

Newick Now to 2030

Neighbourhood Plan Important Update

20th December 2014



Dear Residents,

Newick Parish Council is delivering this letter to all residents of the parish to share the latest news about the Neighbourhood Plan (The Plan), and in particular the Parish Council's decision to proceed to a referendum on the Plan in February 2015. After incorporating many of the comments made on the Draft Plan during the consultation process earlier this year, the Council submitted the Proposed Plan to an external Independent Examiner, whose role was to determine whether it complies with the 'basic conditions' that apply to the neighbourhood planning process.

The Examiner of Newick's Plan has identified a number of aspects of it that need to be changed to meet the basic conditions, but has stated that provided those changes are made, a referendum can be held. That will allow you to vote on whether or not the Plan should be adopted. Some of the changes are unpalatable, but it is not possible to challenge or overturn the Examiner's decisions about the modifications required. The only alternative to adopting them would be to take the Plan back a number of steps and eventually hope for a better result from another Examiner. This would delay the referendum and hence also the point at which the Plan gains maximum influence over future housing developments.

Furthermore, producing and consulting on a new Plan would take things beyond the general election and the inception of a new Parish Council in May 2015, and the referendum on a changed Plan could not be held until late June 2015 at the very earliest, always assuming that the next Parish Council will be prepared to proceed immediately with the Plan. It is also possible that a new government will move the goalposts for neighbourhood planning. By accepting the changes the Examiner calls for, we can have a referendum on 26th February 2015, which will then leave Newick far better protected against speculative planning applications for additional large housing developments.

The Examiner made several encouraging remarks about the Plan and many of the modifications required are just minor editing without changing the intent of the Plan's policies. The Parish Council has few issues with these changes, **but** there are three significant modifications required by the Examiner, and one significant comment, that have already caused some controversy and consternation amongst people in Newick.

First, the most unwelcome change removes the phasing of the development of the three main sites selected for development. The Examiner has determined that we cannot insist on such phasing. However, the Parish Council believes that there will still be some phasing in reality. The developers of the site north of Cricketfield and the site east of the telephone exchange are believed to be at different stages of preparedness to proceed, and will probably not want their houses to be on the market at the same time in competition. Furthermore, the owners of the site on part of what was previously known as Woods Fruit Farm have always made it clear that they have no intention of releasing their land for development until about 2025. Thus sixty homes (net), rather than the previously proposed thirty, might be built relatively early in the Plan period, but the last thirty-eight (net) will probably not be built until towards the end of the Plan period.

Secondly, the inclusion in the Plan of maintaining a 'green gap' between Newick and other parishes, in particular north-east Chailey, has to be removed. This is partly due to the difficulty of precisely defining such a gap, but also because much of the gap would have to be in Chailey and Newick's Plan can have no influence over the use of land outside Newick.

Thirdly, the Examiner has determined that it is not acceptable to have a policy that prevents new housing development being equipped with street lighting, as there is no evidence that lighting would never be required for justified safety reasons. Subject to the expected agreement of our advisers, the street lighting policy will be replaced by what the Examiner terms a 'community action'.

The Examiner has also made one comment which does not require a change to the Plan, but has caused great concern. In response to representations implying that the Plan should cater for more than 100 homes, the Examiner has pointed out that the Plan does not impose a cap on the number. This is true, but government legislation and guidance does not permit such a cap. However, we believe that when the Core Strategy for Lewes District has itself been examined, completed and adopted, any risk of further large developments in Newick will disappear. Lewes District Council (LDC) has stated that its intention is to permit only the 100 homes it allocated for Newick (now allowed for in the Neighbourhood Plan) plus windfall development within the existing planning boundary (houses in gaps here and there) plus any "permitted development" outside it (essentially the conversion of farm buildings now allowed by the government).

If the Examiner of the Core Strategy imposes an increase in the 100 new homes LDC has allocated for Newick, it will not be possible to overturn that. However, by having a Neighbourhood Plan, Newick should be far less likely to have such an increase imposed. In the meantime, the existence of a Neighbourhood Plan that has been through examination is giving strong protection against speculative planning applications for large developments not included in the Plan, and after a successful referendum this protection will be even stronger.

Newick Parish Council has fully considered the Examiner's required modifications and the options available. These are: abandoning the Plan; producing a revised Plan, consulting you on it and submitting it for a new examination, with the delays and risks that would entail; or putting before you an amended Plan, containing the modifications the Examiner determined necessary, at a referendum to be held on February 26th 2015.

It is the last option that was put to an extraordinary meeting of Newick Parish Council on December 16th and passed unanimously.

The Parish Council hopes, therefore, that you will vote in favour of adoption of the Plan at the referendum in February, in order that Newick has in place better protection from speculative planning applications prior to the completion and adoption of the Core Strategy, and reduced risk of an increase in the proposed number of 100 new homes for Newick. You will shortly be able to view the Referendum Issue of the Proposed Neighbourhood Plan on the parish website, and from early January you will be able to obtain a hard copy from the Clerk, Sue Berry (contact details below).

We will be holding some drop-in question sessions at which we can clarify and explain things still further, and we encourage you to attend if you have any doubts or questions about the Plan or the Examiner's report. These will be held in the Community Centre in January on Saturday 10th (9.30am to midday), Wednesday 14th (6pm to 8.30pm) and Saturday 17th (2pm to 4.30pm).

John Lucas, Chairman