

## Neighbourhood Plan Meeting Minutes

29/03/2021

In Attendance: David Russell, Amy Hardingson, Neville Penman, Caroline Rackham, Trevor Harris, Kate Crisell, Emma Cully, Ann Page, Matt Kangarani, Lin Francis, Katherine Green, Claire Upton-Brown, Catherine Bartlett, Dave Hills, Louise Cerasoli

Time meeting start: 7pm

Caroline: I'll start by sharing my screen of the document to help us talk through while Claire is here. Claire, over to you

Claire: What would be helpful for my part of view is to understand the issues that the neighbourhood plan is trying to address, and maybe what are some of the issues that it's not trying to address.

Caroline: We've got a list of priorities let's get that up. We started this work with Dave Bevan. We worked on the areas we wanted to cover and the rough timescale. We drafted a vision and objectives. You've had this document Claire – do you have any questions about it?

Claire: I have seen this, I am just querying because it has been some years now. Especially in light of the local plans we now have available and the time horizons that we have available.

Caroline: Yes, we should have a think about the time frames, but the objectives are still the same. We want to revitalise the town centre, we want to improve green spaces, increase investment in commercial and community, and maintain/improve transport by road

Claire: That's one thing to think about is the wording around transport as we are moving away from roads, and thinking more about multiple transport modes. It's worth reflecting on this and updating it in line with LTP from the county.

Caroline: Also with the town centre we have been looking at how we can access the town more easily with walking and cycling. You're absolutely right, we can add that in that section.

Matt: People my age are very interested in the short term plan. 2036 is a very longterm plan. I would like to see some changes now, especially ones that don't have to cost a lot of money. I think we need to immediately look at the town centre and look at improving it, and improving access now (crossing the road, access down pavements). Is there anything we can do with that level now?

Claire: The challenge that we all have is that we need to work within the framework we are working within. So if we continue with a neighbourhood plan then it has to comply with the local plan and the most up to date versions of the legislation. That is something to bear in mind with your timeframes. Because ultimately the neighbourhood plan has to conform with the local plan.

Matt: I'm just thinking about the meanwhile... what we can do while we are preparing the neighbourhood plan

Claire: There's a process to go through to get NP adopted, which takes time. If you are looking for instant improvements to public realm, you might look to create a more focused document. For instance something which you can work with as a town council, based on things that you already have power over, things that are in your ownership. You don't need a neighbourhood plan to achieve all of these plans. But if you want to change the shape of the roundabout or put in a new cycle way then this has to comply with county and national standards, depending on what it is.

Caroline: I think a lot of what you are talking about there Matt is probably in the town centre point which is another agenda point.

The philosophy of what we're trying to do has been consistent throughout.

Catherine: We identified our themes early on with town centre, green spaces, and accessibility. We identified that there are a lot of desire lines in the town, with the way that the train line cuts right through the centre of the town, a very horizontal blockage to that north south access. So improving pedestrian and cycle access safely has been a focus. I don't see how any of the work we have done so far conflicts with the LTP. As I see it (as a town planner) is that we need to be in broad compliance with the strategic vision. We're aware of the policies and we want to move forward of the process that we have made so far, and get feedback from the local authority on the progress that we have made so far.

Caroline: Claire, do you have any feedback on the work so far?

Claire: I have to advise that the transport work is brilliant, but we aren't the transport authority. We're aware of pieces of work with the highways authority. If you are going to put these things in the neighbourhood plan then how are you going to include this authority?

*Catherine replies – missed wording in the transcript*

Claire: the LC whip is a fixed process, and across Hampshire they are more commonly done at a town level, and because of the transforming towns funding this comes down to the waterside and there have been workshops. In 2019 a number of district councillors were involved in that work. There have been a number of LC whips across Hampshire that are in consultation. It would have normally been done about 6 months ago, but it's been delayed. They are looking to make sure that any schemes in the LC whip are capable of being finished. To ensure that everything is compliant. My impression from talking to county is that they are busy working on the draft in preparation for the next consultation after the elections, in June time most likely.

Caroline: the work that we've been doing on transport though is as much about reviewing the town centre, and how it can be refigured. Like the roundabout or changes to library road. It's not the LC whip type stuff

Catherine: It's more site specific to interaction with the town centre

Caroline: Shall we move on to discussing the town centre?

