



Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Steering Group Meeting

Date: Wednesday 9th February 2022

Start: 6.31 pm

Present

Steering Group Members

Councillor Richard Wood (MWPC) (Chair)
Councillor David Pafford (MWPC)
Councillor John Glover (MWPC)
Councillor Saffi Rabey (MTC)
Councillor Mike Sankey (WC)
Shirley McCarthy (Environment)
John Hamley Melksham (Transport User Group)
Rolf Brindle (Representative for Transport)

Officers

Teresa Strange (MWPC)
Lorraine McRandle (MWPC)
Linda Roberts (MTC)
Christine Hunter (MTC)

Invited Guest

Gerald Milward-Oliver (Townscape)

MINUTES

1. Welcome and Apologies

Councillor Wood welcomed John Hamley, Melksham Transport User Group, as a new member of the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Apologies were received from David Way, WC Link Officer

It was noted that there were three Melksham Without Parish Council representatives present and it was clarified that Melksham Without Parish Councillors Wood and Glover had voting rights.

2. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest

3. To consider holding item 15 in closed session due to its confidential nature.

It was agreed to hold item 15 in closed session, due to the confidential nature of the matters to be discussed.

4. Public Participation

No members of the public were present.

5. To agree the Notes of the Meeting held on 29th September 2021.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the notes of the meeting held on 27th October 2021, having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. To note outcome of request/search for new Steering Group members and consider a way forward

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council confirmed no responses had been received from the Historical Association, Healthwatch, and Melksham Seniors, however John Hamley from the Melksham Transport User Group was in attendance as a new Steering Group member. The ATC had replied that they were unable to participate as it did not comply with their “non-political” rules. It was agreed to approach the recent Wiltshire Youth Council candidates from Melksham Oak School with an invitation to become representatives on the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

7. To note successful outcome of Locality Grant funding for year ending 31/03/2022 for member training, new website, media adverts and Stage One of Review programme for consultants.

The Clerk to Melksham Town Council confirmed £7,440 Locality Grant funding had been received, which would enable Place to undertake Stage One work. The funding would need to be spent before the end of March 2022. The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council confirmed there was no evidence still of potential Locality funding from 1st April 2022. Councillor Glover asked if there was funding to continue to progress the work. The Clerk to Melksham Town Council explained as well as the Locality grant the Town and Parish Councils jointly had £10,000 in their budgets earmarked for the work.

8. To note consultants instructed on receipt of Locality funding approval and confirmation of Stage One programme of works and key dates for workshop, meetings, press releases and training dates.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council explained Place had been instructed to proceed with Stage One of the review and had produced an extensive programme of events which had been circulated to the group. The date of the first workshop would be 2nd March 2022 at Melksham Town Hall (6.30 to 8.30pm). The outcome of the workshop would be reviewed by Place who will produce the final scoping document for the Review Plan for approval at the next Steering Group meeting to be held on Wednesday 16 March.

Neighbourhood Plan Training on Zoom was scheduled for Tuesday 15th February 2022 and Tuesday 22nd February 2022 for all steering group members, all Councillors from Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council had also been invited to attend.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council suggested placing the Community Engagement advertisements showing details for both the new Website and the Neighbourhood Plan Review explanation in the Melksham Independent News editions scheduled for 17th March 2022 and 31st March 2022. This would give time for the new website to be up and running (subject to approval later in the meeting) and to conform to the grant funding deadline of the end of March.

9. To approve copy/content for Community Engagement press releases in March 2022.

The Steering group discussed the content for the Community Engagement advertisements and felt it was important to explain why a Review was being undertaken so soon after the Plan had been adopted. The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council explained the content would be a whole page advert covering two consecutive issues in the Melksham Independent News. Members reviewed the text and made a series of amendments and agreed that it needed to be expanded to make it clear that the steering group/review needs to be informed by local people, to give the feeling of ownership; to explain why it's worth getting involved. The Clerk to Melksham Town Council added that fundamentally a Neighbourhood Plan is a community led plan.

It was agreed that the photographs to be used in the advert would be the original aerial shot on NHP#1, the town centre/market place, a village, new housing, and the new village hall being built in Berryfield.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council agreed to confirm with David Way that the date of the Plan date of 2038 could be used as not sure if the new Local Plan Review dates were common knowledge.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council confirmed members of the public would be able to leave comments on the website from 1st April 2022 and, if Covid allows, a public consultation exercise would be undertaken.

10. To approve quotation for new website for Review NHP#s

The Clerk to Melksham Town Council confirmed the quotation from Place to create and manage the content of the website was £2,750+ VAT, £1,000 of which would be paid for by the Locality grant funding with the remainder being split between the two councils. The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council explained the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan had a large evidence base which would require uploading to the website. Version control and community consultation results, which would automatically feed the website, would be the responsibility of Place and eventually the website would be managed by the Steering Group. Colin Harrison (local website designer) had kindly undertaken a sensibility check on what was being proposed by Place and was satisfied with their proposals.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the main content of the new website be produced and managed by Place at a cost of £2,750 + VAT + web hosting for one year.

11. To note updates from recent meetings on NPPF and NHP policy:

a) WALPA (Wiltshire Area Local Planning Alliance) (12 January)

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council reported that the group met on the 12th January, before their meeting with Wiltshire Council later in the month, to agree what their priorities were and agree a list of questions for the group meeting.

b) Wiltshire NHP groups and Wiltshire Council (27 January 2022)

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council reported Wiltshire Council are engaging with the Wiltshire NHP groups, this has expanded to include all groups, not just those in WALPA. WALPA had been formed in response to the recent changes in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) with the new Paragraph 14¹ meaning that “made” Neighbourhood Plans with housing allocation policies hold even if the local authority only has a 3-year land supply – but only for two years. The group was formed to lobby both central government and Wiltshire Council to assist in overcoming this new hurdle.

