

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

The Neighbourhood Planning Group has not met in the last two months because of the measures in place for Covid-19. There are no future dates arranged yet for meetings of the Neighbourhood Planning Group. The status of the work has not progressed much in the last four months, for the reasons explained in the 1st May 2020 Bi-monthly Progress Report.

### **Changes to the current National Planning System - Consultation Paper, August 2020**

As anticipated in the 1st May 2020 Bi-monthly Progress Report, National Government has proposed radical reforms to the English Planning System. These changes are explained in a 40-page consultation document. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/launch-of-planning-for-the-future-consultation-to-reform-the-planning-system>

The intention is to simplify the role of Local Plans and zone all land under three categories – **Growth areas**: suitable for substantial development, and where outline approval for development would be automatically secured for forms and types of development specified in the Plan; **Renewal areas**: suitable for some development, such as gentle densification; and **Protected areas**: where development is restricted. Except for proposals in **Protected areas**, development will be given planning permission by following the guidance of Local Design Standards/Guides, rather than seeking planning permissions from the District Council.

Much of the undeveloped land within the Parish is Green Belt. Under the proposed revisions to National Planning Law, Green Belt land will be 'protected.' According to the Government's publicity: *'Decisions on the Green Belt will stay with local authorities as they prepare their plans, so that we can continue to protect and enhance these important areas for generations to come.'* However, in the Local Plan, the District can revise the boundaries for Green Belt. Information published by TRDC indicates reductions in Green Belt land are required to meet the Government's specified housing targets for the Three Rivers Council area. Also, National Government is revising the standard method for calculating future housing needs for an area. The new method is not expected to take any pressure away from housing development in the Shire Counties.

According to press reports, another issue rising its head is the pressure from National Government to replace the two-tier Local Authorities in England with Unitary Authorities. There are productivity and financial benefits in taking this action. In this area, my preference would be to split the Hertfordshire County into two or three unitary authorities, creating a South-West Hertfordshire Unitary Council.

## **Implications for Local Neighbourhood Plans**

All the above changes, if approved, will have major implications for controlling future development in the Parish.

The Government states that: *'Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system, but we will want to consider whether their content should become **more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans**, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility for users.'* Because the Neighbourhood Planning Team have used aerial photography and overlaid colour coding and data on these bases for the Parish, they have already started down the road of presenting 3D maps and data, as proposed for the new format of Neighbourhood Plans.

The required Local Development Design Standards/Guides will be prepared by the District Council. Reference and comments can be made to these in the Neighbourhood Plan without duplicating the effort to provide these technical documents.

**The challenge for the Neighbourhood Planning Team is to reduce significantly the written content of the First Draft - making more reference to Local Plan Background documents where the Neighbourhood Plan agrees with their findings and proposals.**

### **Three Rivers District Plan publication delayed until June 2021**

The TRDC Local Plan will not be published until June 2021, according to a recent TRDC Local Plan agenda at their August committee meeting. As the Covid-19 restrictions on public gatherings could continue for another year, this delay makes sense regarding any meaningful consultation programme. The District Council's stated reasons for the delay are the on-going transport analysis, flood analysis and five Districts Review Report. These reports should be complete by the end of 2020. From past experience, the Parish Council will be reluctant to comment on any suggestions to develop protected green areas until the Local Plan is published.

The proposed changes to planning is undermining the role and creative input of the Neighbourhood Plan - as land zoning means the developer and land owner will be more dominant in deciding on the nature of any new built environment - often addressing short term opportunities rather than the longer term planned land uses. Add to this the changing demand patterns for employment/residential locations (with less commuting to city centres and more home-based activity.) This makes the future trends even less certain. This is before consideration is given to the impact of Climate Change and ensuring all key infrastructure is resilient and able to cope with the predicted severe changes in weather conditions - including higher temperatures, droughts, flooding, high winds and changing seasonal patterns.

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