



Date: Wednesday 17th January 2024

Start: 6.30pm

Present:

Steering Group Members Present

Councillor David Pafford Chair (MWPC)

Councillor John Glover (MWPC)

Councillor Graham Ellis (MTC)

Councillor Mike Sankey (WC)

Councillor Pat Aves (MTC)

John Hamley (MTUG)

Shirley McCarthy (Environment)

Mark Blackham (Bowerhill Residents Action Group)

Chris Holden (Melksham Community Area Partnership)

Task Group Members

Councillor Mark Harris

MTC Melksham Town Council

MWPC Melksham Without Parish Council

WC Wiltshire Council

MTUG Melksham Transport User Group

Officers

Teresa Strange (MWPC)

Lorraine McRandle (MWPC)

Andrew Meacham (MTC)

Planning Consultants

Vaughan Thompson (Place Studio)

MINUTES

1. Welcome & Housekeeping

Councillor Pafford welcomed everyone. Teresa advised that the meeting was being recorded and would be available on YouTube until the minutes were approved. She also outlined fire escape route.

2. To note apologies

There were no apologies.

3. Declarations of Interests

Chris Holden advised he was involved with the Melksham Green Space Group.

4. Public Participation

One member of the public was present.

5. Minutes of Last Meeting

Resolved: To approve and for the Chair to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September.

6. Changes to NPPF

Vaughan felt it was too early to make decisions or discuss alternatives. It was suggested there be a Working Group meeting to look at the changes, especially around site allocations.

Vaughan referred to his written summary about changes and outlined the most important changes that affected the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan (JMNP) Paragraph 11. Local Authorities with a local plan that has got to Regulation 19 only need to demonstrate a 4-year rather than 5-year land supply. This protection lasts until 19th December 2025. Wiltshire Council's ability to show a 4-year housing supply will probably face a legal challenge.

Neighbourhood Plans that allocate sites towards meeting identified housing need and are less than 5 years old will be protected by Paragraph 14. JMNP1 is therefore protected but there is a need to be mindful of how strong the protection is.

Steering Group now has three options for progressing JMNP2 – slow the process down, continue as previously suggested, or a middle route whereby we continue as previously planned but can slow down if required. Vaughan outlined potential problems - a fragility in the 4-year housing supply, fragility in Paragraph 14 protection, failure by Wiltshire Council to adopt its Local Plan before the expiry of the two-year protection. Members asked questions.

Chris Holden – Would we be able to ask Wiltshire Council for progress reports? There would be opportunities to do so.

John Glover – If protection was challenged would proceeding with the proposed sites in JMNP2 be of help? Of some relevance but not of help until adopted.

David Pafford – Housing required to 2026 has already been built. Does this count for anything? May be enough to protect from speculative development but after December 2025 is a period of greatest danger.

Teresa noted that if Wiltshire Council turn down speculative development, they may not be able to demonstrate a four-year land supply later on.

Resolved: To carry on as previously planned but to slow down if necessary.

7. Technical Support Packages/Evidence Document

- a) SEA – There were a couple of factual errors and Teresa has advised AECOM.
- b) HRA – not required.
- c) Car Park Audit – Survey indicated Melksham had more parking than was needed. John Glover pointed out that the survey classed Waitrose as public when it was private. Graham Ellis pointed out that the station was

going from private to public. Vaughan was of the opinion that the survey supported the allocation of Lowbourn car park and long term could support the Town Centre masterplan.

- d) Plan Health Check – Equalities Impact Statement may be needed. Comments on site allocations with suggestions on how to improve clarity. Comments on Green Wedges.
- e) Viability Assessment - Middle Farm not part of the assessment as more straightforward than the other sites. Waiting for the completed report. Dovetails with the work being undertaken by Anthony Keown.
- f) Cooper Tires Site – Anthony Keown providing insight on amount of development possible on the site. Working with Viability consultant and will be providing information shortly. Anthony and Vaughan have met with Wiltshire Council and are working to produce a Concept Statement/Framework Masterplan to sit with Cooper Tyres Policy. This may take some time.

Teresa noted that the work was agreed by MTC and MWPC at £6000.

8. Highlights of Regulation 14 Consultation Responses

Overview

92 responses to online questionnaire, of which 2 were statutory consultees. Questionnaire asked if responder supports the policy, weren't sure, or did not support the policy. All pie charts almost completely blue (support) or green (not sure). Most statutory consultees sent brochures by email. Responses will be extracted and community email responses will be input to online questionnaire. Will then have two reports, one showing community views and one showing stakeholders' views.

Wiltshire Council (WC) comments.

Commented on whole of plan, Steering Group may, in light of WC comments, wish to look at some policies previously not updated.

