

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

The Neighbourhood Planning Group has not met in the last two months because of the measures in place for Covid-19. The status of the work has not progressed much in the last six months, for the reasons explained in the 1st May 2020 Bi-monthly Progress Report.

### **Changes to the current National Planning System and the implications for Local Neighbourhood Plans**

Following the details given on this matter in the last Bi-monthly Progress report, questions were raised at the Parish Council Meeting in September. A Briefing Note has been distributed with this Progress Report, attempting to explain the impact of these changes on the Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Three Rivers District Local Plan - Consultation on Sites selected for Development**

Three Rivers District Council has decided to hold an extra public consultation regarding 'the selection of sites for development', prior to the publication of their new Local Plan in June/July 2021. **The proposed list of 'sites for development' are due to be published this month.**

### **Zoom Seminar - 'The Future of Neighbourhood Planning'**

On 12th October 2020 The Chair participated in a 2-hour Zoom seminar on 'The Future of Neighbourhood Planning,' organised by the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance. One of the three speakers was John Howell, MP. He confirmed that MPs and the Government still believe Neighbourhood Plans are an important part of the planning system. The Government will publish guidelines within the next six months to explain how the content and process of Neighbourhood Planning will change, as new Planning Laws are introduced.

### **TRDC Consultation on their Draft 'Climate Change Strategy' for the District**

This is a relevant document in support of policies under development in the Neighbourhood Plan for Abbots Langley. See: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-on-tackling-climate-change-in-three-rivers>

### **St Stephen Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 - Consultation**

The Neighbourhood Plan for the adjoining Parish of St Stephens has been published as its Pre-Submission Version for Public Consultation. See:

<https://www.ststephenparishcouncil.gov.uk/in-your-parish/parish-neighbourhood-plan/>. Our Neighbourhood Planning Consultant, Alison Eardley, who is assisting us with our Neighbourhood Plan, also works with St Stephens Parish.

### **Neighbourhood Planning Budget**

Details of the projected expenditure for the work on the Neighbourhood Plan up to March 2022 have been submitted to the Clerk of the Parish Council, at his request. Also, it was agreed that the Parish should apply for the extra £1000 grant from Government that is available for this work.

**Peter Warman,**

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## Briefing Note

by Peter Warman, Chair, Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Planning Group - 31st October 2020

**Possible changes to planning regulations and the imminent release by TRDC of the “Sites for Development” document and associated policies -**

**What are their likely impact on the development of the Neighbourhood Plan?**

### 1. Introduction

This Briefing Note was prepared by the Chair of the Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group in response to questions raised by Parish Council members at their last meeting.

### 2. Changes to Planning Regulations under discussion by Government

A summary of the main changes proposed for the English Planning System were summarised in the last Bi-monthly Progress Report for the Neighbourhood Plan dated 1st September 2020.

Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) provided a summary report on this matter at recent Planning Committees, see: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/meeting/local-plan-sub-committee-27-august-2020-7pm> (item 6)

The Public Consultation on the the Government White Paper ‘Planning for the future’ ended this week. The response and concerns submitted by the District Council can be read here: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/meeting/local-plan-sub-committee-7pm-23-september-2020> (item 5)

The Council’s concerns are similar to points raised by MP’s in Parliament from all sides of the House of Commons during their debate on this matter in early October. In summary, the proposal is to have binding targets for each local authority to build a specific number of new homes each year to ensure 300,000 units are completed annually across England. The legislation favours landowners and developers. It does not assist the planning process. It will not address the need to provide ‘affordable’ housing and will not ensure sufficient capital is raised to build the necessary infrastructure and public services required for the new housing. The location of the new houses favours development in suburban and rural areas in the South East of England rather than urban areas across the nation.

The 14-page document published in June 2020, by TRDC, provides a comprehensive review of the issues faced by the District Council when trying to meet the new housing targets. See: ‘**Housing Delivery Test Action Plan**’: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/egcl-page/housing-delivery-test> .

