



Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Steering Group Meeting
Crown Chambers, 1st Floor, 7a Market Place, Melksham,
Wiltshire SN12 6ES

Date: **Wednesday 30th August 2017**
Start: **6pm**

Present:

Cllr. Richard Wood (MWPC) (Chairman)
Cllr. John Glover (MWPC)
Jo Eccleston (MWPC)
Teresa Strange (MWPC)
Lorraine McRandle (MTC)
Steve Gray (Clerk, MTC)
Cllr. Pat Aves (Wiltshire Council)
Nick Westbrook (Health lead)
Rolf Brindle (Transport lead)
Shirley McCarthy (Environmental lead)
Colin Goodhind (MCAP)

Notes: Phil McMullen (MCAP)

Guest: Anthony Northcote, Neighbourhood-Planning.co.uk
Guest: Sarah Martin, Lemon Gazelle

Plus one member of the public

1. Welcome & apologies

Cllr. Richard Wood explained that this was a special meeting giving the opportunity to hear from professional consultants. Normal business would be discussed in two weeks' time.

Phil McMullen reported that apologies had been received from Clare Harris, David Way, Richard Wiltshire, Tony Watts, Andy Hinchcliffe, Colin Harrison

2. Declaration of Interests

There is a standing declaration of interest in MCAP from Nick Westbrook, Shirley McCarthy, Colin Goodhind and Phil McMullen. There is a standing interest in Young Melksham by Teresa Strange, with reference to any discussions concerning the Canberra Youth Centre.

3. **Public Participation**

There was one member of the public present, who wished only to observe.

4. **Invited Guest: Anthony Northcote, Neighbourhood-Planning.co.uk**

Anthony Northcote opened with a brief introduction. They specialise in helping communities take what information they have and turn it into a Neighbourhood Plan. They are also working with Oaksey and West Lavington and have previously worked with Calne, whose plan is currently at the independent examination stage. Elsewhere they've done quite a lot of large settlements, including St Neots in Cambridgeshire [pop. 40,000] which is set to double in size over the next twenty years.

Anthony explained he had previously met with officers in January to discuss potentially helping us with our plan. They hope to help us to get from where we are with everything we've got to get it into the form that's required, into the right suite of documents. They have looked at the work we've done to date on a no obligation basis. We've done a lot of work to date, but there is a long way to go. It's clearly been written by a number of different people, in different levels of detail. They would look for the precise evidence to underpin the evidence we have. The aim is not to try and be critical but to get us from what we've got to something which is secure and can be defended. It is recognised that it's sometimes difficult to get evidence. We have got to get the plan past Wiltshire Council and past an independent examiner. Wiltshire Council are generally reasonably amenable compared to some authorities. They are not going to argue provided we can justify what we have done.

The idea is to get the data we have into something like 70 pages. The plan doesn't have to contain every little piece of information on any given topic. You need to be clear on what it is you want to achieve. There are probably too many objectives in the plan at present. Anthony would suggest half a dozen, ten at most. Where we are is no different to where many others are at present. It's better to start with too much information and to pare it back. We are in a very good position in terms of having done lots of work, there is a lot of detail. There are some areas that need a degree of challenge in that it's not immediately obvious what we are trying to achieve. Protecting the eastern by-pass for example; where in the local transport plan is this stated?

Policies should be written in particular ways. Developers could deliberately try and misinterpret things. The more policies you have the more you might have things that conflict or end up with bits of duplication. One topic is at present in four different policies at present, for example.

Everything should be in the same format and bits moved to where they need to be. So, there is a considerable piece of work [for Anthony to do]. It's refreshing to see that we have a very, very good starting point though, and there is little need to go out there and find additional evidence. You don't have to repeat evidence: refer for instance to things that are in Wiltshire documents rather than copy and paste it.

There followed a Questions and Answers session.

Colin Goodhind said that he considered this to be very good news. It's what we desperately need to hear. We can be challenged and given the chance to argue the case. We should all accept what has been said and go on from there.