David: Are we complying with the latest regulations? That's an ideal world. Is it our job to do planning on the roads? I didn't think that was our job. I'm confused.

Are we complying with the NFDC and the LC, and the other thing is, where is the area we are actually trying to do, and what is our objective. I'm still not sure what we are trying to achieve.

Caroline: We have a vision and a number of aims. That's essentially what we want the neighbourhood plan to do. The design overarching statement is what we did in order to come up with our objectives. We then came up with those aims.

Catherine: We presented all of this to you not that long ago David. We did the presentation to the council.

David: I'm trying to understand if we are complying with the regulations that Claire is talking about.

Caroline: That's the main reason why we've been trying to get Claire along. So we can work alongside NFDC and other relevant authorities. It's really good that she's come along today. We are trying very hard to comply with all the documents that we can. We want to be compliant, so we hope that ongoing we can have enough input from NFDC officers to make sure that we are compliant in all wording because there is no point in doing the neighbourhood plan otherwise.

David: So is changing roads in our remit?

Claire and Caroline: No

Caroline: the role in the neighbourhood plan would be to look at opportunities to connect into existing and planned networks. We are also looking at connecting with Hampshire.

David: Do we need to move away from roads Claire?

Claire: Looking at removing a roundabout isn't the function of a neighbourhood plan, and if you want to put that in then how are you going to deliver it? I've not seen the plans so I can't talk about things in detail.

Caroline: What we want is for the town centre to function better, then it sounds like we need Hampshire to be more involved

Claire: You'll need an agreement from them. You'll need to manage expectations. You need professional expertise to talk to Hampshire. They won't do that work for you. We can look at technical support that is needed to help achieve some of these things.

Neville: What about the police station that looks like it's going to be going soon as it's barely staffed. How do we find out about that? Can we demolish it?

Caroline: What the neighbourhood plan can do is to clarify what we would like to do if the police station were to move out, but we can't tell them to move out. It's a wish. We can pull people together to try and do something constructive.

Neville: Shall we contact them?

Caroline: Yes we have done that. We also presented on that at the town council meeting.

Catherine: A number of people at this meeting have had this information presented to them several times, or been party to this information.

Matt: What I've heard so far is that locally we can't do anything, and that HCC aren't going to do anything. What we've done so far isn't going to bear fruit any time soon. We can order planters and benches but all the other hard work is pointless. We should stop throwing so much work into this project.

Claire: I suppose it goes back to what do we want to achieve with the NP. There are limitations with highway matters. Maybe it wants to be narrowed down slightly to things that are more in your gift to deliver. It's great to have an aspirational plan, but it's frustrating to not be able to deliver. Is it broader than it might be? Is there a focus on the list of priorities that can be delivered? Especially in view of other pieces of work that are being delivered in the area.

Caroline: Yes, absolutely there is a question over whether we should do an official neighbourhood plan. We've put it into three aspects. Hopefully all three of those plans can influence things. Without any kind of plan we can't do anything. I'm more frustrated than anyone.

Catherine: Hear, hear. We need more consistency from people on this call so we don't have the embarrassment of this call where we having to explain information again. What does the district council want for Totton? We would like some focus and some guidance. We are putting in as much time as we can as volunteers.

Kate: I agree with what Catherine has said. I was there early on but I came away. There's a lot of work been going on. But it seems like this work does want to stop now.

Claire: It's not my job to decide what is right for Totton. We have been helping. As a district council we have been working in partnership.

Catherine: Do you have an officer dedicated to neighbourhood plan support?

Claire: Yes, a junior officer. We would like to look at how we can help improve the town. There are significant opportunities across the waterside. My position is that. There are projects that you are aware of, these are all things that will influence the area in the future. We need to agree on how we are going to work together in the future in what will be an increasingly

complex time, complex area. Lots of different groups who are working in their areas. Part of my role is to collect all of those different bits of information into a place. I agree as a planner that unless we have plan-

Catherine: - This is the point. You've highlighted the main points. Totton is an opportunity. It's got areas of deprivation. Some kind of plan needs to be supported so that we can be active stakeholders as a group. I don't feel that we are given the support and recognition that we should. This is the work that we do and we should be involved.

Caroline: I think it's brilliant to have you along here tonight Claire, and I think it would be great to see you more.

