

Bledlow-cum-Saunderton Parish Neighbourhood Plan (BcSPNP)

Vision Workshop Note

November 2015 Final

Introduction

This note summarises the discussions of the Vision Workshop held with the Project Working Group and other stakeholders at Holly Barn, Bledlow on 9th November 2015. It also adds further reflections on follow-up questions and consideration of the issues. Finally, it identifies a series of follow-up actions for the Group to consider.

The Discussions

We discussed how the local planning authority, Wycombe District Council (WDC), applies the adopted policies of its development framework (principally the 2008 Wycombe Core Strategy and 2013 Delivery & Site Allocations Plan (DSAP) – the ‘consolidated plan’) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in determining planning applications. We noted that the purpose of a policy in a development plan like the BcSNP or the Wycombe Local Plan (WLP) is to either lower or increase the likelihood of a planning applicant securing a planning consent.

We were advised that the new WLP must be ready for examination by spring 2017 and that the neighbourhood plan is likely to reach examination before this date. We were also advised that the Princes Risborough Area Action Plan is proceeding ahead of the WLP. We were told that the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) has been published and that the first stage of the review of the Green Belt boundaries in the District will be published very shortly (but that it was unlikely the review would raise issues in this Parish).

We noted that the WDC appears close to withdrawing its ‘Greater Saunderton’ proposals to prepare a Saunderton Area Action Plan covering the Molins and other sites around the station, although an appeal has now been lodged for the non-determination of St Congar’s 212 home planning application.

We were advised that new homes planned on the West Yard and Saunderton Coal Yard sites have been included in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) of land supply to 2033 but that Molins, and all other sites submitted for assessment in the Parish, have been either excluded from assessment (given their Green Belt location) or assessed as unsuitable. West Yard now has planning consent for demolition of redundant buildings and the Coal Yard is considered suitable as previously developed land in the Green Belt, assuming it is no longer required for employment use as per Policy DM5 of the DSAP. There are four excluded sites between the Molins site and the Station and just beyond the Parish boundary and two unsuitable sites within the Parish beyond the western edge of Princes Risborough.

How the Parish works?

The group defined the parish as a number of smaller settlements set within an extensive and cherished rural landscape of very special character:

1. Bledlow Ridge – a recognised settlement in the Green Belt (WDLP Policy GB4) and AONB
2. Bledlow – on the edge of the Green Belt and AONB, including a cluster of hamlets such as Holly Green, Pitch Green and Skittle Green outside the Green Belt and AONB
3. Saunderton (PR)/Horsenden - in the Green Belt
4. Saunderton (HW) - in the Green Belt and AONB

We discussed how the various settlements work well now and their common or distinct problems in relation to planning and development matters. We noted the following key points (in no particular order):

- Unclear why decisions go the way they do – “the bits they value (the built environment) and the bits in between (the countryside).
- Due to the cost of moving house, houses are being extended but we need smaller and more affordable homes
- There has been a steady loss of light industrial units
- Farm buildings are being used for office/industrial use - planning policy doesn't address this
- ‘Hobby’ farms impact on conventional agriculture and many going into ‘horsiculture’; the consequences are visual
- Loss of agricultural tied housing near Icknield Way
- Agricultural change driven by agricultural economics
- Equestrian also changing the view of the countryside
- Parish demographic ok but housing too large and there is a jobs/housing mismatch
- Infill could be used as a means of finding sites for smaller houses
- Extensions are a function of planning restrictions and economics - families grow - homes need extending
- There is a need for flexible housing policy that allows for growing families
- Need more small houses that have flexibility to grow and need to create ‘churn’ in the local housing market.
- Boot Pub – proposed change of use to residential but refused – a good example of an ‘asset of community value’
- Bledlow Ridge is losing amenities; the shop is for sale. Loss of community facilities happening all over the parish – mismatch in policy seems illogical
- Is there a need for a local design guide to influence this?
- Policy needs to be easy to interpret through the neighbourhood plan
- There is an important connection to be made between the countryside, planning and farming diversity. The rural economy has particular needs.
- A local example of planning policy being too restrictive in the eyes of the Parish - Bledlow born resident whose business contributes to the parish economy now needs a house and has a suitable previously developed site on which to build - a shortage of starter and follow-on homes and many

locals can't afford to buy in the village but planning application refused on conflict with WDLP/WCS countryside policies C10 and CS7 (Skittle Green).

