

Dogmersfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group - Approved Minutes

Meeting of the Dogmersfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held on Monday 14 November 2016 in the Dogmersfield Primary School starting at 6.00pm.

Those attending

Steering Group Members:

Chris Ward (CW)

Valery Scott (VS)

Carol Anne Harrison (CAH)

Geoff Beaven (GB)

Alastair Clarke (AC) representing Dogmersfield Parish Council.

Members of the public:

None present.

1. Welcome and introductions.

GB welcomed all present to the fourth meeting of the Dogmersfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. He explained that the primary purpose of this meeting is to consider whether to change the consultant support arrangements. Apologies had been received from Christine Lowe (CL) Mark Lowe (ML) and Lorraine Fullbrook.

2. Acceptance of the notes of the meeting held on the 12th September 2016.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2016 were a true record (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).

3. Review of progress since the last meeting.

GB reported that he had written to the joint CEO of Hart District Council reminding him that in response to the Refined Options consultation the Parish Council had identified errors in the analysis that underpinned the categorisation and that we had asked for the errors to be corrected and for Dogmersfield to be categorised as tier 5 'remaining villages and hamlets'. The received response did not concede our claim but it could prove useful depending on what is proposed for Dogmersfield in the draft Local Plan.

Since the last meeting a Vision and Objectives Statement was delivered to all residents over the weekend 21/22nd October. Further calls were made a week later to collect comments sheets and some of these are still being received. More than 50 residents have responded which is similar to the very good involvement with the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire circulated by the Parish Council in 2015.

An initial review of the comments show widespread support for the Vision and Objectives statement with only one respondent not happy with it. The statement was based on the feedback from the Parish Council's questionnaire and not surprisingly favourable comments were made about many of its features. However, there also has been significant disagreement with some specific proposals which will mean that the inclusion of these items needs to be reviewed. All of this useful information will be taken forward to the next stage of work.

The last meeting concluded that there should be a review our use of consultants and how to best make use of the current grant monies before the grant period expires which is at the end of the year.

The production of the Neighbourhood Development Plan is a complex activity involving engagement with the community and the application of specialist planning knowledge. The need to support the work of the a Steering Group (SG) with specialist planning expertise was recognised from the outset and as part of the work to launch the neighbourhood plan the Parish Council put in place a consultancy support arrangement through the engagement of Planet. This involved the issue of a purchase order to the company with a limit of liability of £1500.

The Initial activities commissioned from Planet by the Steering Group in support of their work to draw up a vision and objectives statement failed to live up to expectations; in particular there was a 5 week delay in commenting on the draft V&O statements and the comments when received were not found to be helpful. It was apparent that the essential close working relationship between the SG and Planet was not being established and an alternative arrangement was desirable.

Members of the Steering Group carried out their own review of the arrangements put in place by local Neighbourhood Plan teams encompassing Rotherwick, Winchfield, Odiham, Crookham Village, Crondall and Hartley Wintney. This revealed a mixed picture with some teams being heavily dependent on consultants and others working largely unaided. Many of the teams had either abandoned or changed their consultancy arrangements during the course of their work.

This work identified three consultancy organisations that were highly valued: Ann Skippers (supporting Winchfield), the NPIERS service (supporting Rotherwick and Winchfield) and RCOH (supporting Odiham and Fleet). These three organisations were investigated further.

Having completed a comprehensive evaluation of these organisations the Steering Group members concluded that their lost confidence in Planet was unlikely to be restored and in this situation that an alternative consultancy RCOH should be asked for a costed proposal.

To avoid nugatory expenditure Planet were advised that no further work would be placed with them beyond the limit of liability of £1500 in the DPC purchase order. They were also asked to submit invoices for the work done to date and to complete any other work in hand to achieve a deliverable standard.

RCOH have provided a comprehensive quotation and project plan that provides a very clear picture of the support that RCOH can contribute to the development of the Dogmersfield Neighbourhood plan. However there were four areas where further discussion would be beneficial and these were discussed at a teleconference between two Steering Group members (Mark Lowe and Geoff Beaven) and Neil Homer from RCOH. (More details of these discussions are covered in Annex A)

The RCOH project plan and quotation as clarified by the telecom on the 11th November demonstrate that an affordable consultancy arrangement is available with RCOH but this needs to be supplemented through a small number of task groups to be set up by the Steering Group.

An outstanding issue is that the work to complete a Strategic Environmental Assessment may not be affordable depending on the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan. Should RCOH be engaged their initial activities planned for December will include a workshop with the Steering Group to build on the outcome of the Vision and Objectives statement and firm up

the remaining work that will be needed. This workshop will consider the affordability implications. The RCOH support for the planned December activities can be afforded with a tranche of grant currently in hand.

RCOH will not redo the work completed by Planet and as the charging rates of the two organisations are similar there will be few financial implications due solely to the potential change of consultant. The affordability problems always existed and the improved clarity of the way forward we now have has brought them into focus at a much earlier stage.

The SG resolved the following.

- **That the invoice for £864 submitted by Planet should be paid subject to the DPC being content to do so (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).**
- **That the DPC should be asked to curtail its commitment to Planet by reducing the limit of liability on the purchase order to £864 (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).**
- **That the DPC should be asked to engage consultants RCOH to provide consultancy support as described in their quotation and project plan with a LOL of £3000 (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).**
- **That the DPC should be advised to seek to extend the finish date for the current grant period to at least the end of January 2017 (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).**
- **That the DPC should be asked to note that a further grant application will be required in order to fund the required consultancy work up to the end of March 2017 but this application could be deferred until the New Year when an updated project plan should be available (CW proposed, VS seconded with all in favour).**

4. Consideration of next steps

The SG noted that the RCOH will facilitate a workshop to build on the outcome of the Vision and Objectives statement and firm up the remaining work that will be needed. It is important that time is made available to support this activity.