Some of the main issues raised in the document are:

- Houses in Three Rivers are the least affordable in the UK outside of London - costing 14 times the average income.
- 'Land banking' by developers slows delivery to maximise land values and profit.
- There are few opportunities for brownfield development in a semi-rural District constrained by Green Belt - which forms 76% of land area in the District.
- The Government's annual housing target for TRDC is 624 homes per year. Using the proposed Standard Method this target is reduced to 588 homes per year. The TRDC Local Plan, approved in 2011, had a target of 180 new houses per year.
- The national housing targets do not address the high local need for 'affordable housing for rent.' Past experiences suggest these will not be provided by private developers.

### **3. Imminent release of Three Rivers District Council's "Sites for Development" document and associated policies for the new Local Plan**

Given the development challenges faced by TRDC, the Council has decided to hold an extra public consultation, prior to the publication of their new Local Plan in June/July 2021. **The proposed list of 'sites for development' are to be published in November 2020.**

When the 'selected sites for development' are known, the Parish Council can consider their likely impact on the Parish of Abbots Langley. In particular, assess their implications for local facilities such as school provision, primary health care facilities, traffic and transport implications, environmental and natural resource consequences, etc. It will be interesting to see the extent to which TRDC protects its Green Belt land and green spaces in the face of Government imposed new housing targets and the pressure from landowners and developers to deliver their housing schemes.

The 'Future of Planning' White Paper makes little reference to the planning implications of Climate Change. The Government is proposing a ten-year housing programme during a decade that is said to be critical in transforming our planet to ensure all the primary elements associated with biodiversity, air pollution, fresh water resources, sustainable food production, soil renewal, recycling waste/sewage, renewable energy and stabilised population are addressed. The intention is to bring our lifestyles into harmony with the natural world which, in turn, will allow human civilisations to be sustained beyond this century. These factors should be taken into account, before we plan to build 10 million houses by 2030.

Naturalist and broadcaster, David Attenborough, in his recent book 'A life on our Planet' (September 2020), clearly explains to the lay person the challenges we face and the paths we must follow to succeed. We can no longer continue with policies that sacrifice natural resources for short term profit. Sustainable housing schemes involve far more than just improved heat insulation and water harvesting. The National Technical Guidelines on future land use and development have not been prepared to address the challenges of Climate Change and Biodiversity. Even the updating and implementation of building regulations have proven to be neglected, during the last decade, partly because of the cuts in public expenditure. ( e.g. Mis-use of combustible materials in High Rise Buildings.)

#### **4. Possible implications for the Abbots Langley Neighbourhood Plan**

On 12th October 2020 I participated in a Zoom seminar on 'The Future of Neighbourhood Planning' organised by the Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance. One of the speakers was John Howell, MP. He confirmed that MP's and the Government still believe Neighbourhood Plans are an important part of the planning system. However, the proposals in the White Paper on Future Planning appear to downgrade neighbourhood planning, removing the opportunity to make specific development proposals for particular sites. Essentially the Neighbourhood Plan can give its input to the proposed three zone classification of land ( i.e. Growths areas, Renewal areas, Protected areas) as maybe identified by TRDC in the new Local Plan. Then the future use of land will be left to the discretion landowners and developers who will be expected to comply with design codes and manuals. TRDC state that, at present, they do not have the resources to prepare and oversee the implementation of these design standards. Under the proposed new planning legislation, there will be no opportunity for the public and local councillors to review individual planning applications unless they are proposed in 'protected areas.'

TRDC say that under the new planning proposals and the wish to make better use of digital tools, 'it is likely that specialist skills required to develop a Neighbourhood Plan are not available and that more pressure and resources will be required from the Local authority to assist.' This will require more funding for parishes 'to enable them to secure specialist consultants' and engage with Local Planning Authorities.

The Government is commissioning some 'demonstration projects' to suggest how the new style of Neighbourhood Plans should be presented. You will appreciate that without more detailed information from Government announcements, this briefing paper is more speculation than firm guidance at this stage.

With the Consultation feedback, the Secretary of State is expected to provide more detailed proposals on 'Planning for the future' by the end of 2021 with proposed legislation in 2021.

With regard to Local Government Devolution, proposals are not expected until the challenges of Covid-19 are overcome. This may limit the scope for changes by the present Government.

There may be other matters of concern to the Parish Council that have not been covered in this briefing paper. These can be addressed when the Chair of the Neighbourhood Planning Group attends the next Parish Council meeting. END