- Other examples: Barry's Nursery (Sandpit Lane) refusal after refusal; Cutler's Orchard (Perry Lane) both large houses when could've been smaller and Little Gibbs - exception site for social housing.
- There is likely to be a healthy local demand for downsizer homes for older households needing 1/2 bed houses (designed to prevent extension to family sized units) and for self-build/custom-build serviced plots
- Molins must be a better scheme than the one proposed – lots of ideas for how to achieve this without necessarily undermining its viability:
 - Mix of commercial and housing to reduce traffic but still adds nothing new to the settlement that is missing all normal 'village' services and relies on Bledlow Ridge or longer trips
 - Create business hub / Serviced offices?
 - Shop in Saunderton would impact on viability of shop in Bledlow Ridge
 - Tourism making countryside accessible?
 - Portal at Saunderton station for visitors?
 - A new play-space as there's nothing at the moment?
 - important to connect the site to the station
 - Problem with on-street overflow parking in Saunderton Vale housing scheme – noted its management company owns the ransom to connect to Molins if no way through the rail land
 - Possible to extend current site to achieve open space and business benefits by increasing net developable land to get some leverage over landowner

In summary, it was agreed that it was difficult to see how the BcSNP could make planning rules more restrictive than is already the case, given the environmental designations. It appears the role of the BcSNP will rather be to identify how and where planning policy may be more permissive of development.

Emerging Policy Issues

- How can we define settlements outside the Green Belt and AONB in our own terms to be more permissive, within reason, of local housing schemes? Are we able to define 'infill' for this purpose or use some other general term? Or should we define specific sites or road frontages within the cluster of settlements where development is acceptable in principle?
- Can and should we enable more infill housing at Bledlow Ridge by amending the current Policy GB4 boundary of the settlement? Could this be used to leverage specific housing types, e.g. smaller starter/downsizer homes, subject to design standards and Green Belt policy (which will continue to 'wash over' the settlement)?
- How can the Molins site contribute to meeting local housing and other needs but also operate in such a way that minimises its impact on the Green Belt/AONB and local traffic and relates well to Saunderton (HW)? How can this enable a better long term solution for Saunderton (HW) with West Yard and Coal Yard?

- How do we continue to protect the Parish from future Princes Risborough expansion beyond the railway line?
- How can we better manage agricultural development to encourage the right kind of schemes and discourage those that make little of the productive value of the land but harm the landscape? So much is already governed by national and local policy – is there some room for local refinement? Does it differ within and outside the Green Belt/AONB?
- How do we prevent the loss of valued community facilities? Can we be more permissive of their extension to remain viable assets if that helps? What are these crucial assets?
- More generally, how do we improve the quality of design of all new development in the Parish, assuming that the existing standards are too generic (Chilterns) or over 20 years old (Bledlow Conservation Area Statement)?
- As there is an adopted CIL, what are our local infrastructure priorities for the 25% Parish element once the BcSNP is made?

