

Minutes of Sutton St. Nicholas – Neighbourhood Development Plan Project Group Meeting held by Zoom on 24th January 2022 at 7.15pm

Present

Keith Lawton (Chairman)
Rebecca Blackman
Stan Gyford

In Attendance

Dr David Nicholson
Tony Ford – Parish Clerk

1. Apologies

Apologies from Cllr Richard Andrews, Cllr Ron Gow, Ian Nicholas, and Seng Yeo

2. Minutes of meeting held on 25th November 2021

These were confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

3. Update on Actions

- Page 28 Change to Key Views - additional views to be submitted by Keith Lawton. (Completed)
- Page 35 (Paragraph 5.18) Keith Lawton to send suggested list to Dr David Nicholson (Completed)
- Herefordshire Council Local Plan – pre-consultation engagement Keith Lawton to draft response. (Completed)

4. Draft Neighbourhood Plan – To approve version2 dated January 2022 for submission to Herefordshire Council.

Keith Lawton highlighted page 41 Community Actions and gave special mention to CA1 -Highways, traffic, and road safety for all users.

Keith Lawton and members of the group thanked Dr Nicholson for his comprehensive document.

Having discussed the matter, the group approved the draft document for submission to Herefordshire Council.

Action – Dr Nicholson to submit document to Herefordshire Council.

5. Actions Going Forward –

Dr Nicholson informed the group that the process going forward was as follows: -

- Sending the draft ND Plan to Herefordshire Council for them to conduct it's strategic environmental assessment and appropriate assessment under the Habitat Regs, which should take some six weeks.
- Working on the Statement of modifications

- Develop the Regulation 14 consultation process including formal approval of the plan by the Parish Council. (Hopefully, March meeting, if not an extraordinary meeting)
- Leaflet in the Sutton News April Edition.

- 6. Herefordshire Local Plan – pre-consultation engagement –** The Clerk informed the group that the Parish Council had requested that the draft developed by Keith Lawton be sent to Dr Nicholson for a final review and comment and that it had been delegated to the Clerk to submit the final (Appendix 1 refers) Keith Lawton thanked Dr, Nicholson for finalising the document. The final version was noted by the group.
- 7. Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-41- Strategic Spatial Options Consultations –** The group considered the matter and agreed to recommend option one to the Parish Council.

Action Clerk to inform the Parish Council of the group’s decision.

- 8. Any Other Business**
There were none.

Chairman
Keith Lawton

Sutton St. Nicholas Parish Council

Herefordshire Local Plan Update – Pre-Consultation Engagement

General Questions:

1. **What elements of the strategy and policies in the current Core Strategy do you consider to have been successful or not? Please explain the reasons for your answer.**

The Parish Council considers that the strategy addressing development, traffic and transport is flawed. Traffic volumes have grown but this has not been matched by adequate highway infrastructure around Hereford, with adverse implications for the parish. Traffic flows on the A4103 Roman Road are beyond maximum capacity at the railway bridge with single lane traffic lights between the VW and Land Rover Dealerships. This has become a critical bottle neck for travellers to Worcester, Gloucester and beyond and vice versa.

With the use of car and HGV sat navs constantly looking for the quickest route, vehicle drivers are guided to bypass the A4103 when traveling from the west of Hereford on the Roman Road to Worcester etc. They now come through Moreton-on-Lugg and Sutton St. Nicholas and pick up the A4103 later on their journey. To make matters worse the opening of the Bloor Homes bypass through the new housing estate to the A49 north of Holmer for the relief of traffic traveling from west to east on the Roman Road has pushed even more traffic through Moreton-on-Lugg and Sutton St. Nicholas. This has resulted in excess of 250 vehicle movements through the village in the peak weekday hours on a route which passes through the Conservation Area, is unlit and generally without footway. **Highway safety and village character is being harmed by the significantly increased volume of traffic.**

2. **What elements of current core strategy policy could be improved? Please explain the reasons for your answer.**

