



March Update

We know from the 2019 village questionnaire that there is significant frustration and even anger around ongoing development in the village. Residents repeatedly object to new planning applications, but without an adopted Neighbourhood Plan (NP), the planning authorities can only review each application “on its own merits” and against strict planning criteria. Hence new developments keep being approved.

The argument that as a village we have taken our fair share of additional housing has not, and will not, protect us from new development as is clear from all the new housing that has been built or approved in the past two years alone despite the fact that we have “met our quota”. The need for additional housing at a national and at a county level is overriding and simply saying “no” to development in Whitchurch will not stop it from happening.

A Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan is our way out of this never-ending cycle of applications, objections and disappointment. Once adopted a NP becomes the key tool the planning authorities will look to when making decisions on proposed plans within the village, NPs have a legal standing within the planning framework. Having a NP allows village residents to have our voices heard as to where in the village is deemed most appropriate to new housing development, along with what types of housing and the amount that is considered appropriate to the needs of the village in future years.

To pave the way for a future Whitchurch NP, the village NP group are focused on gathering evidence about our village, the future needs of the residents and the local environment. A small group of volunteers are being supported and guided by Consultant Neil Homer and his experienced team. It is a statutory requirement in the process of developing any village NP that landowners must be contacted and asked if they would be interested in their land being considered for possible development. If you own 0.2 hectares or more of such land and haven't been contacted please get in touch at info.whitchurchplan@gmail.com . The sole purpose at this stage is to allow the identification of possible development sites.

At a later stage these possible development sites would be carefully reviewed to assess their suitability both for development and for their fit against the wider needs of the village. Only land identified as appropriate on all counts would be included within a draft Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan for firstly consultation and then finally to a referendum of Whitchurch residents. A NP cannot be approved without sites being identified and agreed irrespective of the amount of development already under way or in the planning process currently.

It is a requirement of the process that the NP is put together in a transparent manner and this column and the website are currently key contact points; as Covid restrictions are removed, we look forward to discussing the NP face to face with residents and village groups this summer.

Please don't forget that everyone will have the opportunity to comment on proposed plans and the final version of the NP. In next month's article we will update you on the activities of the NP group that are gathering information on the environmental aspects of our village, a key part of the NP process, as we know the importance that preserving the rural nature of Whitchurch has to us all. Thank you all for your support.