

Upton Bishop Parish Council

Neighbourhood Development Plan

An Open Letter to the Parish

Brian Spencer -Parish Council Vice Chair and NDP Co-ordinator

Dear Parishioners,

On 7th October I received an email implying that the NDP process was being conducted in an underhanded manner, although it is unclear where these accusations are coming from. This is not only a reflection on the Steering Group, it also calls into question the behaviour of the Parish Councillors, who fully endorse what we are doing, and specifically me in my role on the Steering Group and the Parish Council. I can state unequivocally that this is most definitely not the case and all information and minutes for both the PC and NDP are posted on the website where everyone can see where we are up to. This matter will be an agenda item for discussion at the November PC meeting which, I remind you, is open for any member of the public to attend. I would like to thank those Councillors who have responded with positive support for what we are doing.

For the avoidance of doubt, I would like to explain where we are and how we have reached this point.

To begin with, this process has already taken too long. The main reasons for this are:

- A delayed start despite several of us pushing the PC back in early 2017 to begin. Work did not start until mid-2018 and we had our first public meeting at the Millennium Hall in November. Later that month, the PC called a halt to any further work
- In May 2019, the new PC restarted work immediately which led to the issuing of the questionnaire later in the year and the results of this were presented in the Millennium Hall by our consultant in February 2020
- Hereford Council, meanwhile, were delaying the outcome of the Leeward House decision and our best advice was to do nothing until this was decided which finally happened in August
- As a result of the delay, we were required to return our remaining grant money and make a new application, and these funds only arrived in August so finally we could move on

- In the 33 months Since the start of 2017, we have only worked on the NDP for a total of 16 months through no fault of anyone on the Group, and I would like to thank all those who have helped move it forward.
- The current situation is that the Parish is required to find 38 new properties by 2031; 14 are already completed and 15 are committed i.e. in planning approval but with no guarantee they will ever be built. This leaves us 9 properties to find in the next 10 years
- Hereford Council have refused to allow us to include the 5 caravans at Windy Hollow and the lodge at Phocle Lake in the totals, claiming that they were all part of the housing stock prior to 2011. Whilst it is clear to us this was not the case (the Council did not even know the caravans existed at the time); HC would not budge on this so we took the decision at PC it was time to move on
- At the September meeting, after a lengthy debate during which members of the public were present and contributed, the PC decided by the narrowest of margins that, based on the evidence before them, a Call for Sites would be the best and fairest way to proceed and would give control back to the PC and Steering Group
- Our Consultant was subsequently instructed to carry on with this and we are now in the process of advertising this on the Website, Twitter and Facebook feeds, on all Parish Notice Boards, at the Hall and in the Phone Box. A notice will go in the November Chimes and the Hereford Times
- **Nobody will receive an individual invitation to make a submission** as this could be construed as favouritism by anyone who does not receive one
- The opportunity to make a submission will end on 30th November and there will then be an independent assessment of the suitability of sites in accordance with a formal process known as the Housing Site Assessment. We expect to have information to share by the end of February but in the meantime, there will be no further NDP meetings or intervention to allow the Consultant to do this job fairly and without any external influence or bias
- Our Consultant has asked Hereford Council to share any submissions they may have received during their own recent Call for Sites

Following this we will move to the next stage which is for the Consultant to produce a Draft NDP and this will include any sites deemed appropriate to meet the target.

A public meeting will be held, current circumstances allowing, once we have something to share and discuss.

In a change of direction from Hereford Council, the following statement was made:

*Previous advice gave neighbourhood planning groups the option to produce a plan which is criteria policy based or contained site allocations. However, since the update of the National Planning Policy Framework, **you are strongly advised to consider the inclusion of a site allocation within your plan.** This is to ensure that in the continuing likelihood that a five-year supply is not demonstrated, your plan will retain full weight in any planning decisions.*

In other words, an NDP with a site allocation is the best possible defence we will have going forward against additional Planning Application submissions not included within the NDP document.

There is nothing new in any of the above, it is all in minutes and documents and in the public domain. If anyone still has doubts, criticisms or questions they wish to level against me or my fellow Councillors, we will happily debate them and provide a response. This will be done openly at a PC meeting.

If anyone feels I have failed to keep you all fully informed, may I apologise profusely, but I believed we were communicating everything fully.

This PC has made great issue of being open and honest with you all. We have made the PC meetings far more accessible to everyone, and information that was previously kept secret has been shared fully as we are required to do. Nothing has been hidden. Despite the challenges of Covid, the PC has continued to meet on a monthly basis and all members of the Parish are welcome to join us online at our Virtual Meetings. If anyone wishes to join and is nervous about Virtual Meetings please contact me, it really is simple.

The PC remains fully approachable through the Clerk (currently Alison Feist on an interim basis) at clerk@uptonbishoppcc.org and through the dedicated NDP email address uptonndp@gmail.com.

The Chair, Keith Cornwall, is known to many of you and is always available to discuss any concerns you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact any of us or any other Councillors on any subject.

Brian Spencer

8th October 2020