Shirley McCarthy said she has anxieties about how environmentally friendly and sustainable our plan is. The Centre of Sustainable Energy is available to help with this. They put a strong imprint on the original Sustainability Appraisal. Our draft is not quite in line with that though. When would be a good time to put our plan in front of the C.S.E?

Anthony Northcote: AECOM is doing the Sustainability Appraisal [for us] and that's what's required to tick the box as we go along. Wiltshire have historically been a little unclear over the role of the habitat appraisal and the sustainability appraisal. Wiltshire has learned over time about the statutory obligations though. The Plan doesn't have to cover every topic. You could choose not to have certain policies because they have been done elsewhere. If you are going to have additional environmental content, it has to be locally distinctive and not simply replicating national policy. You can't write an additional policy to deal with SSSI sites for example because they are already protected. The policy is already there. Flooding for example; if your particular problem is surface water flooding in a hotspot, then write a specific policy for that and not a general one which repeats national policy.

Anthony gave the example of a very small village which has two particular places where there is a problem with surface water run-off. They need something very specific in place to deal with the issues there.

Cllr. John Glover asked whether we could specifically state all new developments should have PV on the roof [for example]. Anthony Northcote responded that you can't specifically recommend anything over and above building regulations. The difficulty you would have is that if someone challenged it then you have no evidence to show it's required.

Shirley McCarthy raised the example of the micro hydro power scheme in the River Avon which is planned as part of the Canal redevelopment. It's possible that that project might become a community scheme if the canal is delayed. The Melksham Energy Group wouldn't like that scheme to fail if we don't have the right words in the Plan. Anthony Northcote replied that there is always potential for a second part as a back section to the Plan. You can capture community aspirations, public concern etc. in a part of the plan which the examiner doesn't consider. Sarah Martin agreed, giving the example of a community where they had an "Action Chapter" for community concerns, identifying who would be taking those issues forward rather than losing sight of them altogether. It made good use of people expressing interests and getting involved, rather than trying to wrestle them into the planning policy itself.

Nick Westbrook said that the document in front of you is the result of numerous public consultations. The question now is when is it going to happen? What is your timescale?

Anthony Northcote said that the quote we were given some time ago included an indicative timescale. It's realistic to be looking at three months from where you are now to getting the Plan ready for consultation. You cannot go to Regulation 14 consultation until you have the Site Allocation and Sustainability Appraisal in place. It could be longer depending on our meeting arrangements and how we want to feedback. Calne for example got a little weary of meetings, so the work was done remotely and the officers liaised with the working groups. Anthony's preference would be to have a central point of contact. There is no need for daily dialogue.

Anthony Northcote said he was unclear over what we want to do consultation-wise in terms of sites. The only statutory consultation is the Regulation 14 one. You can do as much or as little other consultation as you like.

Nick Westbrook expressed concern over whether we need to do any further site allocation consultations. Anthony Northcote responded that everybody would normally do non-statutory consultation before you get to the statutory consultation. The danger that you run if you haven't done something on sites specifically is that you are not forearmed. It would be surprising if you didn't do something on specific sites. Employment sites for example; you might have two or three landowners who you might want to come forward. The difficulty you can get is a perception that you become cosy with some landowners and developers, and you get others arguing that you have not been treating them equally or fairly.

Anthony Northcote summarised by saying, you should not be worried. Early delay can make the examination process less costly and less cumbersome.

Rolf Brindle asked, the present allocation we have is already used up with developments that are in the pipeline. We are already over the numbers allocated by Wiltshire Council. Should we not suggest anywhere? We are in effect looking towards the next plan period.

Anthony Northcote responded: We are looking to allocate housing sites for a couple of reasons. One is to get the community benefits. If you are looking to allocate, it has to be delivered in this plan period. Most of the communities are looking to allocate sites so we don't get back to planning by appeal when there is no five year land supply figure. Wiltshire don't intend to allocate any sites in Melksham. You can't allocate something in this plan period to be delivered outside of this plan period. Calne had the same argument. They came to the view that Wiltshire has history of not having a deliverable five year land supply, so they have done the sensible thing of being ready for that and having something deliverable.

