were now to be considered there could be a considerable delay.

GG mentioned that the evidence was contained in the WSCC publication 'Planning for School Places 2015' and that there was nothing further that WSCC could add to that. This was published around Easter time.

DM advised that the May 2015 letter had acknowledged that document, but noted the advice given by WSCC officers at the meeting in April 2015 had advised that there was a sequential assessment to determining the need for a new school (i.e. 1 expand existing schools; 2 – reduce catchment area; and 3 – new school) and no firm decision

had yet been made that a new school was required. Clarification on this was therefore specifically requested in the May 2015 letter.

VC confirmed that she had not thought a reply necessary as she believed the meeting which took place with the CLC had wrapped up all the issues brought up in that letter. IC had tried to engage with WSCC regarding schooling and had invited Graham Olway (Principal Manager for Planning and Capital Projects at WSCC), for a meeting but had never had a response. When the community had been asked for feedback re site preference the provision of a school did not seem high on their agenda. IC believed that WSCC would have land to allocate for a new school.

DM felt that to undertake a detailed site finding and feasibility appraisal of options for land for a school and to include that within the Neighbourhood Plan would create a delay in the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process of between 4 to 6 months.

Finding Sites in Hassocks and Incorporating into the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan

GG mentioned that he had spoken to three developers with sites available for a school in Hassocks and that they had offered him plans of their proposals, given this he was surprised the subject of school provision was coming so late in the day. (GG acknowledged that 1 of these meetings was at the request of the site promoter (site 8) and 2 had been at the request of WSCC (sites 9 and 15). IC noted that Site 9 is the subject of a current application and this does not confirm the offer of land for a school.)

IC asked why after these meetings GG had not contacted the Working Group?

GG felt that to contact the relevant Parish after every meeting he had would be too burdensome as sometimes the meetings were far reaching and not concentrating solely on the one area that the Parish would be interested in. The sites where land for a school had been offered were Sites 8, 9 & 15 and he was surprised they had not come through the Neighbourhood Plan.

JF felt that the WSCC feasibility study e-mail sent around mentioning the three sites had given no indication that Site 8 was in the National Park.

GG felt all three sites had pros and cons but agreed as Site 8 was in the National Park it may be a non- starter. He considered 9 & 15 now not available.

IC confirmed why Sites 8 & 9 had not been chosen. Site 8 was very unpopular with the Community. Site 9 had too many constraints for development.

To explain why Site 15 was now not available DM advised that he had, under instruction from the Working Group, spoken to the Golf Club owners about their original plan requesting that in order to protect the local gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint, changes were necessary. A result of these changes being, amongst other things, that the total number of proposed houses had reduced and the land for the school was taken out. Some provision for schooling was left in resulting in the 0.9 hectares for a playing field opposite the Belmont Recreation Ground which it was thought might provide suitable land for a school.

IC warned that the 0.9 hectares allocated for a playing field at the Golf Club (site 15) was not without difficulties. The earlier plan at the Golf Club (Site 15) had provided land for a school and not just land for playing fields but this was also not without constraints being situated straddling an ancient woodland a stream and was land that flooded in winter. The access to the school was to be via Pavilion Close or across the Recreation ground through the play area. It wasn't going to be able to use the Golf Club main entrance. It was land that wasn't going to be useful for a golf course or

housing development. The Belmont Recreation Ground was the subject of a covenant that it was to be used for 'public playing fields or recreation forever' and that 'no buildings whatsoever' were to be constructed on the land.

CT said there were two issues: whether the land provided by the Golf Club would be suitable for playing fields; and given that the existing recreation ground was currently fully used for recreation there would be some loss of facility if it were swapped for the land to be provided by the Golf Club (the land to be swapped for the recreation ground was a smaller area at 0.9ha). The covenant issue hadn't been looked into yet. DM asked that if the feasibility study prepared by WSCC had looked at physical constraints only and GG confirmed that it had.

GG accepted that the feasibility assessment had been a high level, light touch exercise to assess if land for a new school could physically be achieved on a site. It was not an assessment of other constraints, e.g. planning policy, covenants etc. Given the covenant on Belmont Field (which GG was hitherto unaware of) that site may not be deliverable.

In looking at the 3 sequential steps to providing additional school place VC advised:

- i) Expand existing schools which VW had confirmed had already taken place in 2013 (NOTE – in April 2015 WSCC had advised consideration was taking place regarding the potential for further expansion);
- ii) Change the catchment area for the school which given that the neighbouring parishes were experiencing the same problem seemed not to be a solution;
- iii) Provide a new school(s).

DM asked that given that the County were now at Stage iii) above how will the county look for a site?

GG said it would be a desk top approach and to some extent reliant on what came forward to them.

DM clarified that the approach was not targeted or proactive.

VC said that if a development of 500 plus houses came forward it would flag up the need for a school automatically but otherwise there was no proactive approach.

DM wanted to know how the need was documented.

