**Crowhurst Neighbourhood Plan Group**

**Notes of Meeting held on Sunday 21 May 2017 at 3.30pm in**

**Crowhurst Village Hall**

**Present:** Gareth Bright**,** Ros Day, Tracy Hoad, Sonia Plato, Martin White, Willy Wilson,

Pat Buckle, 36 members of the public.

**Apologies:** Chris Davidson, Ann Wilson

**Introduction**

Ros Day welcomed everybody, thanked all for attending, and introduced Group members. She explained that the Land Use Task Group (LUTG) had shortlisted 5 proposed sites to take forward. Martin White will explain how we got here, where we are now and what happens next. A folder of all information can be found in The Plough or on the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) website.

**How We Got Here**

Martin White stated that Rother District Council (RDC) had looked at the village as part of the development of its own Local Plan. The site on the corner at the bottom of Station Road was considered as possible for housing development but is prone to landslip and flooding. Investigations into these issues had cost RDC around £15,000, and led to them deciding the site was unsuitable. When neighbourhood plans were introduced by Government this was seen as our chance to find suitable sites and decide on the design and size of dwellings. Crowhurst’s Neighbourhood Plan was started in October 2015 using grant funding. So far £850 has been required from Parish Council. In late 2016 a ‘Call for Sites’ survey was distributed throughout the village and some 50 sites were put forward. LUTG examined all of them, the criteria being whether each site was suitable, available and viable. Some were too far from the village centre; the initial survey showed residents wanted new housing to be integral to the village and this is also supported by general planning policies. We are required by RDC to provide sites for 20 dwellings with a minimum of 6 per site. This low quota was based on there being no shop in the village and the narrow, winding lanes. ‘Windfall’ sites, i.e. 5 or less dwellings, in-fill sites, cannot be included in our quota of 20. Four public exhibitions were held in March 2017 giving the initial results and likely viability and enabling residents to feedback on the results. The LUTG analysed all the feedback and shortlisted 5 sites.

**Where We Are Now**

From three tenders, two independent planning consultants were interviewed and Ashley Wynn was appointed to provide technical assistance and he inspected every proposed site. Martin White explained that if we could not find suitable sites, and neither could RDC, developers would have much more leeway on which sites to develop. They would follow national guidelines as stated in the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), not considering such aspects as views and with no requirement to take into account the feelings of residents. Martin White stressed that LUTG had no preference for configuration of any site, this was to be decided by residents. Martin White explained the five shortlisted sites put forward had been included on the invitation for today’s meeting. He stated that they all had issues in some respects and LUTG had chosen the least unsuitable in terms of views and access.

a) 2 sites at Forewood Rise – Possible but access would need to be negotiated and proximity to the RSPB reserve remained a concern.

b) Combe Dell, Forewood Lane – This site considered least impact in terms of affect on views or neighbouring properties.

c) East Side of Station Road – Possible but concerns have been raised about increased traffic in Station Road, sewerage and water. Permission for access would most likely be needed from the Network Rail (who own Station Road). For several frustrating months LUTG has been attempting to contact Network Rail without success, even with the assistance of RDC and the local MP, but it is still trying.

d) Station Car Park Wooded Area – Possible but issues as in c) above. Some years ago Network Rail had applied to RDC to build six flats on the ground next to the station car park but this had never been followed up.

e) Combination of 3 sites behind The Plough – One of the two owners has not yet been contacted so total availability not known. Access is an issue particularly due to the narrow lane and the junction with Ballards Hill.

**What Happens Next**

A further survey is being delivered by the Street Champions around next weekend (27/28 May 2017) asking for residents views on the 5 shortlisted sites in terms of the size of developments, and the number, size and design of dwellings per site. Sites with 10 or more houses must have a percentage of affordable housing, i.e. for rent or part share. We plan to engage a landscape architect for a landscape assessment on each shortlisted site. This will ensure the NP has the evidence to be able to defend the choices made and to be technically correct. Future steps to be taken are;

* the drafting of the NP which will be available for consultation,
* RDC will then consult on the final version,
* The resulting plan goes to a Government appointed Planning Examiner for approval,
* a village referendum will then take place. In order to be adopted 50% of those who vote must agree with the final NP.

We need clear support for the plan or there is no point in doing it. The Steering Group need toproduce a constructive plan that residents can agree to and your thoughts are driving our work; no decisions have yet been made.