Sarah Martin offered the opinion that if you do allocate land then you have to be careful that it comes forward for that use. Allocating land for housing over and above what you have to do helps you to control where development takes place. Developers will not be going away for five years. Allocating land helps you to control where you want it. It helps you get ahead of development rather than constantly playing catch up.

Cllr. John Glover asked whether we could defend sites. We have to have community benefits that come out of this. Cllr. Richard Wood observed that the potential hospital site is reasonably robust as there are many reasons it's not suitable for housing. Anthony Northcote responded that elsewhere they have managed to persuade an examiner that although there is no funding there is a more than 50% chance of a health centre coming forward in the plan period.

Teresa Strange observed that we have not talked to landowners and so are not aware if they are happy for their land to be used for health facilities rather than housing.

Anthony Northcote closed by saying that in his opinion it's calling out to undertake a landowner engagement exercise. Remember that anything you do has to be documented. It's easy for these things to be lost.

5. Invited Guest: Sarah Martin, Lemon Gazelle

Sarah Martin echoed what Anthony said previously. Having read through the document, it needs to be clear on vision, aims and policies. Remember the audience. The audience is really the planners. You are writing it to guide them. It needs to be precise and pithy and show what the community has said. Positively worded, not reiterating the high level policy.

Lemon Gazelle has worked on a number of Neighbourhood Plans in Wiltshire and the South West, including Royal Wootton Bassett. They have been a courageous authority and have looked to allocate above and beyond and determined with the people of the town where things are built and the community benefit it brings. Sites are allocated for x number of houses, and alongside that comes y and z. In terms of getting to that point, there is a lot of work to be done. We talked about not having previously engaged with landowners and developers. Sarah would encourage us to talk to them now. Instead of making assumptions what a developer would provide, it's good to go back and ask what community benefits they are offering. If you do it now it will save you being tripped up again at a later time. It's a safeguard to talk to people ahead of public consultation. Invite them to a session for example, so they can come and give a short presentation of what their offer is. It avoids you making a set of assumptions about a site. Lemon Gazelle can help us and support us in doing that. We have over 70 SHLAA sites, and we need to be really robust in talking to them. Sarah would encourage us to do more public consultation at this stage to ensure we know what people want. There are a variety of means they can use. Everything that comes back from the community can be documented. Lemon Gazelle can provide all of the community engagement that we are looking for.

Cllr. John Glover thanked Sarah and expressed the opinion that we should employ professionals to help us. Steve Gray agreed with this. He asked Sarah whether she needed to revise her quote or whether it stands? Sarah said the quote stands so long as she gets support.

Anthony Northcote responded that although the plan was bigger than he anticipated, it was reasonable to assume that his quote still stood.

Sarah Martin asked if we have an up to date housing needs survey. Teresa explained that AECOM would not sign one off for us because Wiltshire is doing its own. David Way of Wiltshire Council subsequently asked us why we hadn't done one! So it's a bone of contention. Anthony said it would cause a bigger delay to rely on Wiltshire.

Shirley McCarthy asked if it were possible to entice developers to higher environmental standards. Sarah Martin said that if it goes over and above the Wiltshire Council standards, you need to tread carefully with developers.

Colin Goodhind offered the opinion that we have done what we can, and that now is the time to take professional guidance and expertise.

Sarah Martin said one of the things we might like to consider when writing policies is to write a criteria based policy. This might say for example that a new health centre is needed, it must be on a brownfield site, within 500m of the town centre and on a bus route. Not everything you want has to be redlined on a map.

Nick Westbrook asked Sarah Martin what the timescale was. Sarah said the recommendation was for a six week period. Talking to landowners and developers can be prepared beforehand. Then come back to the group and decide which of those sites

you are suggesting you allocate in the Neighbourhood Plan, *then* you go out to consultation. Teresa Strange expressed concern that sites are going out to public consultation before landowners have been spoken to and sites have been agreed for consultation.

