

Bi-monthly Progress Report for Abbots Langley Parish Council Report Twenty-Six - 1st July 2020

The Neighbourhood Planning Group has not met in the last two months because of the measures in place for Covid-19. At present, there are no future dates arranged for meetings of the Neighbourhood Planning Group. The status of the work has not progressed much in the last two months, for the reasons explained in the 1st May Bi-monthly Progress Report.

Local future trends remain uncertain

The impact of Covid-19, and its associated measures, on the future of the Parish remains uncertain. Lessons are still being learned about actions that can improve local resilience. Benefits have been derived from reduced traffic volume and noise, cleaner air and other environmental improvements - including well-maintained parks, natural spaces and safe footpaths and cycle-ways.

It remains to be seen whether there will be a larger proportion of residents wanting to work from home in 2021 and beyond. This, in turn, may encourage an increased reliance and interest in the local community and its facilities by adults of working age. If the concept of working from home becomes commonplace for specific sectors of employment, the choice of home location will be more flexible. This may encourage relocation to less expensive housing areas, away from commuter belts. In urban areas, the trend to convert offices into apartments, plus communal use and shared workspaces may be accelerated - if their use solely for employment declines.

Hopefully such trends may help protect Green Belt land and productive food growing areas from speculative built development. This, in turn, may depend on how farmers see their future after Brexit and the UK's future international trading relationships.

Announcements in the press, by Taylor Wimpey, suggest some major developers recognise new houses in commuter areas may not be their preferred investment.

UK must improve its long term investment planning and delivery

National Government policies during the last ten years have focused mainly on short term issues. Clear investment plans for the next 20 years have been weak apart from a few major transport projects. It remains uncertain whether Covid-19 will change national policies and encourage further government devolution that enables regions to plan their own futures. Will policies on carbon reduction be more than just aspirations without clear investment targets and action programmes? Effective land use planning is required which shows how our zero carbon futures will become a reality in 20+ years. Unfortunately, at present, National Government wishes to

undermine existing planning procedures allowing more short term land speculation. Reducing traffic problems and peak demand by changes in the patterns of work and leisure is far more cost effective than increasing the capacity of infrastructure. Improving existing houses and new housing to ensure minimum heat loss, renewable heating and electrical systems, water management, etc is an important part of the next 20-year programme. This should be a local focus for job creation and training.

Responding to the new District Local Plan

On 22nd June 2020, the TRDC Local Plan Sub-committee published some useful policy statements for the new Local Plan associated with Green Infrastructure, Green Belt Land and Sustainable Transport. However, regarding the future Green Belt Land, it says:

'...planning to meet needs in the District are such that there are exceptional circumstances justifying alterations to established Green Belt boundaries. Detailed changes to the Green Belt boundary will be made in association with the allocation of sites in the new Local Plan...'

In Summer 2020, Three Rivers District Council is due to publish its proposals for the new Local Plan. It will be interesting to see their proposals for the next twenty years. Are these plans driven more by land speculators and national policies to build houses rather than sustainable land use planning, encouraging resilience and self-sufficiency in local services and affordable housing.

Covid-19 has given Councils a clear warning that sustainable futures are important requiring the public sector to take the lead on our priorities and protecting local assets and primary services. Having the resources to do this, remains questionable.

When the new Local Plan is published, its implications for the Parish of Abbots Langley will be assessed and the second draft of the Local Neighbourhood Plan will be published ready for public debate.

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