The problems of this 2-year time period have become very apparent for Malmesbury NHP who were one of the front runners in the country, being one of the first to achieve a made plan as they had now come to the end of the two-year protection against a lack of 5-year housing land supply.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council explained that as the Steering Group had applied to be a part of a national pilot scheme for design codes, she had also put forward the group to Wiltshire Council as they wanted to hear from any groups interested in getting involved at a county level.

a) Melksham Without Parish Council and Michelle Donelan MP (28 January 2022)

Councillor Pafford reported on a meeting with Michelle Donelan MP where she had expressed the opinion that the proposed bypass would not go ahead as the business case was not strong enough, and she favoured a shorter route. It was pointed out that if the bypass did not go ahead the A350 problems would remain, and other solutions would be needed because a strategic route to the Dorset coast would be required. Councillor Pafford was hopeful that by the time the NHP is written the strategic route for the bypass would be known.

Councillor Glover explained that any proposed housing to the east would have to be built in the west if there was no bypass.

Rolf Brindle felt the busiest roads were those to Chippenham and the A365 to Bath. If housing was built in the north-east this would cause more congestion. He stated that current plans for the bypass did not address that issue and people would not drive a longer route but would cut through the town centre.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/2-achieving-sustainable-development>

Making the town centre pedestrianised was discussed and Gerald Milward-Oliver stated that he could not see this occurring as drivers would find it easier and safer to use the bypass.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council confirmed the NHP#2 covered housing/site allocations, local green space, town centre masterplan, environmental issues and the implications of the proposed bypass and implications of the proposed canal restoration and enabling development and would be discussed at the workshop planned. It was noted that the proposed route of the canal restoration is protected in the Core Strategy, but there is no protected route for the proposed bypass.

12. To note update on Melksham Link canal project

The group noted the update on the Melksham Link canal restoration project in the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust Officers' Reports for December and noted local opposition to 900 homes being built to help pay for the canal. The Group discussed the effect the proposed canal would make to the town centre. Rolf Brindle felt this was not the best solution as the original canal had one lock and the proposed canal had seven locks and would be a less navigable route. Rolf suggested the canal could follow the proposed bypass to join the north of Melksham, which would require no additional locks and take out the sharp bends on the new proposed canal.

13. Priority for People: To note update following Workshop held on Wednesday 9 February 2022

Gerald Milward-Oliver confirmed that the results of the survey conducted in June/July 2021 were discussed at a workshop held in October 2021. The main ideas were separated into core themes and reviewed at a meeting held earlier that day where 30-40 themes were identified, and a process was identified to reduce these themes to ensure that some of the ideas would be taken up.

14. To note the date of Next Meeting of Steering Group Wednesday 16 March 2022

It was agreed that the workshop will take place on 2 March 2022 at Melksham Town Hall; this will be a closed session.

The date of the next public Steering Group meeting was noted as 16 March 2022 to be held at the Melksham Without Parish Council meeting venue, 1 Swift Way, Westinghouse Way, Bowerhill, SN12 6GX. Both sessions will be 6.30 to 8.30pm.

Due to the confidential nature of the item to be discussed members of the public were asked to leave the room and the Zoom meeting.

15. To receive update on Appeal APP/Y3940/W/2021/3285428: Planning Application 20/07334/OUT: Land West of Semington Road, Melksham (to rear of Townsend Farm) and consider approval of cost implications

Due to the confidential nature of the item to be discussed members of the public were asked to leave the room and the Zoom meeting.

The Clerk to Melksham Without explained the appeal was about the robustness of the Neighbourhood Plan. The applicant was calling into question how the site allocation was made and therefore, it was important to defend the appeal, as this had major implications for the Neighbourhood Plan. Melksham Without Parish Council had already paid £550 towards Vaughan Thompson, Place Studio, Neighbourhood Plan consultants assisting Wiltshire Council in their defence, and it was hoped the steering group would help contribute towards these costs with the implication that the cost would then be shared 70/30 with the town council as this was outside of the scope of the Locality grant funding. The Parish Council had also felt it important that Vaughan attend the appeal hearing on both the Council's and Steering Group's behalf to defend the Neighbourhood Plan.

Following more recent discussions between Vaughan, the Planning Consultant employed by Wiltshire Council to defend their case and David Way NHP Link Officer it was felt it might be more effective to have a local person taking part in the Neighbourhood Plan to express the community's wishes and commitments to the review and to express its disappointment should such development be allowed to undermine the clear strategy, rather than another person with a planning background being cross-examined on legislation and the NPPF.

The Clerk to Melksham Without Parish Council asked if the Group wanted Vaughan to attend the hearing, as well as or instead of a local person and explained that the Chair of the Townsend Farm Residents Group had also offered to attend and speak at the Hearing.

Members felt it was important to get across all the hard work which had gone into producing the Neighbourhood Plan and the disappointment that this had gone to Appeal as the NHP had already been examined by an Independent Examiner, and this effectively was challenging that outcome.

Shirley McCarthy suggested that the group could highlight that the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group had been highlighted in a Locality Case Study of community engagement best practice and perhaps it was worth seeking advice from the Royal Town Planning Institute etc.

The Clerk to Melksham Town Council added that as the Neighbourhood Plan had gone through the examination process and a referendum how could that process now be challenged?.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED: Councillor Wood represent the steering group at the Hearing, with Councillor Glover as reserve.

The meeting ended at 7.56 pm.