Nick Westbrook reiterated his concern that we are running out of time. Members of the public are asking him when they are going to see the referendum. Teresa Strange responded that the housing task group had whittled the 60 SHLAA sites down to 20 or so. AECOM had reported on those sites. The housing group then whittled those down still further to 7 or so sites. It transpired that some of those SHLAA sites weren't even put forward by landowners. We still haven't done a lot of the work required asking developers about the community benefits. We need critical friends to help us with that.

Sarah Martin said that it's best to get it right now rather than put down a draft for the sake of it given public pressure. It makes everything else so much easier. You need visions, aims and objectives in place.

Colin Goodhind offered the opinion that we have to put ourselves in the hands of the experts. We need to keep ourselves legal. He's concerned that pockets of opposition can come up even before the referendum. We need to educate people. People need to understand that agreeing to things being done in a controlled way is beneficial and we need experts to do that for us.

The chairman thanked both guest speakers for coming to see us this evening.

The guest speakers left the meeting at this point.

6. To consider and approve quotations

6.1 Neighbourhood-Planning.co.uk for professional planning support for writing the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr. Richard Wood invited those present to consider the offer from Neighbourhood-Planning.co.uk which was placed before the meeting. Colin Goodhind proposed that it was accepted, Cllr. John Glover seconded. Six voted in favour and there was one abstention.

6.2 Lemon Gazelle for professional planning support for site allocation consultation

Nick Westbrook referred to website enhancements that were required, and asked whether the funding was separate to this question. It was agreed that this would be taken forward to the next meeting. Action on Phil McMullen to add to the agenda for the meeting on 13th September.

Acceptance of the quotation from Lemon Gazelle was Proposed by Cllr. John Glover, seconded by Rolf Brindle. Six of those present were in favour and there was one abstention.

Nick Westbrook wished it recorded that in his opinion the vote should have taken place a year ago.

7. To agree to apply for grant funding to cover the cost of consultant fees

Nick Westbrook proposed, Colin Goodhind seconded, and all were in favour. Post Minute Note: Officers met on 31st August and the grant application was submitted.

8. Payments for Approval

8.1 To consider the July 2017 invoice from MCAP reference 17/P/007 sum: £261.00

link: [July Invoice](#)

Cllr Richard Wood proposed from the Chair; Cllr. John Glover seconded, and all were in favour. The timesheet was accordingly signed off by the Chairman.

9. Date of Next Meeting of Steering Group: September 13th 2017

Colin Goodhind gave his apologies ahead of this meeting.

Subsequent dates are: 27th September 2017, 25th October 2017, 29th November 2017. There will be no meeting in December 2017, the group meeting once again thereafter on 10th January 2018.

Meeting closed 7.45 pm

Signed:

Chairman of MNPSG

Date:

Links to supporting documentation and relevant sites of interest

[CCG GOV/17/07/10 Strategic Outline Case \(SOC\) for Chippenham, Melksham and Trowbridge](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>

[LEP paper January 2016](#)

[Melksham Bowerhill SHLAA map Aug 15](#)

[Shaw SHLAA map Aug 15](#)

[Whitley SHLAA map Aug 15](#)

[Final Sustainability Scoping Report](#)

[Briefing Note 258 - WILTSHIRE HOUSING LAND SUPPLY STATEMENT 2015](#)

<http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/resources/documents>

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/>

[Wiltshire Council Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Report Addendum](#)

Common Abbreviations: MNPSG = Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group; MCAP = Melksham Community Area Partnership; CAP = Community Area Partnership; AB = Area Board; SCOB = Shadow Community [campus] Operations Board; SG = Steering Group; TC = Town Council; MTC = Melksham Town Council; MWPC = Melksham Without Parish Council; PC = Parish Council; WC = Wiltshire Council; JSA = Joint Strategic Assessment; JSNA = Joint Strategic Needs Assessment; MIN = Melksham Independent News; DPD = Development Plan Document