5. Next SG meetings will be held provisionally on 9th January and 12th March 2017
6. AOB

Nothing was raised and GB closed the meeting at 7.00pm

Annex A

Dogmersfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Consultancy Support.

The production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NHDP) is a complex activity involving engagement with the community and the application of specialist planning knowledge to ensure the resultant plan is sound in planning terms and that it passes independent scrutiny and a local referendum. The Dogmersfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was established to be responsible for the Dogmersfield plan and although consultant support was put in place this arrangement has not lived up to expectations. This paper seeks agreement to formally curtail the purchase commitment placed by the Parish Council on Planet (the current consultants) and to establish replacement consultancy support with consultancy RCOH.

The need to support the work of a Steering Group (SG) with specialist planning expertise was recognised from the outset and as part of the work to launch a neighbourhood plan (NHP) for Dogmersfield, Councillors investigated the arrangements put in place by other local NHP teams. This work led to the conclusion that Planet could meet the consultancy support need for Dogmersfield and following a number of meetings with representatives of the company the Parish Council issued a purchase order covering an initial tranche of activities to be reimbursed on a daily rate basis with the commitment capped by a Limit of Liability.

Initial activities commissioned from Planet by the SG were in support of their work to draw up a vision and objectives (V&O) statement and included a half day workshop, commenting on draft V&O statements prepared by the SG and researching the population demographics for the NHDP designated area. In the event Planet's contribution failed to live up to expectations and it was apparent that the essential close working relationship between the SG and Planet was not being established and an alternative arrangement was desirable.

Members of the SG carried out their own review of the arrangements put in place by local NHP teams encompassing Rotherwick, Winchfield, Odiham, Crookham Village, Crondall and Hartley Wintney. This revealed a mixed picture with some teams being heavily dependent on consultants and others working largely unaided. Many of the teams had either abandoned or changed their consultancy arrangements during the course of their work.

This work identified three consultancy organisations that were highly valued: Ann Skippers (supporting Winchfield), the NPIERS service (supporting Rotherwick and Winchfield) and RCOH (supporting Odiham and Fleet). These three organisations were investigated further to establish whether they could fulfil the consultancy support arrangement for Dogmersfield. This work revealed that:

- NPIERS is a service provided by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) that holds a list of approved planning consultants who can support communities developing NHDPs. It was apparent that the successful use of this service locally was largely due to the quality of the particular consultant and that this individual was already over stretched.
- Ann Skippers proved to be an impressive person (a recent President of the Royal Town Planning Institute) with many skills and knowledge that would be of benefit. However she has many other demands on her time and as a single practitioner there were concerns about her ability to respond quickly to the SG's need for more hands-on support.

- RCOH is a very experienced and credible consultancy based in West London that has already guided 27 plans through the final referendum stage involving all sizes of community under many different planning authorities. They are already working within Hart on the Odiham and Fleet plans. They are willing to provide a comprehensive proven support package tailored to reflect the limited resources available for Dogmersfield.

Having considered this comprehensive evaluation (which is only summarized here) the SG members concluded that their lost confidence in Planet was unlikely to be restored. They also concluded that RCOH should be asked for a costed proposal. A price competition for the shortlisted organisations would not be meaningful as they would be asked to work within the available grant and as the grant rules limit what can be paid per hour it is likely that everyone will quote the same figure or just creep in under it. In these circumstances the quality of support based on track record and ability to respond to Dogmersfield needs would be the determining factor and RCOH were assessed to be best candidate based on these criteria.

Planet were advised that no further work would be placed with them beyond the limit of liability of £1500 in the DPC purchase order. They were also asked to submit invoices for the work done to date and to complete any other work in hand to achieve a deliverable standard.

RCOH have provided a very clear and comprehensive quotation and project plan that provides a very clear picture of the support that RCOH can contribute to the development of the Dogmersfield NHDP. However there were four areas where further discussion would be beneficial and these were discussed at a teleconference between two SG members (Mark Lowe and Geoff Beaven) and Neil Homer from RCOH. The issues and telecon conclusions are summarised under the following headings:

Essential activities not covered by RCOH

RCOH were not expected to cover all the activities to generate the NHDP and a better understanding was needed of the resource and potential financial implications of the essential activities that are outside the RCOH scope. One of the aims of the workshop proposed for December would be to firm up on these needs.

Development of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a complex task which can only be carried out locally with significant specialised help. A key task for the workshop proposed for December will be to establish the aims and scope of an affordable NHDP.

Affordable scope of work

The RCOH quotation currently exceeds the funds available for the NHDP which are limited by the available grants but the quotation does identify those tasks where RCOH help may not be needed or RCOH may need fewer days. How to make best use of the RCOH within this limitation would be an ongoing consideration starting with the December workshop.

Financial/project profile

The central government grant funding has in-built timescale limitations with the initial tranche of grant having a finish date of 31st December 2016. The RCOH project plan proposed a number of activities during December including the workshop mentioned above. Providing these can be achieved the initial tranche of government grant will be expended before the end of the year. However, it will be prudent to seek to extend the finish date for this tranche of funding to allow more time for invoicing and payment approval.

Parish Council purchasing

The Parish Council's preferred approach will be to commit to an agreed scope of work through the issue of a purchase order which includes a limit of liability (LOL) that reflects the grant funding limitations.