

Sandy Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

Thursday 19 May 2022 at 6pm

At Sandy Town Council, 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy.

Meeting Minutes

Present: Nigel Aldis, Robert Baker, Anne Elliott-Flockhart, Arnold Gilpin, Joanna Hewitt, Ruth Lock, Chris Patterson and Anne Ramsay.

Apologies: Richard Barlow and Amanda Gibson.

1. Review and approval of minutes – 21 April 2022

The minutes were approved.

2. Consultant Presentations

Members had received a summary of progress from Chris that detailed the three consultants and their quotes prior to the meeting

a) Dave Chetwyn – via Zoom

Dave Chetwyn introduced himself and told members a little about himself and his company Urban Vison.

The company have worked with Locality to create the Neighbourhood Plan road map.

They have done neighbourhood plans for both rural and urban areas. And locally have worked on Biggleswade Neighbourhood Plan which is now at the examination stage.

The company works collaboratively with the neighbourhood plan steering group, they will advise on the process at each stage, what things to do and what to avoid. They start with a session looking at key issues which are turned into a map for policies. They will help with drafting policies; every plan is drafted from scratch, so

they are locally specific. They will also advise on legal compliance. Once they have done the policy mapping, they can recommend if we need any specialist support, e.g., housing needs, and can help obtain the support needed. They would run through the whole process at the beginning and give a clear idea of what we still need to do.

A member noted that we have already had funding for support with creating a green infrastructure plan and designated green spaces. Dave reported that these provide a great evidence base for policies.

The company have supplied a costing proposal in a format that can be submitted directly to Locality with our grant application. The Locality grant fund has been extended for another year, but as it only runs till March next year it's important to get the application in as soon as possible. As we have already accessed some funding, locality can advise on how much we can still apply for.

A member asked if all meetings with Urban Vision would be via zoom. Dave replied that most meetings would be as they are based in Liverpool. A lot of the work can be done online, but there would be site visits.

Dave asked the group what our reasons were for undertaking a neighbourhood plan. A member explained how Sandy is constrained by its geography and the need to protect certain areas, such as Sandye Place. Residents would not wish to see it built over. Dave explained that Urban Vision are specialists in place making and could definitely help with this.

b) Neil Homer

Neil Homer introduced himself and told members about his company – O'Neill Homer. There are five members of the team who are based in Oxfordshire. Their background is

design. They have worked with 51 different planning authorities from Norfolk to Dorset. They have worked with Eaton Bray within Central Bedfordshire jurisdiction. They have worked with 18 towns our size or larger. 80 plans have been made, 20 plans are at examination or referendum stage. They have 20 live projects.

Neil explained that groups need to know what to do next, so they don't waste their time doing things they don't need to do. O'Neil Homer use templates to create their plans, to keep things simple and expenses down, but the templates can be refined to make it locally relevant. There is lots of flexibility to make the plan look and feel the way you would like it to. The important thing is for the plan to be able to be applied to planning applications, therefore it needs to be written in such a way so local authority planning officers can understand and implement it. A plan should be simple, not too long or too novel.

Neil explained that you need professionals behind the group in case of any issues with the local authority. A member asked if he had experienced lots of issues like that. Neil replied that he would like to say no but couldn't. Local authorities are under pressure from central government. In his experience he has come across two local authorities that support neighbourhood plans.

O'Neill Homer charge a fixed fee for a fixed scope, changes to this are only made in agreement with the group as they are conscious of the cost. They help monitor the project with a simple spreadsheet.

They undertake a scoping session early on in the process as 80% of what will go in the plan, the working group are already aware of.

They will work with us up till submission of the plan, as then the plan is the hands of the local authority.

A member noted that Sandy had not been allocated any housing in the local plan, but housing is not the only important thing within a neighbourhood plan. Neil replied that it's unusual, but he had done his homework and Sandy appears to be similar to Chesham, whose plan they worked on. While there is no pressure for development you wouldn't wish to see poor quality infill housing. There is also scope for other policy making including green infrastructure and sustainable travel. Traffic and transport issues are highway issues but can be influenced indirectly by the neighbourhood plan.

Another member mentioned the Sandye Place concerns. Neil asked some questions about the site but said a hot topic subject would get people involved. In a town of our size community engagement can be problematic without a hot topic issue.

c) Sally Chapman

Sally introduced herself, she works alone as Chapman planning. She used to work as lead planning officer of neighbourhood plans at Central Bedfordshire Council when neighbourhood plans were first introduced. She first helped to create the neighbourhood plan for her village. She has visited Sandy before and is very familiar with the local area. She has worked on 28 plans in total.

Sally had provided a process diagram to demonstrate the neighbourhood plan process. She said that engagement and evidence base are straightforward, but the middle section of identifying issues and drafting policies to create the plan can be where groups get stuck.

She always starts the process with a workshop with the group to figure out what policies are needed.

A neighbourhood plan should have the appeal of a brochure, with lots of pictures. The plan has three audiences: developers, planning examiners and officers and the people who will vote on it. Sally will help order the plan, making sure the important issues are covered first, as not everyone will read the whole plan, headlines are needed to help them find the bits important to them.

Sally will help create the plan and write the policies, make sure it flows, she can advise on community engagement and techniques and has a checklist to make sure everything has been covered before submission.

A member asked if she could help with every aspect of writing a plan. Sally replied that she has no experience with housing design but can get help in this area.

Another member asked if she had had experience in a town with similar constraints to ours. Sally responded that Englefield Green is constrained by its monuments and nearby Windsor Great Park which made it hard to create town centre policies. In relation to the issues at Sandye Place, Ickleford has a similar situation, their NP group are working with Aecom to draw up a master plan for what that site could look like. The plan is not in the public domain yet.

A member noted that a previous application for the north of the town had been refused by CBC, Sally said that should be referenced in the plan.

Another member noted the uncertainty of the EWR rail and how that could potentially impact on the future of Sandy train station. Sally replied that national issues are the hardest things to put into a NP but they need to be acknowledged.

Joanna thanked each consultant in turn for attending and giving us food for thought.

The group discussed the consultants in general terms – each had pros and cons. Timelines are tight and we need to apply as soon as possible to make the most of the consultant before next March.

It was agreed to hold a Zoom meeting at 8.30pm on 8 June to make a decision.

3. Jubilee and Carnival arrangements

The Jubilee concert will be held on Thursday 2 June at Sandye Place. The steering group can have space within the Council welcome gazebo.

Ruth will provide a map of Sandye Place as a visual. We will have some get involved posters. Then we will have a poster that asks, 'Your View on Sandye Place', with a list of suggestions and two columns – I would like and I would hate that people can put stickers against. The following were suggested: care home, health centre, community hub, youth hub, museum/arts centre, housing, park and recreation, river front café. For other suggestions people can write them on sticky notes and place them on the board. We will also need a chart for demographics.

The carnival will be held on Saturday 11 June where we will have the same display as at the jubilee event. There will be different audiences at each event.

Can all members email Joanna their availability for both events and Joanna will create a rota.

4. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 8 June at 8.30pm Zoom meeting to choose a consultant.

Thursday 16 June at 7pm at Council Chamber, 10 Cambridge Road Sandy.