**Neighbourhood Plan Working Group**

**Report to Council, December 2018**

The Neighbourhood Plan Working Group met for the first time on 27th June. It was agreed that the Plan would not be all-encompassing and the first task was to define the areas which the Plan would cover. An outline document was produced setting the wish for a Neighbourhood Plan in context, showing the areas which the plan would cover and ways in which the wider community would be involved. This is Appendix A to the report and is on the Council website.

Since then, the Working Group meetings have begun to flesh out the detail to be included in each of the four areas to be addressed – Green Spaces, Design Guides, Leisure and Transport/Town Centre/Parking.

External members of the Working Group are: Cliff Andrews, BRCC; Jackie Sadek, UKR, Mark Hyde, Hallam Land Management. Kate McFarlane and Ingrid Hooley from CBC have attended meetings to brief the Working Group on progress with the Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid and members of the Working Group were invited to attend a transport workshop held by CBC to underpin the HIF work. Tom Price, the CBC officer who is the link for Neighbourhood Plans, has also attended to speak about the Plan process and the Chairman and Clerk have attended a full day conference in London on producing a Neighbourhood plan.

The Council received formal designation of the area of our Neighbourhood Plan from CBC on 4th July and, later in July, Council gave us delegated powers for our work, with a budget of up to £20,000. Grants may also be available from Government. At this stage, no monies have been spent.

**Green Spaces**

There is a legal process whereby Local Green Spaces can be designated and Cliff Andrews has advised on the parameters for this. The Plan can also designate land which we want to be used as green space. A full list of these areas is Appendix B, together with a map. The next stage will be to consult with the public, particularly on which of the spaces is more important to them. This has to be done as part of the designation but will also give an insight into public priorities.

**Design Guides**

The Working Group is looking at Design Guides for three areas.

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**Leisure**

Members of the public often comment about the lack of leisure facilities in Biggleswade, particularly ‘nothing for young people to do’. The town has various sports facilities, although will need more as the town expands, but people also talk about a cinema, bowling alley, etc. As the population of Bigglewade and its hinterland grows, it will become more viable for commercial organisations to provide some of these facilities in the town. The Neighbourhood Plan needs to designate possible sites for these facilities and also indicate the kinds of facilities people would support. Again, early public consultation is needed.

**Transport/Town Centre/Parking**

Regarding transport, the Group continues to consider how to get people on to the A1 or to the station so that they can get to work. Consideration is also being given to connectivity for walking and cycling, looking at signposting, particularly on and from new estates.

A map of parking has been produced showing Council car parks, those on lease to the Council and those belonging to commercial enterprises. It also seeks to identify possible land for future car parks. See Appendix C. The Council and CBC continue to work together to try to provide more parking. Designating possible land for parking will make it easier as and when land becomes available.

CBC are pursuing the idea of a transport interchange at the station but there remain practical difficulties to enable commuters to use public transport to access the railway.

On 6th February 2019, Bill Grimsey will visit Biggleswade. As a successful retailer, he carried out a study of High Streets and their slow decline in 20??. At the LGA Conference in July, he launched a review to update his report. He and some of his review team will be briefed about the town, be shown round and will then give some initial thoughts about what more can be done to revitalise our town centre. All Councillors will be invited to this feedback, probably at 4pm.

The Neighbourhood Plan, like the Local Plan, is primarily an exercise in allocating land for various activities. However, until we have clarified our community’s priorities, a map of the parish showing how all land could or should be used, cannot be produced.

Various other maps have been produced to assist with finding the way forward – the expansion of Stratton Business Park; land owned publicly by CBC; the housing trajectory, i.e. housing with planning permission but not yet built. These maps, together with larger versions of the maps in the Appendices, will be available in the Council Chamber.

In the New Year, Tom Price will be invited back to discuss progress and next steps. Also, BRCC are able to give some support in planning an initial public consultation, which the Group would like to take place in March, with sessions both at the Town Hall and the Orchard Centre.

The Working Group is looking for questions/comments/suggestions from Council and agreement to continue its work as outlined.