

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Tuesday 25th June 2013 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

In attendance; Steve Kendall (Chair), Saskia Duncan (CBC), Tony Lines DL, Jim Gledhill, Richard Hagen, Rupert Chapple, Caron Kendall, Kevan Leigh, Martin Harradine (Planning Aid) – all from the steering group, plus: Sally Aitken (Local Agent - estate agency), Stephen Smith and David Hearne – residents. Clerk – Andrew Whiting

1. Apologies: Tom Chevalier, Dee Curtis, Joan Harradine

2. To accept minutes of meeting of 28th May 2013

The minutes were accepted.

Steve Kendall started the meeting by asking all to introduce themselves. It was noted that there were steering group members and non-steering group members present. All were welcome to speak but any decisions would be taken by steering group members only.

Steve Kendall reported that another meeting had taken place on 11th June at which an analysis of the data we have on Businesses and Recreation subjects was undertaken. The meeting emphasised how every subject that we have discussed is also impacted by the Housing issue and so it was decided to invite Sally Aitken from Local Agent (Estate Agency) to attend this meeting to shed some light on trends in the property market.

It was agreed the purpose of this meeting should be to get a better understanding of the scale of housing need, and therefore what level of housing would be required. This will give us opportunity to enlighten discussion on other topics.

3. Housing

The topic started with a short discussion about how many houses have been built in Toddington over the past 10 or so years, as it was thought we might expect a similar average per year to be built in the future. 56 extra – from CBC housing records 2001-2011 and 85 extra from census data. CBC is currently looking at predictions of population growth for their area. It was felt that we need to understand patterns of movement and what housing is required by the community. It was known that 19+ social housing units were needed at present time from 2011 BRCC/CBC survey.

David Hearne stated he has developed two sites in the last 2 years in Toddington. One of 7 houses was sold only to Toddington residents, the other, 5 houses this year were all sold to non-residents. He added that to be able to finance and build 19 social housing units (which would be 30% of any development) then 50 or 60 units would have to be built.

Stephen Smith clarified that land earmarked for Social Housing would only carry value to the landowner of the equivalent area of farmland, so further development would have to take place to make it viable.

Sally Aitken circulated 14 months data of her agency's house sales and buyers and leavers trends. She added that by far the most popular and sought after property in Toddington is a 3 bedroom house.

Caron Kendall suggested that price seemed to be a major factor and therefore if there is a need for growth there is a need for low priced 3 bed houses. Any growth should see supported infrastructure and amenities, and we need to ensure sustainable schools. Tony Lines DL stated that we as a NP group need to focus on the needs of our current population in the first instance and that as a group we are looking at providing homes, whether rented or bought.

Sally Aitken said that if the village were minded to put a development of just low cost, social housing in, it would have a detrimental effect on value of all properties in the village. Problems with lending being more difficult than in past and young people are largely renting or not leaving family home as they are unable to buy.

It was noted that a lot of larger homes where the children have left home are inhabited by just the elderly parent(s). It was also noted that death rates in village are higher than average due to large proportion of elderly residents. The elderly may wish to move to smaller properties but at present there are few available.

Richard Hagen queried if unaffordable homes are built then people who work locally in low paid jobs will not be able to buy them. Also, concern that with the requirement for 3 bed homes to have 3 car parking spaces so extra land will be required in any developments in the future.

Stephen Smith stated that if you build a house for sale on the market there is obviously no restriction over who buys it, but affordable housing CBC will be bale top set criteria for who is eligible, so may well be able to make

one of the criteria 'local people only'. A selection of different types of houses might be preferred to enable all to achieve private ownership.

Rupert Chapple made the point that we are simply our Neighbourhood Plan group making a plan for Toddington. CBC is looking at the situation county-wide. Whatever we decide what the neighbourhood needs, be it a young, vibrant community with need for smaller affordable homes, or a commuter suitable properties which are likely to be large houses.

Jim Gledhill added that we need to take account of what is being developed over the borders in Houghton Regis, North of Luton, Leighton Buzzard, as those developments may well displace some people who may then want to live in Toddington. We need to keep a vibrant community and so sensibly we may want some growth. Caron Kendall added that if we limit any growth to 5 bed properties they will not necessarily contribute to vibrant community.

Sally Aitken cited the example of Ampthill as a thriving and very vibrant community, with all shops let and businesses doing very well, which she put largely down to the new development on its edge which mixes all housing types and sizes. In recent years this has completely revamped the town.

It was noted that the new sheltered housing initiative to replace Crescent Court will add new older people's units (up to 48 units total) as well as freeing up the old Crescent Court site for development and we have signed up to a new sheltered housing facility being built as this has mass support in the village.

There was discussion whether the schools have any further capacity should any development occur and noted this is an important factor, especially as they have pressure on them as there is a 2 tier system elsewhere in Bedfordshire. It was noted that Keith Armistead is the CBC officer who will be able to share school predictions and trends.

There was consensus that infill development was not desirable and neither was further development along A5120 toward Houghton Regis, creating an even more linear village further from the village centre.

David Hearne stated that to qualify for CIL funds from development in order to build facilities such as sports and/or community centres then some development needs to happen. It was noted that there are large sports facilities to be built in Flitwick and Houghton Regis, but also the acceptance that sports centres can have dual purpose such as housing all sorts of community groups such as scouts and guides etc.

Steve Kendall summarised the debate and suggested a way forward;

What we do with the Neighbourhood Plan is not merely about looking at figures but looking at a vision for the village. We have a considerable range of options, e.g. No growth, from all other scenarios up to significant development to get CIL benefits to add to amenities. There are strands running through the discussions we have had on Housing; There is an implication we want to preserve the village boundaries roughly where they are and to preserve the village as a distinct community, a sense that we need to meet the currently unmet need (for 3 bed houses, and affordable homes) and foster a sense of diversity (as in diverse age, background, social standing etc.), also acknowledging that homes for rent may well be a useful tool for enhancing a vibrant community. The reason we are talking round this issue is that it is difficult and there are a range of views on the issue. We will need to focus at the next meeting and put together some propositions to test the assumptions we are making. We need to identify a resource to keep it going between meetings and with certain projects we need to employ professionals to help push the process forward. We need a vision of what we want to have in the village and only then can we start to look at what we can suggest we want to build.

To that end it was agreed that Steve Kendall compiles a document on where we are now with the housing issue to bring to next meeting.

Richard Hagen stated that as he had been tasked with Car parking survey he sought James Gleave (CBC Highways) advice. He stated that to enhance credibility of what we do we need to engage professionals to do a fair proportion of the work.

Noted: next meeting Tuesday 9th July at 7.30pm in Lounge of Village Hall