

A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR EGERTON

Minutes of a second meeting to discuss a way forward, Wednesday 11 January 2017 held in the Committee Room, Egerton Millenium Village Hall

Present: Richard King (Egerton Parish Council Chairman - in the Chair), Jennifer Buchanan (EPC), Chris Burgess, Jane Carr, Jerry Crossley, Claire Foinette (EPC), Elaine Graham, Graham Howland, Heather James (EPC Clerk), Ian Mellor, Ambrose Oliver (EPC), Mel Rawlinson, Peter Rawlinson (EPC), Lois Tilden (note-taker for this meeting) and guest speaker Martin Newman, Chairman, Pluckley PC. (Apologies – not sure!)

1. Richard King opened the meeting by welcoming all present, especially guest Martin Newman, who had been invited to provide an outline of Pluckley's experience in forming a Neighbourhood Plan. In his introduction, Richard said that:
 - a. he was intending to hand over chairmanship of future meetings, in view of his other commitments and because he felt it demanded a different lead;
 - b. EPC would be the sponsor of a Neighbourhood Plan steering group (as a sub-committee of EPC);
 - c. a Parish Assembly would take place on 23 March and that the initiative for progressing a Neighbourhood Plan would be a prominent feature, to be publicised in the next Egerton Update publication being worked on by Mel Rawlinson;
 - d. there had been a clear majority in favour of a Neighbourhood Plan at the open meeting in November 2016;
 - e. a Parish Boundary map would be a starting point (latest planned boundary changes had not yet been implemented); and
 - f. precedents and case studies could be helpful guides to save reinventing wheels.
2. Martin Newman gave a very helpful summary of the process followed by Pluckley and lessons learned from the drafting of a Neighbourhood Plan. He made the following points:
 - Following a Parish Design Statement in 2004 and a Parish Plan in 2009 (updated in 2013), Pluckley PC had decided in January 2015, through consultation across the Parish, to go ahead with a Neighbourhood Plan, drawing on relevant material contained within the earlier documents.
 - Whilst there had been some reservations about a Plan, it had been concluded that it would give Pluckley a more robust status in planning terms, because Government policy had evolved towards a presumption in favour of development, giving developers an edge. Pluckley felt compelled to do all it could to define what it needed for itself and a Neighbourhood Plan provided the means of achieving this – in effect, as a pre-emptive strike against unwanted, undesirable or unnecessary development.
 - Advice and assistance was sought from (and over time was helpfully given by) Ashford Borough Council (ABC) about each stage of the process, although there was also a degree of pressure. ABC also provided census and other relevant data.
 - ABC confirmed that if Pluckley produced a Plan that was finally in place, they would not include anything in their latest Borough Plan that would countermand it.
 - There were several funding streams available to cover much of the expenditure, some from ABC and some from Government via ABC or others. Total costs amounted to £8k to date. Most research was done in-house as there was local expertise. A planning consultant to assist on strategy cost £5k. Publication of the final NP would be an additional cost.