VC The WSCC published document 'Planning for School Places 2015' and that the commissioning of a new school would ultimately be a Cabinet Resolution.

GG advised that they needed to keep an eye on Downlands for capacity but that this was not formally documented.

GC felt that the public may have expressed a preference for Site 15 on the basis of the original design where land for a school was provided and that the Plan would not be popular if some provision were not made for schooling.

IC asked VC whether, as queried in the May 2015 letter, whether WSCC would support phasing of development? This would enable the Parish Council to find and deliver land for a school before the need for a school, due to new housing, became too great. IC did not want to rush the process of delivering land for a school. The bar was set very high on the results of the public consultation and evidence for housing site recommendations and he wanted a similar amount of analysis carried out if suitable land were to be found for a school.

IW mentioned the possibility of allocating land in the NP Gap for a school and he asked if MSDC would support this.

CT advised that the Gap was a result of Neighbourhood Plan Policy and would not be commented upon by MSDC it would be a subject for the Examiner.

IC wanted the strength of Policies from the previous District Plan's C1 C2 and C3 to be reflected in the new Policies for the Neighbourhood Plan and the allocation of a school in the Gap would undermine this.

GC thought it would also set a precedence.

DM summarised that the Working Group needed to consider the way forward following the highlighting of the school provision problem and the Agreement of the Parish Council to the Site recommendations.

He reminded all that if following the statutory consultation period of the draft Neighbourhood Plan substantive changes were made to the Plan, then a further draft consultation period would be likely to be required before progressing to the Submission Version Plan.

DM advised that the Working Group should consider if they had enough flexibility in the mandate given to them following the approval of the recommendations at the EGM to allow the draft Plan to incorporate the provision for a school via a Policy?

GG wondered if the NP Gap Policy could incorporate an exception where the provision of a school was the requirement in the area.

DM The Gap Policy has yet to be finalised so there is scope for an exception clause if the Working Group feel they have the legal mandate to include this within the Plan from the Parish Council.

IC asked whether VC could come back to him on the phasing question. **ACTION**

1.VC

DM advised that phasing had been turned down by the inspector for the Hurst Plan but that was because it was not considered to have been justified. If there is sufficient justification then phasing of development is acceptable. Phasing can be by time or by trigger.

SH asked whether MSDC would support phasing?

CT. MSDC would not have a comment on phasing it would be a matter for the Examiner.

IC asked if MSDC would be able to support the published housing need for Hassocks NP.

CT. MSDC would not comment on Hassocks Housing Need but it would need to be justified to the Examiner.

DM noted that MSDC had objected to a policy in the Hurst Plan. CT noted that this was because it conflicted with an emerging strategic policy of the District Plan. The resolution by the PC on housing in Hassocks does not have this conflict.

DM asked VC whether the two form entry was based on the schooling requirement arising from the Housing Needs number for Hassocks.

VC confirmed it was.

Those attending from MSDC and WSCC were thanked for their attendance.

DM summarised what the Working Group now needed to consider and Resolve at the next meeting on 15th October. **ACTION 2 ALL**

- i) The existing time line of the finalising of the Plan would need to be extended to make time for a correct analysis of sites for a school in line with the completeness of analysis and consultation of sites for housing. Or
- ii) Include an additional Policy in the Plan if the WG feel they have the mandate to do so from the Parish Council to allow the school site consideration work to progress at its own pace. Or
- iii) Do not consider School provision in the Plan

7. Planning out draft Policy Options

DM circulated draft Policies for all to consider he would like feedback at the next meeting. DM will send around electronic copies. **ACTION 3 DM/ALL**

8. Correspondence

IC. On the run up to the EGM IC had received e-mail correspondence from a Councillor asserting that, the Working Group were not keeping adequate records of incoming and outgoing letters. IC confirmed that a spreadsheet with such information was kept and further that all outgoing letters were approved by a panel of approvers and recorded on the spreadsheet.

The email also referred to the content of a letter about existing planning permission to do with Clayton Mills. IC confirmed he had never had a letter from Clayton Mills's management. He had received one from a neighbour of Clayton Mills and had confirmed to that sender that Planning Permission and the Neighbourhood Plan were two separate things. After a further letter had been received from the neighbour a reply in the agreed format confirming 'your comments will be taken into account in the Plan' was sent.

IC considered the Councillors e-mails to be inaccurate.

BH pointed out at this point that the e-mails from the Councillor had been unjustified and that had it not have been for the hard work of Councillor Credland the Plan would not be where it was today. All agreed. BH also thanked Nick Owens for his hard work in reviewing Geoff Copley's analysis which had been undertaken with all due probity.

9. Date of next meeting 15th October 2015 7.30pm

The meeting finished at 10.15pm

Actions Points Arising

1. VC to confirm if WSCC would support phasing of development to enable the schooling provision to be addressed for timely.
2. Working Group to consider the way forward with regard to the provision of schooling in Hassocks. Something to be drafted by IW/BH
3. DM to circulate electronic copies of draft policies and All to consider feedback.