Claire: Yes I am planning on that

Caroline: Great. The issue is that we have a plan, and we have opportunities and we need to work together with stakeholders to make it happen whether or not it's a NP

Ann: We came together a long time ago. A lot of other things have gone on in the waterside in that time. In Totton we feel like we are in the outskirts of the new forest, and we are not in anyone's thoughts when anything goes on. It's even more important now that we have a plan. All I know is that we have got to do something. There are so many things going on which can ruin Totton if we're not careful. Someone has to do something. NFDC has to take us into consideration. And HCC with the roadways, if necessary.

Caroline: And Claire has said so many times how important Totton is.

Claire: I certainly have.

Matt: A326 is nothing to do with Totton. Anything outside Totton is not happening in Totton. Eastleigh and Romsey have things going on. We started this process a long time ago. Eastleigh has changed, Romsey has changed but we are getting worse. The plan hasn't helped because the right agencies haven't been involved.

Amy: We need to work together to get anywhere. There has been so much negativity from the very start of this call, people calling in to question the point of this work. The work that we have done as part of this project is incredibly valuable, we are pulling together key information that can help influence things for the better. What we do with that over time, what specific legislation we use and tap into aside we shouldn't stop doing anything. That would be madness. We are only going to improve things by

working together, from all of us consistently working with as many partners as possible to do what we can do, to improve what we can improve.

Catherine: We need consistent support from our local councillors, or don't get involved

Lin: Catherine said what I wanted to say. I was shocked at how many people were on the call when I came on. I wondered, why are they all here? And now I know. The negativity that we have seen in this meeting has been shocking. Lots of people have dropped off over the years. But don't just pop up after a lot of meetings and be negative about absolutely everything.

Neville: I was involved a while back in our work with the buses and our consultations. I think there are more people here tonight because there's an awareness that we could miss the boat, miss the opportunity. I think we all just want to know how we can be involved. We often don't get the support we need as a town. I think people are here tonight because they do care. Once a month isn't enough. We need work to be done in-between. We've been neglected for a long time and that needs to stop.

Katherine: I've only been part of the group a few months. It's been fantastic to see passions coming forward. I think there is a need to get us back in line with the NP and LP. We need those policies at that higher level. The policies that I see are a fairly broad brush, which is true of many NP that I work with in the authority that I work with. The passion for the town is fantastic to have.

Matt: I was feeling negative when I heard a long list of what we couldn't do

Caroline: I feel that we should move. I know that you feel we are wasting our time, but if we turn this into a neighbourhood plan or not – we do need a plan. So I think with our final 25 minutes we should move on. Let me bring up the town centre plan.

Catherine: I'll share the masterplan from Snug.

*Catherine talks through the visuals.*

Snug is a local architecture firm with a local interest, but they also have a lot of experience in creating master plans. The town centre is a fantastic town centre – regardless of how we feel about the visuals, it works and people use it, so we need to make the most of it as a visual centre point.

The war memorial park is thought of as being underused by most people in the town, so this idea opens up the park and draws people in to that green space and has a better arrangement of uses and buildings. This is just a masterplan of our ideas. The retail function will always serve a focal point for local people, but we have looked at a mixed function as well to increase residential dwellings in the town centre. Whether our plans are compliant with the other local plans is all about sustainable development. Utilising and creating increased residential density in close proximity to amenities to reduce the need for travel and to maintain and enhance the viability of places. We have identified the main crossing points. We have never looked at changing the road layout, but we have looked at closing part of library road as a way of creating a green link to the space that already exists.

We walked around the town with the team from snug. The train line particularly causes issues, so we were looking at ways we could improve the public realm to help create focal points for crossings in the safest places, and helps them towards the green spaces and retail spaces.

Caroline: Any comments?

David: When I look at this plan, I think about how we shouldn't be building on green spaces. We have a plethora of buildings in the town. I'm a little bit concerned. But I think you have done a lot of good work. But I am worried about bigger buildings. Why do we want 4 storey buildings?

Caroline: Several reasons for 4 storey buildings. We do already have them in Totton. We're not talking about anything that would dwarf landmark buildings. Secondly, if developers come in then they need an incentive. The only way it will be viable for them is with 4 storeys as 4 storeys is a magic number for them where they make enough money, and that helps to encourage development. The other thing is that it gives a feeling of confidence. 4 storeys gives an impression of confidence in a town, it's more impressive. But the most key is the developer element.