The Parish Council considers that aspects of the local delivery of rural housing could be improved:

- The aims of the strategic approach are to “bolster existing service provision, improve facilities and infrastructure and meet the needs of the communities concerned” (Core Strategy policy RA2). This is a problem because directing growth through a percentage figure applied to all rural settlements in each Housing Market Area is too blunt an instrument to maintain and strengthen locally sustainable communities. **Attention needs to be given in each case as to whether further development can reasonably be expected to boost rural sustainability, or just mean more people travelling by car to access goods, services and employment elsewhere, adding to the increases in through traffic displaced from around Hereford.**
- Whilst policy RA1 promises that “local evidence and environmental factors will determine the appropriate scale of development” in practice the growth allocations have been applied by the Council and NDP Examiners as minimum requirements. Neighbourhood planning becomes a housing numbers game which has eclipsed the opportunity to balance social, economic and environmental factors at the parish level. This has made it harder for communities such as Sutton St. Nicholas to genuinely address local housing needs and to thereby support services, employment and facilities. **More freedom and flexibility should be given to local communities in determining what is appropriate, including taking account of the actual pattern of local services.** For example, since the Core Strategy was formulated bus services

from the village into Hereford have been reduced, yet this cannot be reflected in local policy under the present approach.

- The approach whereby the larger the village the more growth is expected of them is not one that can be pursued indefinitely without harming the character of the community concerned. Sutton St. Nicholas has doubled in size in the last 40 years. As a result, it has lost much of its socio-economic identity and social 'glue'. This harm is continuing - in 2011, there were 389 households in the parish; since then, 104 new homes have been built, given permission or allocated – an increase of over 26%. **What is now needed is a period of consolidation in the period up to 2041 so that the community can recover its identity.**
- The Core Strategy places a welcome emphasis on the role of NDPs in delivering housing in a planned way. Given this, a clearer expression in policies RA2 and/or RA3 that land **outside** but **adjacent** to settlement boundaries defined in NDPs is in the countryside in planning policy terms (and so subject to policy RA3) would be helpful. As it stands, scheme proposers point to the words "in or adjacent" in policy RA2 as supporting their proposals, even though they may be outside an NDP-identified settlement boundary.

3. Are there any key planning policies that are missing for the current year?

The Parish Council are not aware of any notable omissions.

4. Are the policy areas that are devolved to NDPs at the right level? Please explain your reason for the answer.

Yes, subject to the comments above as to need for greater flexibility to be made available to balance an appropriate scale of development with local services, facilities and employment in working towards a sustainable community. With this caveat, the Parish Council supports the role given to them in meeting local housing requirements, defining a settlement boundary for the village and designating Local Green Space.

5. If you have an adopted NDP, do you consider it has been a success? Please explain your answer.

Yes, in that it has met the challenge set by the Core Strategy to identify a minimum amount of new housing and in so doing enabled the community to set in place a settlement boundary and identify Local Green Space, as well as setting out policies on housing mix, landscape character and other matters.

No, in that the NDP has not been able to respond to local evidence or environmental factors in determining the appropriate scale of development. Accepting and enabling new development through the NDP has **not** proved to be a means of bolstering or improving existing services, facilities and infrastructure. A particular issue that the NDP can do nothing to address is the harm to highway safety and village character arising from traffic being displaced from around Hereford to route through Sutton St. Nicholas (see above).

Current Core Strategy Settlement Implementation

1. What impact has the current settlement hierarchy had on your Parish? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

The settlement hierarchy identifies Sutton St. Nicholas as a "main focus" settlement. The Parish Council has sought to manage and control the scale of development that this might have brought through the preparation of its NDP and adoption of a settlement boundary. Now there is a five-year housing land supply and plans are up-to-date we feel we have some protection against development which the settlement hierarchy may otherwise have brought. This does not mean we are not under pressure from disproportionate proposals, and we are dependent on the local planning authority taking decisions in accord with the NDP.