The Policy Scope

With these issues in mind, an initial outline of the BcSNP policies is set out below:

1. A spatial plan that defines the constituent parts of the Parish – Green Belt, AONB and Countryside - and a new Parish settlement hierarchy that establishes the key principles managing development
2. A Saunderton HW spatial policy plus one or more site-specific policies (inc. Molins, Coal Yard?, Land N of Ministry Wharf?) to define land use mix, housing type mix, business type mix, open space/play space facilities, road and footpath/cycleway access, parking, landscape strategy etc
3. An area policy covering the “non-Green Belt/AONB area” with the use of new ‘settlement boundaries’ as necessary and definitions of ‘infill’ and local design criteria, plus a reinforcement of the countryside gap between this cluster and the western edge of Princes Risborough
4. A Bledlow Ridge policy revising the GB4 boundary for the purpose of enabling specific housing types and containing local design criteria
5. A Bledlow Conservation Area policy that updates and extracts from the Statement relevant design criteria to manage future planning applications
6. A policy identifying community facilities to enable their protection from unnecessary loss and to support their improvement/extension so they are capable of meeting new demands – Boot Pub, Bledlow Ridge Shop at the very least.
7. A rural economic diversification policy that manages the development of farms, change of use of business units and allows diversification to happen
8. A local heritage assets policy to supplement WDLP Policy HE5 by designating locally listed buildings

In addition, there should be an Infrastructure Proposals section where CIL investment priorities and other development management process issues can be captured.

Tasks

It was agreed that the Group should be advised of specific tasks that it could pursue to inform the BcSNP in taking forward the issues raised above. It may choose to do so either itself or it may form smaller task groups for that purpose.

The following tasks are recommended:

Saunderton HW

- Consider site options for Molins, adjoining land and Saunderton Vale with RCOH
- RCOH to provide outline concept plan showing land use mix and key principles and to obtain neutral land agent view on viability
- Arrange meetings with WDC then Molins land interests and Saunderton Vale Management Company (and with owner of Land N of Ministry Wharf if necessary) with RCOH and Working Group reps
- Progress to draft policy
- Review Coal Yard HELAA assessment and meet with land interest if necessary to ascertain planning application intentions

Settlements outside the AONB/Green Belt

- Review recent planning application/appeal decisions for housing in area
- review common/desirable design characteristics and identify potential developable sites/frontages in the non-AONB/Green Belt area, annotate a plan with them, take photos of common features
- draw one or more 'settlement boundaries' to show where the policy should be implemented
- Review HELAA assessment of Princes Risborough sites and review WDC landscape character assessment to ascertain if a landscape policy may help discourage proposals west of the railway line

Design

- Review Bledlow Ridge to identify potential land for infill (using annotated plan and photos), including any edge of settlement land, then review existing housing stock data to evidence smaller housing types and review how the argument may be made to remain consistent with GB and AONB policy
- review Bledlow Conservation Area Statement, update as necessary with annotated plan and photos
- identify candidates across the Parish for identifying as a Local Listed Building by way of its local historic/architectural character (including important position in the street scene) that make it more special than the norm but not special enough to warrant proper listing

Community Facilities

- Identify all buildings and associated land of community benefit (not open spaces as covered above), describe their value to the community, take a photo and show on a plan

- Discuss the options to extend any facility (if necessary to maintain viability at some point in the future) and what it might incorporate in terms of uses and need for car parking etc

Agricultural Land

- Review recent cases (officer reports) of proposals winning and being refused planning consent
- Review existing national and local policy (inc AONB Management Plan) to ascertain if there is an opportunity for local refinement

If task groups are to be set up then the following advice may be useful:

- They should seek consensus but not at all costs
- They should complete their work with a short summary report bringing together all the above outputs
- They may be requested to reconvene later in the plan making process if further analysis is required on their subjects

Working Group

On the current timetable, the above work needs to be completed by the end of January 2016 for the Working Group to consider. The Group should identify any overlapping ideas or information or possible policy gaps. The Group (or task groups) should send their reports to rCOH in advance so that rCOH can prepare for the meeting.

The Group will then aim to steer rCOH in completing the Pre Submission BcSNP by the end of February to enable submission by the end of May.

Post meeting note

On 16th November the WDC Cabinet decided that: a) the Saunderton Local Area Action Plan be abandoned in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan; b) the principle of established national planning policy of protecting the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Green Belt must be upheld and c) the mixed use developments be actively encouraged within the Parish of Bledlow-cum-Saunderton