Kate: I can't remember any 4 storeys being passed in planning when they have come up. We're only a small town. The park as it is, is good as it is. Everybody uses it as a quiet park. I think it would be a shame to change it.

Caroline: We're not talking about changing the park, we're talking about turning the town around to face the park.

Catherine: We're looking to extend the park so that it has a street frontage that draws people into it. And this is a masterplan, we're not saying this is

what we're going to do. These are ideas to help us move forward and that incorporates our observations. How can we rearrange things better to be more successful? When we're talking about 4 storeys, it would come to a more detailed analysis in order to decide what would work best. This is a tool for looking at how buildings and uses can be rearranged to make them more successful. And give the town a stronger sense of place.

David: The park is the lungs of the town. It looks like you're taking away green space from the park.

Caroline: You're looking at the area where the doctors surgery and the car park is currently.

David: But we have issues with parking, so 4 storeys doesn't make sense with less parking.

Catherine: As Claire said, the whole premise around plans at the moment is to discourage people from using their cars. The whole purpose of this plan is to look at more sustainable ways of designing the town so we can discourage car use and encourage alternatives.

David: It's part of the green landscape, so if we put more buildings there it seems contrary to what we are trying to achieve.

Catherine: Our plan has a major focus on protecting and enhancing green spaces. We need to promote and encourage people to access the parks, and use them better.

Amy: This is right next to where I live, and it's one of the most common things that people talk to me about when they find out that I am a councillor. People say that the park is underutilised, that it's a shame that it isn't more like Romsey's park when it has such potential. When I discuss some of these plans with people they are supportive of the idea and like the benefits it gives to the town.

David: My concern is that if you said to people that the park is going to be more inclusive, fine. But if you said to people that you would have 3 or 4 storey buildings around it then people might think differently.

Caroline: There are existing buildings – that existing building, do you feel it is imposing? Is it the character of the building that makes a difference? What do you think?

David: My personal opinion is that it can be imposing or is a danger of it.

Caroline: We can look at stepping the height. So that what is next to the park is lower. We've got the civic buildings as well, and we want to keep the character of civic buildings. And we want to improve on those as well. We might be better to go upwards rather than outwards in order to get better civic buildings including the community centre and the council offices. Maybe what you are getting at is having something slightly smaller near the park.

Emma: Can I ask how much of library road would be cut off?

Caroline: Snug said to close all of library road, but I had issues with that, as did Ann.

Ann: Yes I think you would have a danger of rat runs around Testwood Lane, especially for school traffic

Caroline: I proposed having some access to the precinct car park, and from there it would be closed across to Beaumont road, and Beaumont road would be the access to commercial road. And the benefit is the pedestrian access.

Emma: Personally I feel that the civic building is already quite imposing, and that chunk of library road that's left might be a bit redundant.

Caroline: I think the thought was that it was going to support the retail in the precinct. But whether that feeling will stay as we have less retail than we used to.

Catherine: Has there been any update from the retail impact assessment?

Claire: We'll revisit that piece of evidence soon. That will be part of local plan part 2.

Caroline: I think we have had rather a long discussion on odd points tonight, but I am wondering if it is worth having another meeting in 2 week's time in order to talk about the town centre so we can talk further?

David: I think we've got a long going on, and I need to think about this and how it all would work, get my head around it.

Caroline: What we need is a plan that we can take to Hampshire, and then we can discuss it with them

Trevor: The taxi rank did used to be open in the past

David: We do need to think about these things, there's a lot to get our heads around

Caroline: What about another meeting in a fortnight. How about the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup>?

Catherine: Good idea.

Matt: Will it clash with district, can we check?

Caroline: Ok, let's go for the 13<sup>th</sup> and I'll send out an invitation where we can chat through the bits and pieces, and then we'll have more discussions at the 'normal' NP meeting on the fortnight after.

Meeting ends: 8.47pm

### **Action points**

- Refine wording around transport to reflect tilt towards multiple transport modes in planning policy
- Aim to contact HCC about the NP, getting them involved, finding out what specs we need to be aware of

### **Feedback and ideas**

- Might need to narrow down some of the elements in the NP plan document to ensure they are achievable within that framework
- Worries over 4 storey buildings near the park, and an idea that stepping the storey level so it's lower nearer the park.
- Would be good to get information from retail impact assessment as soon as it is available