

The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on Thursday March 17th 2016 in the Parish Rooms, Waterside

Present:

Dickens Heath Parish Councillors; Philip Brandum, Trevor Eames, Stephen Gussin (Chairman), Maureen Holloway, Diane Potter, Doreen Wright.

6 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

Minute 257 (2015/16) Apologies for Absence

Councillor Bob Cudmore.

Minute 258 (2015/16) Neighbourhood Plan Presentation by Richard Cobb

Richard is a Chartered Town Planner, and former Deputy Chief Planning Officer at Solihull MBC – until 14 years ago. He is therefore familiar with the original concept of Dickens Heath. Since then he has worked with Planning Aid and the Planning Inspectorate West Midlands, along with being involved in a lot of Neighbourhood Plan work. Richard then gave a presentation – the slides from which can be seen on the PC website. He reiterated that the community must be consulted on and ‘own’ the Neighbourhood Plan. The timescale for preparation of the Plan will be at least 12-18 months culminating in a referendum that will ask whether voters ‘want Solihull MBC to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Dickens Heath to help it decide planning applications in the parish’. If the community own the plan, then the support should be there.

Minute 259 (2015/16) Question and Answer Session

Should infrastructure be included?

A shopping list should be produced of what is needed if funds become available.

Can we say that Dickens Heath doesn’t want any more development, it’s had enough? Is it realistic to expect a Neighbourhood Plan to prevent future development?

It’s not certain that future development will be around Dickens Heath, but a new settlement does tend to become a magnet for further development. But a Neighbourhood Plan would make the views of the community clear to Solihull MBC.

A Neighbourhood Plan requires a lot of information to be gathered and put together, the PC and DHRA should combine forces to get the work done.

It is better to get volunteers on board, rather than paying consultants to do the work.

What percentage of support is required at the referendum?

More than half of those who vote are required to vote in support.

For what reasons would residents oppose a Neighbourhood Plan?

Possible reasons may be contentious issues, too much change, or a new housing site. A sign at the entrance to the village would be a good idea – Much Wenlock did this, a sign that said ‘Your Village, Your Plan’. The website and social media should also be used.

Neighbourhood Plans do carry weight

Last year, a legal decision was made over a Neighbourhood Plan and where building should take place. One site had been included in the Neighbourhood Plan, and the developer of an alternative site challenged it in Court. The local council had to defend the Neighbourhood Plan, and it was successful.

When does an Emerging Neighbourhood Plan (that is in progress) carry any weight?

The Inspectors place some weight at the 1st stage, but it carries greater weight as the process progresses. It will not just be dismissed, and more and more Courts are taking Neighbourhood Plans into consideration. There is a stronger case than ever before to do one now. Policy areas should be prioritised and consulted on, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan could then carry some weight depending on the details of a particular planning application.

We need to keep the gap between Dickens Heath and Shirley, Wythall is also very close and creeping closer.

The SMBC view is that these gaps are very important, but the need to retain these gaps and prevent coalescence with Shirley/Wythall/Cheswick Green should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Should we also look at the requirements of Wythall/Tidbury Green and adjoining areas?

We should consult with neighbouring parish councils and adjoining landowners.

Should we consult with landowners who are trying to develop their land?

Yes, then we can show that we have asked them, listened and given reasons for rejecting their proposals.

How would a Neighbourhood Plan be organised?

A steering group is formed – which can be the Parish Council, or a sub-group which feeds in to the PC. The PC can delegate to a group of volunteers, as long as a member of the Parish Council is on the group. The Parish Council needs to persuade members of the community to come forward and volunteer, there are a lot of skills out there if residents are willing to help.

In areas that have produced a Neighbourhood Plan, did they visit each household?

Some published newsletters and/or knocked on some doors.

A lot of apartments in Dickens Heath are hard to access.

Different parts of the community may have to be accessed in different ways, it may be better to produce flyers. We can use our noticeboards, a display at the library, a stall at Festival on the Green and a presentation at the local schools.

We need to get something out to the community quickly.

We have already done a survey, so a flyer can be circulated of suggestions of headings to be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan can really bring the community together.

How do we get the 'cynics' on board? Those that think it's a waste of time?

There is no magic solution, we can only use facts that prove a Neighbourhood Plan will carry some weight. Some will be very sceptical about the impact that a Neighbourhood Plan will have, and it is also important to manage expectations carefully.

A Neighbourhood Plan is a vast piece of work, and the danger is that it becomes too broad.

It needs to be broken down into sections, and stages set for achieving in steps – so that it is not too overwhelming. If we look at other Neighbourhood Plans, there will be consistent issues.

Minute 260 (2015/16) To Consider Whether to Go Ahead with a Neighbourhood Plan

Proposed by Councillor Eames, seconded by Councillor Wright, all agreed – **Resolved** that Dickens Heath Parish Council should go ahead with the production of a Neighbourhood Plan.

Meeting ended 8.15pm