

MINUTES

MEETING OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN WORKING PARTY

THURSDAY 13 MAY 2021 AT 6.30PM ON ZOOM

PRESENT:

Cllr Bill Perry (“WJP”) (Chairman) (Cookham Parish Council)
Cllr Mark Howard (“MH”) (Cookham Parish Council)
Cllr Martin Coker (“MC”) (Cookham Parish Council)
Cllr Mandy Brar (“MB”) (Cookham Parish Council)
Dick Scarff (“DS”) (Cookham Society)
Lars Ahlgren (“LA”) (WildCookham)
Dr Shez Courtney-Smith (“SCS”) (Trustee of Stanley Spencer Gallery)
Jon Herbert (“JH”) (Troy)
Ben Castell (“BC”) (Aecom)
Jimmy Lu (“JL”) (Aecom)
Tracy Bailey (“TB”) (CNPWP Administrator) – present for ten minutes at start only

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Chris Doyle (“CD”) (Cookham Parish Council)
Cllr Ian Wernham (“IW”) (Cookham Parish Council)
Tim Veale (“TV”) (Save Cookham)

FORMAT

WJP explained that since there were only two items up for discussion, namely Troy’s draft vision statement and Aecom’s update on its work, he did not feel it necessary/appropriate to have full minutes taken of what will necessarily be a free ranging unstructured discussion. He will therefore take notes, circulate them for approval. If members consider that they do not adequately reflect the discussion and that full minutes should in fact be written, since the meeting is being recorded TB will still be able to do this. TB then handed control of the meeting to WJP and left.

ADMINISTRATOR

WJP said that Nina Milner (“NM”) had indicated her readiness to return. He had therefore discussed this with TB and NM. The arrangement which suited both was that once the current phase of discussions on the vision statement was complete, TB would step back to become our “reserve” again and NM would take back the position of Administrator. Because this is technically a Parish Council appointment, he had checked it with MH qua Chairman of the Council. MH was happy with this. The working party also agreed this.

AECOM

BC and JL explained the work that they had been doing. They had found the VDS very robust. It is also relatively recent. They propose to rely on it, so it would be possible to omit lengthy descriptions of the parish and the design code could therefore be practical and use examples. BC had also found his tour

of the Parish most productive and helpful. He now understood the nature of the slightly unusual community and its architecture from practical experience rather than just the documents, which was always helpful.

There was considerable discussion about the status to be given to the VDS. The WP considered it very important that the requirements in the VDS be retained and given teeth in the Plan and/or design code. Ultimately the working party was unconcerned about how this was done in the sense of how it was incorporated and/or into which, but it wished to retain the VDS (so that the Plan added to it) and wanted in the requirements in it given the full status in planning law terms that the Plan would have. BC and JH noted this.

WJP and DS noted that there had been occasions when the Parish felt that the requirements of the VDS and indeed RBWM's own design code had been flouted by RBWM's planning panel which had approved applications contrary to them. While they appreciated that the decisions of RBWM councillors could not be controlled, it was important that it was clear that not just the Plan but the design code and the VDS incorporated within them were binding on the panel (and the officers). That way if necessary judicial review proceedings could be started if decisions contrary to these were made.

The WP agreed that whatever was in the Plan and the design code, including the VDS, must be enforceable. JH suggested that RBWM could be contacted and discussions take place about how they would implement this. WJP mentioned the recent resignation of the liaison officer for the Plan. He said he would ask the Parish Clerk to try to find to whom we should speak.

Discussions then took place as to the content of the design code. Emphasis was placed by all the WP on the need to enforce the highest environmental and sustainability requirements. The need to consider flooding, drainage and run-off was also emphasised, particularly in light of the inadequacies of the pumping station in Lightlands Lane.

The WP appreciated that standards to be demanded in the design code could not be contrary to the BLP. Nevertheless, it wished to "build on" the BLP, particularly in the light of the declaration of a "climate emergency" by RBWM, to require even higher standards for housing construction, blue and green infrastructure and so on, including adaptation to electric and hydrogen powered cars, access and public transport.

The WP was also keen to ensure that all design fitted in with the existing ambience of Cookham. It was not opposed at all to interesting new architecture but only provided that it still fitted in, was not overbearing and represented the highest ordinary and environmental/sustainability standards.

Finally, concern was expressed (not least in the light of recent permitted development proposals) at the height of buildings. Reference was made to the recent success in persuading RBWM to refuse permission for a three-storey block of flats near the station (contrary to the advice of RBWM officers). The WP was firm that Cookham was a rural village and no tall buildings should be permitted. They would be contrary to the whole ambience of the village.

BC and JL said they understood the direction of travel wanted by the WP. They would now continue work on the design code bearing this in mind. They hoped to have something concrete shortly. They then left the meeting.

VISION STATEMENT

The WP continued with a detailed discussion of the vision statement prepared by Troy. Broadly, the WP approved of the vision statement. It was concerned to ensure, once again, that this fully articulated the desire expressed in the consultation to retain the village ambience and to embrace maximal standards of sustainability, ecological friendliness, energy-saving, accessibility for personal

non-motorised transport, physical exercise and openness accordingly. The questions of parking, dropped kerbs and hard-surfacing front gardens were also raised. Significant discussion took place around these requirements. JH agreed to tweak the draft accordingly.

LA was keen to see standards which would give different results in the three different parts of the Parish, suited to each of those parts. The WP basically agreed with this.

SCS raised the question of traffic, particularly with reference to the Pound. There was significant discussion of her views, as expressed in her paper, and traffic issues generally. It was felt that these should be discussed further, including if possible with RBWM, on a traffic/road management level, to see what could and could not both in theory and in practice be done. In addition, the limits of the Plan needed to be borne in mind, and expectations managed.

Reference was made to the development at Hollands Farm north of the river and the effect this would have on traffic in Cookham, especially when combined with site AL 37. Paul Strzelecki is working on the statistics and in discussion with WJP and DS but currently takes the view that the Hollands Farm development, when combined with potential use of the John Lewis conference centre, was enough to cause gridlock in Cookham even without the traffic from AL 37.

MH said that he was hoping to have discussions with RBWM road engineers and Cllr Clark, lead member for highways, about Cookham's road network. He would include this and SCS's points in the discussions.

The WP considered the question of Local Green Spaces ("LGS"). The Cookham Society's second submissions included more, and WildCookham had also now submitted a significant document nominating a number of such spaces as well as indicating the desirability and suggested locations of "green corridors". The WP was in principle in favour of these but discussion took place as to the criteria required to achieve designation as an LGS.

JH and WJP explained that the NPPF laid down in paragraphs 99 and 100 three specific criteria which had to be met to justify LGS status. After some discussion, LA indicated that he and WildCookham understood the possible extra benefits in terms of ability to resist development achieved by designation as an LGS compared with greenbelt alone. He/they did not, however, accept that satisfying the NPPF paragraph 99/100 criteria was the only way of achieving LGS status. It will therefore be necessary to consider this further.

JH will adjust the vision document in the light of the discussion. In order to maintain the momentum, the next meeting of the WP will be on Thursday 27 May at 6pm as usual. That will be a full agenda meeting at which it is hoped it will be possible to approve the vision document for issue and discuss consultation methods for it, as well as other usual items.

WJP