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- The Plan involved a lot of work over 2 years - 12 meetings plus other events - and it had been through all the statutory stages up to scrutiny by the Examiner. ABC was now considering the Examiner's comments. After any final changes to the text, it would then be subject to a local referendum (expected March 2017) in order to determine if it would take effect.
- The Plan included annexes covering community activities/projects, although these were not scrutinised by the Examiner.
- Terms of reference of the Steering Group needed to be determined with an outline timetable.
- Pluckley's NP Working Group had worked effectively with a core of 4 members, all parish councillors, plus a few others with relevant expertise who were co-opted. Martin Newman alone collated and drafted the text. This aided consistency – a larger group with varied drafting styles would have made the task unwieldy and protracted.
- Members of the Group needed to be fully committed to drive the Plan swiftly to fruition.
- The first task was to define the boundary (the Parish boundary was the most appropriate).
- A call for landowners to suggest potential sites for development was a key component – 5 landowners suggested 7 sites and 3 more emerged following an announcement.
- The Group held individual discussions with landowners to go over aspirations and proposals.
- The Group had to consider each site and consider reasons, need, purpose, scale, style and location of potential development and determine which ones would be suitable as well as determine sites that would not be supported. The focus was on exiting settlement hubs and not open countryside for housing (agricultural and renewable energy development including solar farms were also addressed).
- The Group found through its research a useful "12 sensible factors" template with which to assess sites and proposed development on them. The Group recommended (and PPC supported) 3 of the sites for development, including 25 dwellings on the site of the old brickworks. This was significantly fewer than the original outline plans submitted to ABC and which had been refused. 25 homes for differing needs including down-size homes for older people, starter homes for younger people and some local needs housing was more in line with what Pluckley as a whole regarded as sustainable, necessary and sound for future-proofing.
- The existing ABC Borough Plan was now being revised and a first draft had been published by ABC for consultation; Pluckley had to take this into consideration as well as principles in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework when drafting its NP, as well as other features and factors such as Special Landscape Character designations.
- Open consultation reigned throughout and was essential (excluding the landowners themselves from workshops to avoid conflicts of interest). Consultation also included a host of organisations with particular interests, most of which had been identified by ABC.
- Questionnaires/surveys to all households were issued in April 2015 and results analysed and publicised via website, posters and notices.
- Pluckley held 15 workshops May-August 2015. These events, meetings and the surveys engaged the community through openness, transparency and facilitation to speak freely. Consequently all aspects of the NP had been accepted by villagers – this being the bedrock of a NP. Only one critic emerged, who did not participate.
- The text amounted to 150 pages.
- Plans were expected to be reviewed and revised in future as more power may be imparted to NPs through the Parliamentary process – this would need to be kept in mind.

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- The appointment of an Examiner was for the Parish Council to select, from an approved list. Examiners had been briefed to sanction NPs that made development easier, so NPs needed to be clearly positive about some development in order to secure scope for any negative (anti-development) aspects that a parish might seek to include. In the eyes of Examiners, some NPs had been too minimalist about the extent of development, and this had resulted in at least one drastic change, leading to a local referendum outcome being “No” to the adoption of the NP. Other NPs had been reworked by Examiners to counteract local discouragement of renewable energy businesses/installations. These outcomes implied the need to be quite tactical when determining the content and wording to go forward in NPs for examination.
3. Richard King and all those present thanked Martin for his insightful presentation, and for his helpful answers to questions. During further discussion, the following points were made:
- a. EPC should be confident that villagers were happy to support the idea of a Plan;
 - b. it would make sense to adhere to the existing Parish boundary for the purposes of a Plan;
 - c. Egerton PC would need to set up a select Steering Group similar to Pluckley’s model;
 - d. the Group’s terms of reference would need to be agreed at the next meeting (Martin Newman would send EPC Pluckley’s terms);
 - e. a template of competencies necessary for effective composition of a Steering Group should be devised (ideas might emerge from researching other examples, such as report writing/editing, facilitating, planning expertise);
 - f. volunteers with firm commitment could be sought at the Parish Assembly and via the Egerton Update magazine to be published by Mel Rawlinson;
 - g. it would be best for at least one Parish Councillor to be on the Group, preferably taking the Chair;
 - h. a SMART timetable (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) with milestones would need to be drawn up;
 - i. the Group would need to report regularly to the Parish Council and be transparent about its work (except where there were good business reasons for maintaining confidentiality);
 - j. researching other relevant published examples and existing templates, flow charts etc would save time and effort (including further information from Pluckley);
 - k. EPC would need to resolve to tell ABC of its intentions to opt for a Neighbourhood Plan: ABC’s Simon Cole should be approached about this;
 - l. Lois Tilden offered to write notes for this meeting, but could not commit further, although Jane Carr suggested there might be scope for a “job-share” with her;
 - m. the next NP meeting would be on Wednesday 22 February at 7.30pm in the Village Hall Committee Room, to be chaired by Peter Rawlinson, Vice Chairman EPC.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm.