

# **UPDATE ON MELKSHAM'S NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW**

**OCTOBER 2022**

This update is to provide information on local consultations and evidence gathering exercises that have taken place over the summer months as part of the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan review.

## **Housing: Assessment and Information to inform approach to housing (together with the Local Plan)**

The steering group undertook a Call for Sites exercise in the Spring, advertising widely locally, with several page adverts in the Melksham News, a social media presence, we also contacted everyone who has ever been in contact in previous consultations or visited an event. In addition, land owners who have their land registered as available with Wiltshire Council have all been contacted. This produced a list of some 90 sites that land owners have put forward to be considered for housing allocation in the next version of the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan. National independent company AECOM are now sifting and assessing the individual sites, with a report to follow in the late Autumn which will then lead to the site allocation work by the Housing Task Group who will be shortlisting sites before engaging with land owners. There will be the opportunity for some informal community engagement on the shortlist of sites. The next version of the Plan will include housing site allocations for small and medium sites, whereas the Local Plan being produced by Wiltshire Council will be allocating large, strategic sites. Running alongside this work, a Housing Needs Assessment has also been undertaken by AECOM for the Neighbourhood Plan area of Melksham Town and Melksham Without; this incorporates the local Housing Needs Survey that was undertaken by ourselves and advertised at the last Area Board meeting in June. This looks at the type and tenure of the housing mix requirements in the area, and is the evidence for housing mix policy in the reviewed Plan; ensuring that future housing meets the needs of local people. Thankyou to the 136 local residents who responded to the Local Housing Needs survey in May and June; we are looking at publishing the results shortly.

## **Protecting Valued Local Green Space**

There is the opportunity through the Plan to give a Local Green Space planning designation to protect spaces that are important to the local community. Thank you to those of you that put forward local green spaces that were important due to their historic significance, their beauty, their recreational value, their richness in wildlife or their tranquillity. This designation can only apply to small, local spaces and not large tracts of land. The volunteer task group is now working through the 50+ sites that the public put forward to ensure that they meet the necessary criteria and eligibility to

produce a shortlist, we will then make contact with the local landowners. You can view the sites put forward on the Neighbourhood Plan website.

## **Green Gaps Designation**

As you may be aware, there has been a recent Appeal Hearing upheld for a site on Semington Road, behind Townsend Farm, for 50 affordable dwellings. One of the things highlighted by the Planning Inspector was the lack of a policy on green gaps, to prevent the coalescence of villages to the town and other villages, and this is being addressed in the review of the Neighbourhood Plan. We are working to secure the appropriate technical support to aid this piece of work, hopefully with AECOM to tie in with other pieces of work, with the aim of consulting the community on this during the assessment period over the next few months.

## **Further Addressing Climate Change**

A separate task group is working on the broad topic of Climate Issues, including analysis of other Neighbourhood Plans that have recently been examined and adopted to see if there are further policies that can be included in the next version of the Plan, as this is a rapidly changing topic. Policy updates have been drafted with background information to be revised next. The group working on this brief are closely aligned with the Town Council's Environment & Climate Working Group.

## **Planning for the future vitality of the town centre**

AECOM have also been appointed to look at the Town Centre Master Plan work, and will be taking a holistic, independent approach at the Town Centre, looking at its Economy and Vitality, its Culture and Distinctiveness, its Connections and Accessibility, the quality of its Public Realm, and its Heritage and Townscape; all set against the pressing agenda of Sustainability and Climate Change. There is also the possibility of some Town Centre Regeneration Site opportunities with vacant sites in the town centre, including those recently vacated as part of the Campus project; they may provide identified/allocated housing to meet local needs. This is a fantastic opportunity for some revised town centre policies in the revised Plan, and for a Master Plan to sit alongside the Neighbourhood Plan as a practical separate stand-alone document. AECOM have been fully briefed by the Neighbourhood Plan team and are working with the Town Council and Wiltshire Council on the publicly owned assets aspects.

## **Protecting our Local Heritage**

Whilst not giving as much protection as the Local Green Spaces, there is still the opportunity to list in the Neighbourhood Plan heritage assets that don't have Listed status but still have an important historical value to the local community. Again, thank you to those of you who responded to this survey. A small group of volunteers is looking at the evidence for these sites, it's a short list but valuable nevertheless,

and the next step is to contact landowners. You can view the list of those sites put forward on the Neighbourhood Plan website.

## **Strengthening locally distinctive Design Policy**

For new housing, and other development, it's not just about where it is, and whether its two or three bedrooms, or rented or for purchase; it's about what it looks like and this is where the Design Codes come in. AECOM have been appointed to do this work, and are looking at what "good design" looks like for the Melksham Plan area and all future planning applications will have to adhere to the Code when the Plan is adopted. From designing out anti-social behaviour, to brick colours, to solar panels, this is all covered in the Design Code. It covers local identity and character, access and movement incorporating the Priority for People work, green and blue infrastructure, sustainability and energy efficiency and the built form. There will be some community engagement on this piece of work as we seek your views.

## **Ensuring that Local Priorities are addressed as the proposed Bypass and Melksham Link Canal projects progress**

The Neighbourhood Plan is all about planning policy, and to be referred and adhered to when planning applications are considered. There are a couple of proposed large infrastructure projects that are in the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan area and there are separate task groups looking into these projects to ensure that the Plan is reviewed in line with the latest updates on these projects. The Plan will have Priority Statements on these projects, but they will be light touch as the Neighbourhood Plan is not the place for decision making on these projects; and therefore cannot have policies relating to them. Volunteer task groups have met with the project teams on these separate projects to review the current statement with them.

## **Who is working on this project?**

The Melksham Neighbourhood Plan is a joint project of Melksham Town and Melksham Without Parish Council but is community led, and the Steering Group and Task Groups are made up from a wide range of volunteers from the community. Planning expertise is provided by Place Studio, who guide us through the process. The group has been successful in obtaining grant funding from the Government to contribute to the costs, and some technical support from AECOM who are also provided by Locality, directly funded by central Government.

## **How do I get involved?**

Information on the progress on the review of the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan can be viewed on the dedicated website <https://www.melkshamneighbourhoodplan.org/> and dedicated facebook page.