

HEADINGTON COMMITTEE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTION

**A report on the Public Meeting held at St Andrew's School, London Road
on Tuesday 26th February 2013**

The meeting was convened to discuss how the residents of Headington would like to see the area develop and to see if there was an appetite to create a Neighbourhood or Community Plan to achieve this.

Patrick Coulter (Chair Headington Action) set the scene by explaining that as a result of a stakeholders' meeting held in October there was a consensus to go to a Public Meeting to explore the idea of setting up a Neighbourhood or Community Plan. Comments have been made that this idea should have been pursued 20 years ago before certain developments and changes had taken place.

The idea of a Neighbourhood or Community Plan (**NP** or **CP**) is to devolve more power to local communities, to put together planning policies which are legally binding to sit alongside those created by the council (NP) or to identify action plans or visions for the area (CP).

Richard Bradley (who has also been working on this issue for the Oxford Civic Society) put the question to the audience

Do we want a plan or not? pointing out that both the **NP** and the **CP** are created by the community. He asked

Why now? and pointed out that

- Over the last 10 years the government has recognised the value of a community led plan
- The Localism Act gives an NP legal powers
- And development in Headington is on-going

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

It is defined by the Localism Act 2011

It sets planning policies by

- Specifying uses of land – visions of its use and the fine details
- Where new houses, shops and businesses should go and how they look

It is used to decide planning applications.

- It has a strict process for producing them
- A Forum to carry out this work needs to be comprised of at least 21 people
- The plan has to conform to the national plan and the local (City) plan
- Its findings must go to a referendum of local people
- There must be consultation with local people
- There needs to be a geographical area covered by the plan that has to be agreed by the City Council

What is a Community Plan?

- It is easier to produce

- Ideally, it needs to be agreed with various authorities
- It covers land, transport and anything else that ought to be in a plan
- It has no legal status

A combination of a **NP** and **CP** is possible.

Who is doing it?

A **NP** is being prepared by: Wolvercote, Summertown/St Margaret's, and Jericho

A **CP** is being prepared by: Marston, Risinghurst, Barton, Cutteslowe and others

An example of a **NP** which is in an advanced state of preparation elsewhere in the country is that of **Exeter St James** (www.exeterstjamesforum.org/userfiles/PDFs/The%20Neighbourhood%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf)

which covers an area very like Headington, being within a city, with a university, with large institutions, and with issues such as traffic, a similar age profile, and a problem of affordability of homes. It is about to go to referendum, being only the second in the country so far to have reached this stage.

What might a plan achieve?

It might

- Control or encourage certain types of retail establishment
- Determine the size and design of large developments
- Protect the character of an area
- Allocate land for specific community use e.g. a community centre
- Influence traffic and transport plans
- Determine cycle and walking routes
- Set out priorities for CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money

It all depends on what the consultation reveals

Should we do it? Is there room for manoeuvre?

A **NP** is all about planning policies, a **CP** is more of a wish list. A hybrid (like Exeter) might be the best approach.

Questions from the floor

Q. What is the City Council's view of a local plan?

The Local Plan is on the City website – it covers a whole range of policies for the city e.g. affordable housing, cycling expectations, housing policies, the Sites & Housing Document which includes Headington

Q. What is distinctive about Headington in the City's Local Plan?

We need to look at the city plan and see what we can add or tweak – perhaps the number of open spaces that could be addressed

Q. What has happened in Headington is not good – what can we do about it now?

There cannot be a presumption of development which is not sustainable e.g. land, schools, affordable housing etc.

Q. Does the community stay involved once the plan is made?

The plan should be a living document , but at this stage it is not clear if the plan can be subsequently changed – the government has not determined this yet.

Q. Is the organisation of the plan non-political?

The Forum that needs to be set up to achieve the plan should comprise representatives from all walks of life in the area and is required by law to have at least one representative from the local authority.

Q. If we don't want something built can we object?

If it already in the Local Plan then we can't. It is areas without specific plans where there needs to be a **NP/CP**

Experience in Wolvercote

John Bleach

admin@bleacharchitect.co.uk

He explained that Wolvercote has a population of c.6,000 centred on the Wolvercote Roundabout. There are four areas: Upper, Lower, Five Mile Drive/Jordan hill, and Cutteslowe Park.

The motivation for producing a **NP** was the impact of new developments

The Northern Gateway business park, the Paper Mill which will provide housing for c. 600 dwellings increasing the population of Wolvercote by one third, and scattered infill in the area.

They saw the Localism Bill as a positive influence. They wanted a **NP** to give them legal clout and to focus on the built environment.

Specific issues in Wolvercote are flooding, schools, noise and traffic

So far they have set up working groups and a steering group and this has been one year into the process

Area boundaries has been established following three public meetings

Feedback from residents – some of it controversial

Agreed constitution – arranged an AGM – set up a bank account

Forum application has gone to the City Council

Contributed to the Sites & Housing Development Plan document

Commented on the Roger Dudman Way blocks of student accommodation on Port Meadow

Meetings with Wolvercote Commoners and the city

Allie Noel

info@wolvercote-ap.org.uk

What we are doing

We are very busy

Positive social impetus

Cohesion development

Setting up local community groups

Continuing to consult residents and businesses

Formulating a vision

Mapping policies against the Core Strategy

Researching and providing evidence

Keeping everyone informed

Liaising with other neighbourhood groups

Facilitated public consultation for the paper mill

Preparing for consultation at other sites – OUP sports Ground, Elsfield Hall, Northern gateway

We need to

Circulate and comment on the first draft of the plan and its sustainability

Take the community with us by PR and website

Arrange a forum launch event

So that there are no surprises at the referendum stage

We have developed a distinctive kite logo which reflects the shape of the area of Wolvercote

Our mission is to change negative views into positive ones

We must do it

We need to make it happen

Questions to Wolvercote

Q. What is legal clout?

Building on what the city have put into the strategic plan. Policies adopted by the referendum will sit alongside the Core Strategy and the Sites & Housing document which has equal validity. We can specify the type, design and location ourselves as this is not determined by the Core strategy

Q. What are the issues with the papermill?

We want housing for our own people but affordable housing allocation is from the city-wide council list

Patrick & Richard then posed the question-

Should we have a plan?

The stages involved

Area needs to be determined. An initial map includes JR, Churchill and an area bounded by the ring road but this is open to discussion

Q. If Cowley set up a plan what would we do?

We could not overlap – and it is up to the City Council to accept or reject the area proposed

Q How long will the process take?

Set up a Forum - Involve the Community - Undertake evidenced based research - Obtain consent from the community by referendum - Submit to city for inspection – this could take 18 to 24 months to achieve.

The benefits

Gives us **status** as an expression of our will

The process **builds** community cohesion

Clarifies the issues

Shapes the direction of development

Basis for **lobbying** for improvement

Cash will follow a plan

Other areas will have a plan

The drawbacks

Some negative thoughts -

It won't achieve anything - too late – we are already full - don't have resources

Quote of the evening “**We create our own community**”

A model Neighbourhood Forum has a

Steering group which manages **Working groups** who work on specific topics and collect some active supporters
And this develops into A Neighbourhood Forum,

Wolvercote has a steering group of 12 people

60 people are part of the forum

There is an interested database of c. 250 people

The population of Headington is c. 14,000

There is a high proportion of transient residents (hospital and students) but anyone who lives or works in Headington is entitled to take part in the process.

A simple majority is all that is needed to carry the plan forward

The audience was asked to make a decision on whether we move towards a **NP** – an overwhelming majority of the 120 in the hall said yes.

Volunteers for a forum were invited to sign up – at the end of the meeting we had 23.

The criteria are at least 21 people, living and working in Headington, a cross section of members, names of people with a specific interest/expertise required.

The forum will grow from an initial small base.

Headington Forward, an organisation that liaises with local institutions on Headington issues, will be approached to be part of the forum but the majority of the forum is for residents not big institutions.

Further reading:

A useful website. Gives a good picture of what is going on across the country and answers some important questions (like CIL funding)

<http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/home>

Liz Grosvenor 7 March 2013