

## Bi-monthly Progress Report for Abbots Langley Parish Council **Report Twenty-Five - 1st May 2020**

The Neighbourhood Planning Group did not meet on 26th March 2020, as originally planned, because of the measures in place for Covid-19. Instead, the Chairman circulated a Progress Note to inform the Group of the status of the work programme. At present, there are no future dates arranged for meetings of the Neighbourhood Planning Group.

### **Impact of the Covid-19 measures on the Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Plan (ALNP)**

The original intention at this time was to publish the Second Draft of the ALNP on the Parish web site and follow this with a three-month consultation programme. Obviously a consultation programme cannot take place until the restrictions on public gatherings are lifted. Therefore, our interaction with the public could be delayed by up to one year. At the moment, there are no reliable predictions when the rules on public gatherings and exhibitions will return to normal.

This means the ALNP submission to the District Council for their consideration will be delayed until sometime in 2021 prior to its review by an External Examiner. Therefore the Final Version of the Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted for approval by a public referendum in 2022. Three Rivers District New Local Plan has to be in place by 2023 to meet the latest Government requirements.

### **Production of maps and other illustrative material for the ALNP Report and Evidence Base.**

The delay means we can spend more time on assembling evidence for the Neighbourhood Plan and creating the relevant maps, figures and photographs to illustrate the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. However, mapping cannot start until the restrictions on movement are lifted. This material will be used in the Report and in its associated Evidence Base as well as at local exhibitions etc. In particular, we need to use our aerial photography base, to identify the location of key features in the area that we wish to protect. Material will include local maps of :

- Public open spaces within the settlements and green spaces across the parish.
- Designated footpaths and cycle ways with the potential links for a more complete segregated network.
- Existing conservation areas plus new areas that need the character of their area to be respected, if new development is proposed.
- Areas to be protected and possibly extended because of their biodiversity and potential tree planting/farming/horticultural potential.

## **Finalising the ALNP Second Draft and update the material assembled in the Evidence Base.**

Work on the text for ALNP Second Draft will be completed soon and then checked again by our ALNP Consultant, Alison Eardley, before circulating to the Neighbourhood Planning Team. Besides the text, notes are given in the text where specific photographs/ maps/ figures and tables are proposed to accompany the text. As explained above, more time is need to prepare this material.

We have been assembling a Evidence Base to accompany the Neighbourhood Plan. Time can be spent in the next three months updating and adding to this material. ALNP Agendas and Bi-monthly Progress Notes are published regularly on the Parish Web site. Also, we need to review the role of our Commonplace Site and Facebook Site for use when we start a public consultation programme.

## **Input from individual settlement areas in Abbots Langley.**

A key part of the Consultation process is to get some specific inputs for the ALNP from the fourteen distinct communities across Abbots Langley Parish. Such information will need to be assembled in summary on local maps and tables with accompanying photographs, where appropriate.

A Briefing Paper and checklist will be prepared for communities to guide them on the range of inputs that would be helpful. Alison Eardley, our Consultant, has prepared a proposal on how this work can be done. This will involve organising local focus groups and possibly web-based surveys using our Commonplace web site, etc.

Some Parish Councillors have explained the importance of obtaining these local contributions from all parts of the Parish. Because of the size of this task, their guidance and help with this process will be sought. A fundamental principle of compiling a Neighbourhood Plan is to demonstrate that the content has be derived from local residents and businesses.

## **Proposed changes to the Planning System and announcements on Local Housing Targets**

During the last two months, National Government has announced their intentions to introduce some fundamental changes to the UK Planning System later this year. This is to ensure Local Authorities are forced to deliver local housing targets that are set by national policy.<sup>1</sup> In particular, these are:

- Planning White paper in the Spring 2020 to explain their comprehensive reforms to accelerate the development process and ensure more land availability for development.

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<sup>1</sup> Planning for the Future, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

- Long Term reforms 'to rethink planning from first principles.'
- Launch a national brownfield map in April 2020 and call for proposals to build above stations, particularly in urban areas.
- Reviewing the formula for calculating Local Housing Need within and near urban areas.
- New rules to encourage building upwards, increasing density to make the most of local infrastructure although in line with the local character.
- Government intervention to release land for housing development when Local Planning Authorities fail to meet their specified housing targets/needs.
- Supporting community and self-build housing and provide help for parish councils and neighbourhood forums who wish to build a small number of homes... providing homes for the next generation and those wishing to downsize.
- The National Budget provided an 'additional funding of £10.9billion to regenerate brownfield land, invest in new infrastructure and provide more homes for local people.'
- All local Authorities must have an up-to-date new Local Plan by December 2023

### **Likely Impact of the Reforms on the Three Rivers District**

There is no mention of how the above reforms will affect Local Authorities like Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), where much of the undeveloped land is classified as Metropolitan Green Belt.

In mid-February 2020, TRDC were asked by National Government for an explanation and action plan of why they only met 41% of their housing target set for the last three years. They are one of eight local authorities to build less than 45% of their Housing Delivery Target for the last three years. The consequence is that our District is expected to be subject to speculative development by private developers. It is not clear who will control this development process. The Planning Inspectorate at Appeals and Public Inquiries may just have to bow down to Government Policy. Obviously this approach applies to any parcels of land owned by developers. It seems speculative Planning Applications in the Three Rivers District could appear by the end of this year. So by mid-2021, before the new Local Plan goes to a Public Inquiry, speculative development could be approved by National Government for our area.

Possible restraints on this process could include:

- Incompatibility with meeting statutory targets for limiting carbon emissions. (However, I am not convinced yet that our National Government is taking this matter seriously, particularly if sustainability policies sacrifices short term economic growth.)
- The economic consequences following from Covid-19.
- The economic consequences in 2021/2022 of not completing the UK trade agreements after the UK leaves the EU.
- Any changes in investment priorities following from the lifestyle impacts of Covid-19 and a greater reliance on public services and measures that boost employment productivity .

TRDC is due to publish its proposals for its new Local Plan and associated policy evaluation documents in July 2020. These could be delayed again because of the impact on their workload of Covid-19.

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