

Hazelbury Bryan Bytes

Parish Council Newsletter – Issue 26 - December 2015

SPECIAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EDITION

Chairman’s introduction: This is a rather different version to normal as it focuses on a single issue – does Hazelbury Bryan need or want a Neighbourhood Plan? Creating a Plan gives us a better opportunity to shape where future housing development might be located and what it might look like in terms of design, style and size. Other features like employment, transport, local facilities etc can also be considered. This sounds fine, but it does involve people in the community putting in quite a lot of work over the 18 months or so that it takes to put a Plan together and have it approved. All the detail follows and I urge you to take the time to read the information below and then let us have your views in the simple survey attached – you can fit it in after Christmas lunch and before the Queen’s speech!

Neighbourhood Plans – background: NP’s were introduced by central Government under the Localism Act of 2011 as a measure to try and give communities a more powerful voice in planning matters. It does not give power to stop development, indeed the intention is to support new housing development, but it gives communities the chance to determine where development might take place and what it might look like, based on local needs.

Central Government sets the overall planning rules for England and delegates planning control to district councils – in our case North Dorset. District councils have their own formal Local Plans which set out planning rules locally. North Dorset’s is currently being revised and should be approved this coming spring and will last until 2031. Development in North Dorset will be governed by this Local Plan. Under this Plan the 19 “sustainable” rural villages have to deliver a minimum of 825 new houses between now and 2031. These villages include places like Stalbridge, Child Okeford, Shillingstone, Marnhull, Okeford Fitzpaine and, of course, Hazelbury Bryan. If a community has a NP then that NP will also form part of the planning rules that control new development. It’s a different animal to the existing Parish Plan which has no statutory weight whatsoever.

Neighbourhood Plan – what’s involved?

NP’s must be community led. The parish council can support and provide help, but the NP should be developed by the wider community. Volunteers are needed with the time, skill, experience, energy etc to work on the project for 18 months or so. There are no set rules as to how a NP should look or how long it should be. Volunteers might expect to attend a committee meeting each month, help with consultation questionnaires and events and generally act as a conduit for feeding in community opinion. Local experience in neighbouring parishes has shown the importance of engaging professional support to act as a guide to the whole process and write the NP – turning local aspirations into technical “planning-speak”. It makes sense to devise a NP that runs along the same timeframe as the North Dorset Local Plan – so from now until 2031

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Neighbourhood Plan – what’s the process?

The first step is to find out background information - what does the community value about Hazelbury Bryan, what housing might be needed until 2031, what size of housing is most needed, is low cost or affordable rented housing needed, what green spaces should be protected, where does the community think development might be acceptable, how will social infrastructure, transport, businesses cope with extra development etc ,etc ? This might be done by way of a village questionnaire and consultation events. Professional help will probably be needed to work on housing need which will be a mixture of past trends and anticipated need (both local and that required as part of North Dorset’s overall target for rural, sustainable villages).

The next step is to analyse all the feedback and draft the NP – “simples”! This initial draft would go out to public consultation, including organisations such as the school, doctors, key local businesses etc, to seek feedback on the draft. In addition, specialist reports on environmental/historical/ecological matters etc will need to be commissioned. All the comments would be analysed, discussed etc and a revised NP produced. This would then go for a further formal public consultation which also gives statutory consultees the chance to have their say – Dorset County Council, North Dorset District Council, Wessex Water, Environment Agency, Natural England and many others. Once their feedback is taken into account a final NP is produced. This goes via North Dorset DC to a formal Examination by an independent Planning Inspector. Changes may be required following the Examination but if the policies in the NP are based on robust evidence then hopefully these would be minor. The final, final NP is then submitted to a local referendum which requires a simple majority of those voting to pass or fail. The expectation is that if the public consultation has been effective then it should be a “Yes” vote. The NP then becomes a statutory planning document alongside the North Dorset Local Plan.

Neighbourhood Plan – pro’s and con’s: The benefits are:

- it gives the community the chance to decide where development will take place and what it might look like
- key local characteristics can be retained
- important local green spaces can be protected
- developers will be expected to take account of the requirements of the NP
- without a NP developers can drive where development takes place

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The disadvantages are:

- it's a lot of work for volunteers
- our NP would have to fit within the overall requirements of the North Dorset Local Plan, so we don't have an entirely free hand
- Central government can change the rules of the game! We're all aware of the pressure to build new homes across the country. It is possible that District Councils will be forced to relax planning controls which might negate the influence of NPs
- there are costs involved – consultancy, printing, consultation events etc. Currently, though, there is grant funding from the Government of up to £8,000 to prepare a NP which should be sufficient; but if this funding is withdrawn then the cost would fall on the community.

Conclusion: Over the last few years the parish council has considered the merits of the community creating a NP on a number of occasions. At October's parish council meeting we had a presentation from officers from North Dorset DC where the topic was discussed again (see the web site to see the minutes of this meeting). It's fair to say we've been ambivalent about the idea given the work involved but we thought it right to seek the views of the community before we made a decision one way or the other. Some of our neighbours are working on Plans – Sturminster Newton, Okeford Fitzpaine and Shillingstone (its NP is virtually complete and ready to go for Examination early in the New Year).

So I urge you to think about the matter and let us have your thoughts by completing the enclosed simple questionnaire. It can be returned as follows:

- By e mail to: hazelburybryanpc@outlook.com
- By post to: Clerk to Hazelbury Bryan Parish Council, 4 The Orchard, Ibberton, DT11 0EL
- Complete on line at: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/MM6RWBZ
- Deliver to collection box in village hall

The deadline for return is 17th January 2016

If there is support for developing a Plan then the parish council will organise a meeting of volunteers in the New Year and help establish a Neighbourhood Plan Committee with its own Chair. The Committee can then take things forward, reporting as necessary to the parish council.

If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact the clerk, Malcolm Wilson, or any parish councillor.

Finally, on behalf of the parish council, I'd like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year

Steve Murcer, Chairman, Hazelbury Bryan Parish Council

Fancy a Coffee? There's something new at the **Village Hall** in Hazelbury Bryan. Meet up with friends. Make new friends. Bring your friends. Keep up with the local news and what's going on in the village. We'll be meeting at **10.30am** on the **1st and 3rd Monday of each month**, starting on **Monday 18th January, 2016**. Tea, coffee, fruit juice, biscuits and cake will be available and we'd ask you for a donation towards the costs. "Goodbyes" at about 12 noon (or whenever the chat stops). If you'd like any further information, please contact Carol (817391) or Sue (817986).

We look forward to seeing you there!

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