**Question and Answer Session.**

Martin White informed the meeting that during the break for refreshments three points were raised with him:-

1. Future expansion and potential impact of possibly 10 more houses (on top of current allocation).

*There is a Government review of existing housing allocations expected in mid 2018 and RDC’s existing quota may increase as a result. LUTG is planning a reserve list if it can and a question about future expansionwill be included in the next survey.*

2. If a road goes in and has 10 houses on each side this future increase could result in a sprawling development?

*Along with having a landscape assessment which will include village character, we will be drafting a policy to safeguard against sprawl. There is a character assessment map and further information on the NP website.*

3. Exact boundaries of sites and possible inclusion of community facilities

*Site suggestions have been taken in good faith; current development boundaries have been considered, and we have made best guesses for specific site boundaries. Community facilities will also be included in the next survey, along with whether site configurations should include a new village hall.*

Further questions:

4. What happened to the late submission of proposed sites?

*These were excluded as unsuitable. The most promising was the field between the entrance to Brakes Coppice and the Christian Healing Centre but there is no mains sewerage and a very sharp bend. It has not yet been formally ruled out but is likely to be.*

5. How big a site would require street lighting and will this need to be considered for new developments?

*Most residents do not want street lighting and smaller developments would probably not be required to have any. However, lighting will be included in with the character/landscape policy.*

6. When is the next survey and will it deal solely with the 5 shortlisted sites?

*Street Champions will be delivering the next survey within the next week and it will not deal solely with the 5 sites but will include housing needs, parking/road safety and community facilities. One survey form will be delivered to each household but any member (teenagers included) of the household can complete a survey form and if further forms are required please ask for more or it will be available on the NP website.*

7. If it is calculated that the five sites will consist of 6 houses, this will take the total to 30 dwellings. Are we therefore required to build 30?

*Our quota is 20 dwellings. Evidence will be required in the policies as to where dwellings should go, how big the sites and how many dwellings per site.*

8. Will the issues with the 5 sites be set out in the survey form?

*The form will include a description of the sites, a map with the 5 sites marked, and some analysis of them all. A landscape architect is being engaged to assist and their work will include views, access, road layout, etc.*

9. Will we be able to add general comments to the survey form?

*Yes, but for ease of input please complete the form on-line.*

10. When will there be answers regarding combining the 3 plots behind The Plough?

*We need to speak to the owners, but potentially the road is too narrow. We are however unlikely to get answers before the survey is printed. Response is also required from Network Rail and we will keep trying to contact the person able to make a decision. Timescales imposed by RDC are tight and we need to get on so are, unfortunately, having to run some actions in parallel.*

11. Developers may not be interested in view of all the difficulties; it would not be viable for them?

*This is possible but it is vital that we have gone someway to finalising a NP which should give us protection against this because the Government is keen on neighbourhoods having their own plans.*

12. What weighting would be given to objectors?

*There will inevitably be some who will object for a variety of reasons but we will try to minimise the impact of any development. This is a democratic process and we seek everybody’s views after which the village will decide on the final plan. We can only ask people and take views from the various surveys and meetings. The setting up of an independent panel has been suggested but how would we pick people to sit on it? In fact the Parish Council is already that because although reports on progress are given to it at each Council meeting, it has not been party to the process. We would prefer the entire village to decide on, and participate in, the Plan.*

13. Have the water authorities been contacted?

*Yes, but only South East Water has acknowledged. There has been no response from Southern Water.*

14. Is RDC reducing timescales and can it help with contacting Network Rail etc?

*Yes both RDC and the local MP have been helpful. Timescales are tight because RDC would like our draft plan to be included in its Local Plan submission to Government. RDC needs a 5 year housing supply and to submit its plan by October 2017 or developers could move in. Although our NP will not be in place by October, RDC think it will be reasonably down the road to be safe.*

15. Is it a requirement that dwellings must be integrated into the village? There would be more options if not.

*Yes it is required by the NPPF. Other options throw up other difficulties, e.g. speed limits, lack of footpaths, connection to main sewer are some.*

16. Why are some site suggestions discounted because they are not near village centre; some existing houses are already away from the centre?

*Those residents may be happy to be away from the centre but we must follow NPPF regulations. Some other parishes have had similar plans and had them thrown out which we want to avoid. We tried to make the best decisions and the NP will be independently audited. NIMBYism will not carry much weight.*

17. Where is the centre of the village?

*It could be considered that there are two centres, The Plough and the Church/School. We tried to join these up by looking at Cinderbrook but this is subject to flooding and not viable. Development boundaries also have to be taken into account and RDC have already discounted some sites.*

The meeting expressed its thanks for the detailed and hard work of those undertaking the NP on

behalf of the village.

7. **Date of Next Meeting**

7.1 **Steering Group** – Monday 5 June 2017 at 7.30pm in Crowhurst Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 5.10pm.

Website: [www.crowhurstneighbourhoodplan.org](http://www.crowhurstneighbourhoodplan.org)

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