

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE



My last update in July reported the publication of the results of the **Housing Needs Survey** carried out in April 2016 by South Hams District Council, the completion of the **Parish Questionnaire** in June 2016 and the publication in July 2016 of the **Plymouth and South West Joint Local Plan** consultation document entitled 'Thriving Towns and Villages.'

The completion of the Parish Questionnaire based upon the issues identified at the Community Engagement Meeting held on the 29th September 2015 and evidence gathered over the following seven months was a watershed event in the development of our Neighbourhood Plan. Similarly, the decision by the South Hams District Council to work with its neighbours Plymouth City Council and its long time partner West Devon Borough Council in producing a Joint Local Plan was an equally important development, bearing in mind that our Neighbourhood Plan has to generally conform with the strategic policies in the Joint Local Plan in order to proceed.

Accordingly, the publication of the results of the Questionnaire, seen initially by the Steering Group on the 15th August and presented to the Parish at an open meeting in the Parish Hall on Tuesday 6th September, was an important event and was very well attended. The presentation was made by Tim Beavon of the DR Company, a specialist Devon-based Community Interest Company who produced the Questionnaire and analysed its responses.

Although the presentation, illustrated by a comprehensive series of slides was very professionally done, Tim Beavon himself volunteered that it was difficult in the time available for people to fully absorb and understand the effect of the responses. The **Results Presentation** is therefore now up on the Parish website for you to browse at your leisure. We will also be following up with a number of Focus Groups to discuss the results in more detail and how they will be used to formulate the policies in our Neighbourhood Plan.

Some reminder of the background may perhaps be helpful.

Neighbourhood Plans are evidence-based and their preparation is largely a legal exercise prescribed by Government Regulations. In the final stage of preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, an Independent Examiner will be appointed to examine the draft Plan and test whether it meets a set of basic conditions set out in the legislation before it can proceed to the Parish Referendum.

- The procedure begins with the Notification to the Local Authority of the Plan Area and the Appointment of a Steering Group. The Steering Group is then required to produce a Project Plan setting out the steps in the process and a Community Engagement Strategy indicating how they intend to engage with the people for whom the Plan is being prepared.
- In our case, the Strategy included a publicity campaign using Village Voice and, as soon as it was operational, the Parish website. That publicity material included frequent requests for parishioners to participate and join the Steering Group.
- The Strategy continued with an extensively advertised Public Meeting held on Tuesday 29th September last year which was well attended and where those attending were asked to note under various subject headings the issues which they regarded as being the most important to the life of the Parish.
- The results of that meeting were very carefully analysed to identify the key issues and themes that needed to be examined and for which evidence would need to be obtained. Like all legal exercises, the issues all require a firm evidential base.
- This was followed by some seven months of detailed research with the Steering Group, as reported in the Village Voice, dividing up into four Working Groups and recruiting additional members from across the Parish to assist them.

- These groups conducted interviews with local landowners, businesses and residents in the Parish and ran Well-being Workshops aimed at young families. *Devon Communities Together* gave a Talk to the Parish explaining what a Neighbourhood Plan can and cannot cover, and a Housing Needs Survey was undertaken by the District Council.

Also, at the beginning of this year, Government and Parish Council funding was obtained to enable the Steering Group to commission the DR Company to prepare a Questionnaire based upon the issues and themes identified at the public meeting on the 29th September together with the benefit of the evidence obtained since by the Working Groups. **The DR Company** is an independent organisation with considerable experience in carrying out community surveys. The questions were designed to be entirely open and not subject to any kind of bias and the results were analysed by the DR Company, usually in the form of percentages.

The next stage in the preparation of the Plan is the drafting of the policies as well as the narrative of the Plan, based upon the evidence obtained in the course of the past twelve months and the results of the Questionnaire. This is then followed by the draft Plan being formally consulted upon within the Parish and by consultation bodies, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England, over a six-week period.

However, given the amount of data presented at the Results Presentation and the limited time available to discuss the results in detail, the Steering Group will be holding **Focus Groups** for parishioners to have the opportunity to discuss and comment upon the results and the emerging policies of the Neighbourhood Plan and how they have been arrived at. The first Focus Group will be on the local Economy and will be held on Tuesday 18th October at 7.00pm. The second Focus Group will be on Housing and this will be held on Tuesday 1st November at 7.00pm. Do please try to attend these Focus Group meetings.

As to the **Joint Local Plan (JLP)**, the Steering Group and the Parish Council have submitted a joint response to the JLP consultation document entitled '*Thriving Towns and Villages*' in which we criticised the lack of prominence given to the South Devon and Tamar Valley Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). We also strongly emphasised that Neighbourhood Plans are best placed to deliver housing and employment required to sustain village networks, such as our own, where there are environmental constraints and issues of accessibility, sustainability and land availability. We concluded by saying that since Neighbourhood Plans can only be 'made' (adopted) if they contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, housing targets should be left to the Neighbourhood Plan process in the case of village networks rather than imposed upon them by the local authority.

Another important factor in the development of our Neighbourhood Plan was the publication of the **South Devon AONB Planning Guidance** consultation document, given that the whole of the Parish is within the AONB. This document is an annex to the South Devon AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 and provides detailed guidance on how development can respect and contribute to the special qualities of the AONB whilst complying with the National Planning Policy Framework. The Steering Group has submitted a detailed response in support of this Guidance which, when adopted, will be critically important in informing both the Joint Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies, and the planning decisions subsequently taken in accordance with them.

Finally, in a wider context, there is more Neighbourhood Planning legislation on the way including the Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill that is aimed at strengthening Neighbourhood Planning, and the publication of the revised National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. Changes to the Neighbourhood Planning regime will also come into force on 1st October that will impose tighter deadlines on local authorities to progress Neighbourhood Plans and make their duty to support neighbourhood groups "more transparent". The Steering Group will be keeping an eye on all these developments, so please watch this space!

Tony Goddard (Steering Group Chairman)