2. Do you consider the current distribution of proportional growth in the named settlements RA2 of the Core Strategy achieved its aims of rural sustainability? Please explain the reasons for the answer.

No. This is because the distribution of growth by means of a percentage figure applied to all identified rural settlements in each Housing Market Area is too blunt an instrument to deliver rural sustainability. It directs more growth to larger settlements with insufficient attention paid as to whether such development will actually serve to “maintain and strengthen locally sustainable communities” (policy RA2). In Sutton St. Nicholas, there is no evidence that the community is more sustainable as a result of growth since 2011 or that planned in the NDP. There has been no increase in services, jobs, facilities or infrastructure in this period and bus services have reduced. There is no sign of any improvements to come (it is acknowledged that some affordable housing will result from the two NDP allocations in due course). The non-implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy has exacerbated this position. **With no clear link between more houses and better services and facilities, if more housing development is to be sought in Sutton St. Nicholas it will mean the village will continue to evolve into a dormitory settlement to Hereford rather than as a sustainable community.**

Services and Facilities

1. Have existing services been retained or new services and facilities provided through development in your Parish? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

No. Whilst the Village Hall and Sutton Primary Academy were delivered in 2008 alongside new housing, otherwise services and facilities have reduced: the village shop has closed and bus services have declined, limiting transport options into Hereford.

2. What would consider to be the key services and facilities required to support proportional growth over the next twenty years? Please explain reasons for your answer.

The NDP household survey shows residents want to see a village shop, Post Office and hairdressing salon. A local convenience store selling day-to-day essentials like bread and milk would be of notable benefit, particularly given the older demographic (26% of the parish residents are now estimated to be aged 65 or over, up from 22% in 2011).

A further issue is car parking at the Village Hall for community events and hirings especially during school term time. Since the new school opened the number of children has grown from circa 60 to 185. The shared car parking space serving the school and the Village Hall has not grown at all. This is becoming a serious issue creating congestion and needs County Council resolution should the school want to increase its Planned Admission Number to accommodate further proportional growth.

Future Settlement Hierarchy

1. Are there any constraints to new development in your parish which would affect future growth? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

The public consultations for the NDP and recent planning applications have highlighted the following constraints to future growth in the parish:

- Water quality in the River Lugg (part of the River Wye Special Area of Conservation) which runs through the parish.
- Flood plain of the River Lugg, limiting edge-of-village development opportunities to the south/south-west.

- Open and exposed landscape setting of the village particularly to the east, north and west limiting development opportunities on prominent and overly large sites.
- Lack of village services, facilities and infrastructure whose range and capacity will need to be improved before new development is to be contemplated. The school cannot expand unless the car park is bigger for both the Village Hall and the School. Public transport needs to improve significantly – i.e., more than three buses a day.
- Volume of traffic through the village needs to significantly reduce.

2. Would you consider your area to be a sustainable community for proportionate growth? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Sutton St Nicholas is no longer a sustainable community which is able to accept more “proportionate growth”. The aims of the strategic policy are to “bolster existing service provision, improve facilities and infrastructure and meet the needs of the communities concerned” (Core Strategy policy RA2). But new development has proved to be a blunt tool for achieving these aims at village-level. Services in the village have declined not grown in recent years with the closure of the village shop and more recent reduction in bus services. There is no sign that recent development or promise thereof is having any effect at all on expanding or improving services, facilities and infrastructure. Rather, pressures and demands on the existing facilities have simply increased. New households continue to have to travel further afield generally by car to access day-to-day services. This generates more traffic on the unsuitable rural lanes which as explained above are also coming under increased pressure as a result of a lack of transport infrastructure around Hereford and the unintended consequences of development outside the parish. There is no sign that this situation is likely to change in the next 20 years particularly given that the Community Infrastructure Levy remains unimplemented. **If yet more development is to be directed to the village in the Local Plan review, Sutton St Nicholas will be a less, not more sustainable community in years to come.**