WC felt plan undertaken with good community engagement, was well presented and well laid out.

Room for more consistency with Core Strategy and Emerging Local Plan

Sustainable Construction/Renewable Energy – Need to be more flexible.

Policy 6 – W.C Housing team do not support figures in AECOM study. Wish JMNP to be consistent with approach set out for Wiltshire. Affordable Housing is 30% under Core Strategy and 40% under JMNP.

Allocations

- Cooper Avon - Comments on flood risk and access. Acknowledge that work is being done to resolve these.
- Library – A request that it be used for care rather than older-age accommodation. Engagement with Wiltshire Council has started.
- Middle Farm – no substantial comment.
- Whitley Farm – WC Heritage Service. Cannot support because of, in their view, the lack of evidence on change of use and poor heritage assessments.

Will need to look at the allocations again.

Bio-Diversity – Request to set a target of 20% net gain.

Local Green Space – Provided an appendix and critique. Focusing on those in W.C ownership. Feel that additional Local Green Space should be considered.

Green Wedges – Object as obstructive to types of sustainable development, outside of housing development, which are supported by core strategy policies (community facilities and employment). Will need to look at Green Wedge Policies again. The consent granted on appeal for land south of Western Way also provides planning permission for the land identified as a Green Wedge. No alternative but to withdraw the Green Wedge.

WC will welcome discussions on any of the objections raised.

Some questions of clarification were asked. Vaughan advised that a Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the adopted Local Plan or Core Strategy at the time of examination. Some core strategies out of date. JMNP2 will show conformity with Core Strategies but also show where it has regard to up to date policies.

Landowners

Mainly replied with booklets produced by consultants with a view to promoting alternative sites. Main points put forward

- JMNP2 should be behind the Local Plan, not ahead of it.
- JMNP2 is unsound as quality of evidence on allocations is not good, reasons for allocation are not sufficiently justified and there are mistakes in assessments.
- Lack of deliverability, particularly of brownfield strategy.
- Library does not have capacity for 50 dwellings.
- Particular site being promoted by the respondent would be an ideal alternative to solve the issues raised.

Vaughan commented that these are serious challenges that strike at the heart of plan and must be dealt with properly. Will be dealt with in detail at workshop.

9. Local Green Spaces

- a) A number of requests received for Cooper Tires Plot B/Site 1000 to be designated Local Green Space. Land in ownership of Cooper Tires but requests must be considered and assessed by the proper criteria.

Chris Holden noted for information that Plot 2 is being promoted as building land.

It was noted by David Pafford and Mike Sankey that there were a considerable number of requests. Vaughan advised there was a duty to assess regardless of how many representations were made. David Pafford urged members to make a visit to the site before the next meeting. John Glover left the meeting at this point (8pm).

John Hamley asked about the status of the site if not assessed as Local Green Space. Vaughan advised it was in the country, not the town and was greenfield land that had never been developed. No presumption it can be used as an infill site. Also, a large part of the land is a high flood risk zone so there would be considerable constraints to development. The

possibility of use for Environment Agency River Management was raised. This can be further discussed in working group meetings.

- b) Former Golf Course site, Bowerhill. Owned by WC who want to build a depot and will not support Local Green Space designation. David Pafford asked if it is WC land can they not do what they want with it? Vaughan advised if it is designated as Local Green Space and the JMNP2 is sound and well made, WC can make representations but the plan would proceed to examination.

There was discussion on community use of the land. It was noted that it was used by dog walkers but Mike Sankey confirmed there was no public right of way. Chris Holden felt it would make an ideal green space. The member of the public present felt WC should be challenged.

Vaughan confirmed that as the Local Green Space proposal was in draft reg 14 plan the assessment has concluded that the land does qualify as a potential Local Green Space. The Steering Group must consider WC objections and consider whether the alternative use has greater benefits to the wellbeing and economy of Melksham.

10. Working Groups

Workshop 1: Development Management Policies
Wednesday 7 February 2024, 6pm.

Steering Group
Wednesday 28th February 2024, 6:30pm

Workshop 2: Site Allocations and Local Green Spaces
To be confirmed

Steering Group
Wednesday 3rd April 2024, 6:30pm

11. Resources

MWPC have employed temporary support to deal with work to be done as are filling in for the lack of MTC officer support at present. This means that the MWPC Clerk is attending meetings etc that would have been attended by the MTC Clerk as relating to sites in the town.

Changes to NPPF will result in additional work and therefore additional cost from Place.

12. Finance

It was proposed by Councillor Pafford, seconded by Shirley McCarthy and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve payment of the Place invoice 6088 for £3025 plus VAT.

The meeting closed at 8.35pm signed.....
Chair