



Sherborne St John Neighbourhood Plan SSJPC AGM – 15th May 2017

The Referendum (under the control of the BDBC Electoral Department) was held on 4th May, alongside elections for a new County Councillor; voting was strictly controlled. The turn-out was 58% and the vote:

Yes - to adopt the N Plan: 346

No – to reject the N Plan: 242

Following this success at Referendum, the Plan now takes on “full material weight for decision-making purposes” and is expected to be formally adopted by BDBC Council on 18th May.

The SSJ Neighbourhood Plan presented to Referendum was the result of 4 years of meticulous analysis by the Steering Committee assisted by external consultants. At each key decision point, the whole Parish was invited to consider the alternatives, add its comments, or vote for its preferred option. Given this extensive preparation, the margin in favour of the Plan at Referendum was disappointingly smaller than expected - due to a misguided 11th hour campaign urging Residents to vote against the Plan.

This ‘No’ campaign was focussed on the question of where to locate the approximately 15 houses demanded by the BDBC Local Plan (at that time under development). It was made clear that should the N Plan fail to choose a development site, this task would be completed by BDBC instead. The process started well, at the Consultation Event held on 14th March 2015, Bob’s Farm emerged as the clear favourite. Sadly, subsequent discussions between BDBC and the Developer resulted in the site being withdrawn from N Plan consideration – a situation that remains to the present day.

Another site was required; there were no brownfield options available. At the same time the N Plan team noticed that an option to develop a large section of the field behind Spring Close (from the bottom of the field, to a line ~ level with ‘top’ of Spring Close) was being promoted through the developing BDBC Local Plan. Given the fact that BDBC did not have a ‘5 year supply’ of building land (which means that developers are able to promote alternative development sites against the wishes of BDBC and local Residents), there was a real threat that BDBC might be forced to accept up to 80 new houses at this location.

After considering the situation, the lack of alternatives, and a key provision in the developing Local Plan, viz: *While the site is located in the Basingstoke – Sherborne St John Strategic Gap, the BDBC Local Plan Policy EM2 states that “Development in gaps will only be permitted where it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order”*; the N Plan team approached the Developer. An agreement, subject to approval, to support a development of 16/18 houses was reached - as long as the larger development was abandoned. While not perfect, the Village voted to support this scheme and the site was formally adopted in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan as the ‘best’ / or ‘least bad’ option available. Whilst it sadly will impact on some residents in the Village, the impact is substantially less than the original development would have made. The ‘No’ campaign misguidedly supported more rather than less development.

The development will provide the smaller house sizes that will hopefully attract younger families to the Village – supporting sustainability for the future. In addition, there is now a real option for the development to deliver a shop (land and building to be gifted to the Parish) to replace the Village Post Office that closed during development of the Neighbourhood Plan. Another positive step for sustainability.

A further important sustainability achievement of the N Plan is the establishment of a Wildlife Map for the Parish. Much of this work has been completed by Mike Harrison, supported by other wildlife enthusiasts in the Village. Now that the N Plan has been adopted, further work is required; in the medium to longer term however, the Wildlife Map will be extremely important in limiting development in and around SSJ.

The SSJ Neighbourhood Plan comprises

The Neighbourhood Plan itself

Eight primary Supporting Documents:

1. Baseline Evidence Report
2. Consultation Statement
3. Housing Needs Review

4. Site Sustainability Report
5. (BDBC) Screening Report
6. Scheme of Delegation
7. Housing Site Identification, Appraisal and Selection Process
8. Basic Conditions Statement

Twenty two Further Supporting Documentation (Appendices).

I commend the N Plan (and supporting documentation) as a great read for your further attention, and thank Mrs Penny Mayo and my fellow team members for their hard work:

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Mike Harrison

Natasha Rougier
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Julian Crawley and the SSJ Neighbourhood Plan Team