



Melksham Neighbourhood Plan

Steering Group Meeting

Wednesday 25th January 2023

Present - Steering Group Members

David Pafford, Chair – MWOP
Councillor P Aves – MTC
Mark Blackham
Councillor G Ellis - MTC
Councillor J Glover – MWOP
John Hamley
Shirley McCarthy
Unitary Councillor Mike Sankey

Present - Task Group Members

Councillor A Baines – MWPC
Mark Harris
Councillor Saffi Rabey – MTC (Present until 7.00 pm)

Planning Consultant

Vaughan Thompson – Place Studios

Public

One member of the public was present on Zoom.

Officers:

Teresa Strange – MWPC, Clerk
Linda Roberts – MTC, Clerk

MTC	Melksham Town Council
MWPC	Melksham Without Parish Council
WC	Wiltshire Council
MTUG	Melksham Transport User Group

1. Welcome & Housekeeping

The Chair, David Pafford welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the housekeeping points.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Chris Holden and Councillor T Price (MTC).

3. Declarations of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

4. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

5. Minutes

It was proposed by Councillor Mike Sankey, seconded by Councillor P Aves and

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2022 having previously been circulated were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, Councillor D Pafford.

6. Approval of the draft Town Centre Master Plan and Consultation Boards

The Planning Consultant, Vaughan Thompson advised that the draft Town Centre Masterplan (TCMP) is currently a working draft TCMP and now open to public comments. It was noted that the draft TCMP needs to be proof read as there were some errors/typos for example Cannon Square should be Canon Square.

Vaughan stated that as it currently a draft document there is a reasonable likelihood that it will change following the public consultation and so it is important that errors are ironed out, at this stage it was just being approved as a draft for consultation.

It was proposed by Councillor J Glover, seconded by Councillor P Aves and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the draft TCMP for consultation.

7. Consultation Boards

Vaughan Thompson stated it was important to hold a stakeholder and public consultation on the draft TCMP as a distinct but particularly important document to accompany Neighbourhood Plan 2. Advising that the consultation event would launch with Stakeholders invited to the first session, then moving onto a public consultation. Once the consultation events had completed there would be a static display in the Campus and the Town Hall. Going on to advise at this stage the Steering Group were approving the content of the consultation boards.

Vaughan Thompson then discussed the plan of the consultation event and how it would be laid out with consultation boards and maps. The Café Area and the party room had good visibility and it was good there are public undertaking other activities. At the entrance to the café area will be a registration and introductory area, welcome desk, copies of questionnaires and somewhere to get grounded in the process.

Inside the party room will be dedicated to the TCMP with information boards and the table will have a large map, where people can be free flowing and given the opportunity to put stickers onto the map with their ideas for the plan.

The static exhibition will obviously not have this activity but there will be signposts and information for the public.

Vaughan added that this was an opportunity to communicate and inform the public on:

- NP1 and NP2
- Consultation topics taking place
- What is coming up in the future
- How to get involved, what the public can do at the event or online (exercise will be mirrored on-line).
- QR codes will take the public directly to the on-line consultation; alternatively there will be a hard copy questionnaire available which mirrors the online questionnaire
- Will advise that housing will be consulted on at a later date

It was reported that the TCMP consultation and contents on the boards had been drawn from the TCMP.

The consultation boards will be A2 in size with the following content.

1st Board is about NP2 and how NP1 was doing a good job in terms of planning for the community area, that it had a short life and the Steering Group were committed to extending the life of NP1 to 2038 so it can continue to inform planning policy for the community area.

2nd Board - What can you do

Answering questions at the event (a "how to" board)

Also covered would be the link to the Green Space Consultation with a prompt for questions and somewhere to direct comments. The Local Green Space Board would be accompanied by the Local Green Space proposed list for people to look at.

There were also boards on Heritage Assets and Housing.

Mark Harris queried 2038 suggesting it should be 2036 however it was explained that the plan will be in line with the Local Plan Review timescale, which has now been delayed.

There will be a board which refers to the commitment to carry out a TCMP in NP1 and advise that the Steering Group had secured substantial resources to bring the TCMP forward.

Another board would make the point about why completing a TCMP is worth undertaking for the future of Melksham's town centre.

Public will be encouraged to think about what they treasure in the town and be encouraged to confirm the town's most important positive qualities and priorities for improvement so they can come to the top of the list for enhancement. The public will be asked to list their top ten priorities and also whether anything has

been missed and whether there is agreement with the proposals, if not to establish why not.

There are priorities for action rooted in TCMP report, and facilitators will discuss the themes for the town centre and how they align themselves to the policy agendas in the NP.

The draft TCMP is full of inspirational images, to give people the idea of what a sustainable high street and walk in the town centre looks like.

Events will be facilitated by members of the steering group and both Clerks. The other side of the room will contain consultation boards which go into more detail; including the regeneration clusters and talks about the future shape and potential uses of those areas. Three boards will discuss in detail the three clusters identified in the draft TCMP.

Those clusters are:

- i) Cluster 1 – Civic and Campus quarter – this asks questions on the future of regeneration sites such as Melksham House, Blue Pool and seeks ideas from the public. Vaughan advised that the Assembly Hall Survey would be useful for the process of looking at scope for improvement of the facility, make it more flexible with better access and facilities.
- ii) Cluster 2 – the old library site, a complex urban cluster containing some private properties

(It was noted that this was wrongly labelled in TCMP as Nat West/HSBC).

The public would be encouraged to come up with suggestions and ideas for the re use of existing buildings or redevelopment.

- iii) Cluster 3 – Avonside, The City and Cooper Tires – edge of town centre but important for the future of the town centre and an important focus for the future. The consultation exercise would be asking the public what they think about the town centre and what principles would best support the town centre, its economy and life to put down some markers for the future.

The last Board would be a 'Thank you' and reminding the public how they can get involved, what happens next, the informal engagement and the formal engagement.

Councillor Mike Sankey suggested that at any consultation it would be useful to have the current SHELAA (Strategic Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment) sites which are coming forward for development stating it is of huge importance and will help put things into context.

Vaughan acknowledged his understanding that housing delivery and sites in NP area are an important issue explaining that this is why the marker was put down stating it was an important issue but not at this juncture. The upcoming consultation event is about the TCMP and it is vital for people who live, work and run the town centre. Stating that to include housing sites for development could become a significant distraction and advised that the information to

discuss in detail is not completed yet as sites are still under assessment by AECOM.

It was questioned whether the Steering Group should have a view on the Cooper Tires Site, which would become a brown field site and what could be done to preserve as many of the existing buildings as possible in any future development. Of particular interest were the canteen, fire station and the main building in the centre of the site.

This was covered in questions about priorities in this area, under the topic of sustainability which talks about preserving heritage assets, mature trees and respect for the existing heritage.

Shirley McCarthy added that it is difficult to say, and we should just think about the SHELAA sites later because the Cooper Tires site has the potential to accommodate a lot of housing; if housing was allocated in the town that would mean using less of the SHELAA sites. This would not change the number of SHELAA sites and whilst AECOM are assessing the sites it is better that we do not distract attention.

It was then suggested that following the call for sites, those sites are being assessed now and whilst the Cooper Tires site is not available it makes no sense to have a plan going to 2038 when we are not in a position to allocate houses to the Cooper Tires site because it is not available.

The Steering Group were advised that the exhibition and consultation next week must remain focused; by bringing housing into it, dilutes the exhibition on the TCMP.

Councillor A Baines reminded the Steering Group that part of the Cooper Tires site which did come forward in the all for sites is being assessed.

Vaughan Thompson reiterated that this consultation was primarily about the TCMP and that it was important to keep town centre business informed about the TCMP's progress. Vaughan advised that there is a marker down about housing. At this stage the NP process is not ready to have a meaningful conversation with the public yet. Adding that the SHELAA sites have gone off to be assessed and we are awaiting the report. Equally the Local Plan is emerging and not yet made.

Vaughan Thompson agreed to prepare a briefing paper for facilitators so people can discuss the proposition for housing growth.

Mark Blackham stated that it is not so much the number of houses but the impact on where any future housing might go and discussions on pedestrianising the town which would prevent people getting from east to west; so the location of housing developments is crucial.

A concept out for discussion in the TCMP is the possibility of pedestrianizing the town centre. So, there is a direct relationship between people who live within the NP area and outside of it and what connects them to Melksham town centre.

7. Approval of the draft Design Codes for public consultation

The Chair, Councillor D Pafford asked whether the Steering Group agreed with the first thrust of the proposed design codes and asked if it could be approved in principle? Adding that the draft Design Code document was at the same stage as the TCMP is in terms of progression of the work, and it is now open to the community to seek their feedback.

It was pointed out that the labelling at Fig 1 text needs to be revised as it was confusing.

AECOM had been requested to beef up vernacular and distinctiveness in the villages. So there is a decision on, what should the design of Melksham look like?

Shirley McCarthy stated she was slightly confused about the draft as it was not clear and did not suggest what types of stone, adding that the blandness of major redevelopment which is what Shirley thought we should be preventing by having an overarching character. The town centre would have a different character to the villages, indeed each village will have differing characters and that needs to be reflected clearly in the document.

The Chair Councillor D Pafford asked for clarity about the information Shirley was seeking.

Shirley advised that it should be drilling down to detail such as developments using natural stone, have overriding characteristics across the villages and the town. Adding that natural stone would be worth prizing if it was affordable.

The Steering Group were reminded that the draft design codes are for consultation. So, there is an opportunity to inform and change the document after comments from the public.

It was suggested that the document was more a style list than style guide.

The Chair Councillor D Pafford advised that the Steering Group needed to approve the draft Design Code document in its draft form.

RESOLVED to approve the draft TCMP for consultation.

8. To approve shortlist of Heritage asset sites for public consultation

It was reported that there is now a short list of heritage asset sites and there is a desire to keep the older buildings and repurpose buildings where possible. The list is divided into a red, amber and green list. With red meaning a no go, green has approval and amber means the Steering Group had not heard back from the land owners.

The Steering Group were advised that during the consultation process further suggestions which may come forward should be accepted. There will be a difference in some cases between what the owner wants and the community values. There will be features in the sites suggested which the community value and this should be documented in the plan. Some of the features will be on the Cooper Tires site. Listed Buildings are protected whereas a listed heritage asset site is not. However when there is a proposal for development near the assets

listed the developer and planning are alerted to the site which has local heritage significance, so it is flagged up for consideration.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the proposed Heritage Asset shortlist.

9. Approval of the Local Green Spaces Designation sites for Public Consultation

It was noted that the list has been drawn up from the community who have put forward local green spaces which they value. Landowners are now asked their permission for inclusion on the list, they are being informed that their site has been nominated and that the list will be out for public consultation.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to approve the Local Green Spaces short list.

10. Approval of the Informal Evidence Base & Town Centre Master Plan Consultation programme and events

The Planning, Process & Agenda Report – produced by Place Studio

The Steering Group were talked through the various advertisements promoting the public consultation and engagement exercise.

It was reported that the Area Board meeting on 8th March would have a Place Shaping Theme and would be more interactive. Elements of the Neighbourhood Plan would be part of a discussion table with the TCMP having a table dedicated to it. It is anticipated that Steering Group members would be facilitators at those tables.

Referring to Place Studio's briefing note the Steering Group were requested to approve the following:

- The Communications and Event programme – produced by Clerks
- To note Communications material produced to date
 - i) Mini newspaper (4 page) for distribution 3rd December onwards
 - ii) Melksham News advert "Save the Date" – issue w/c 16th January
- To agree the town centre stakeholder invite list and agree who would attend, facilitate and present at the stakeholder event, public consultation events, and the Area Board meeting.

Vaughan explained that the emphasis would be on people who have a relationship with the town centre, businesses, service providers, churches and it was important to make sure they get the first opportunity to attend with an appropriate representation of the councils.

It was agreed that the Town Mayor would make a presentation to the stakeholder event which was running on 7 February from 5pm to 8pm

A timetable would be circulated to facilitators once determined.

Vaughan advised that it would be better at the stakeholder event that facilitators remain for the whole 3 hours. The facilitators would be briefed to ensure the same message is given.

The following facilitators were agreed for the Stakeholder Event.

Councillors Ellis, Pafford and Rabey.

Officers from the town council would assist with refreshments. Both Clerks would be facilitators.

It was suggested that there should be a rota of facilitators for the remaining public consultation events. Both Clerks had arranged to attend them all.

The Steering Group noted the indicative costs of the consultation event to be held at the campus consisting of: Room hire, Printing, Banner/Flags, Maps, Printing, Melksham News adverts etc

The hourly rate of the party room was £21.00 an hour.

11. Technical Support for the Green Gaps/Landscape Buffer Work

The Steering Group were advised that technical support had been awarded for the above work. An initial meeting had taken place with AECOM on Friday 20th January with site visits planned for Monday 30th January, with the Clerks facilitating the visits.

RESOLVED: To note Locality Technical Support has been awarded for Green Gaps/Landscape

12. Housing Site Allocation Site Visits

Tuesday 31st January was noted as the day that the Housing Site Allocation Visits would take place by AECOM, with the Clerks facilitating the visits.

13. SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Scoping Report

The Steering Group noted that the SEA was now out for consultation with stakeholders which was due to end on 3 February 2023.

The stakeholders included Heritage England, the Environment Agency, Historic England. The main objective of the work is to have an independent check whether all reasonable alternatives have been looked and that the identified land is the best option.

14. Finance – Approval of future spend and consideration of the quotation for additional work provided by Place Studios, approve Invoices

It was proposed by the Chair Councillor Pafford, seconded by Councillor J Glover D to approve the invoice (6030) of £1,650 for TCMP work undertaken by Place Studios. (The quote had previously been approved).

15. Government Consultation on the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework)

The consultation by Government on the NPPF was noted. The Steering Group were asked to consider whether they wanted to provide a response. The deadline was 2nd March 2023.

It was agreed to discuss at the next Steering Group meeting on 22nd February 2023.

16. Next Meeting of Steering Group

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 22nd February, commencing at 6.30pm at MWOP offices, at the Community Campus.

Meeting closed at 8.21pm.