

ARDINGLY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

DRAFT PRE-SUBMISSION PLAN

Accompanying Note for Steering Group Members, 25 July 2013

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to provide Steering Group members with additional information as part of their consideration of the Draft Pre Submission Neighbourhood Plan document on 30 July 2013.

The document has been drafted in line with the steer of the group in terms of scope of content and choice of policy. I have reviewed and interpreted the evidence base to arrive at a series of draft policies that I believe best fit the key tests of any policy: suitability, achievability and acceptability.

Based on my experience with other neighbourhood plans, I have placed the greatest weight on the test of acceptability, given the need for the Plan to pass the referendum for it to be successful. Of course, for the Plan to reach that stage, it must also be deemed by MSDC to be in general conformity with its own development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We cannot therefore disregard the suitability and achievability of the policies but the assessment of policies on these tests must pragmatically be undertaken in the context of their eventual acceptability to the local community.

For most of the policies in the Plan, there is little or no tension between these tests as they clearly promote good planning principles and will win the support of local people. On the key housing policy (Policy 3) and Local Green Spaces (Policy 6), however, there are less clear choices to be made.

Approach to Housing Supply & Allocation

In my view, for the Plan to achieve the maximum value it should seek to be as specific as it can be about housing policy, i.e. set a total supply target for the plan period and allocate a site(s) to meet that target. This is especially the case, given there now appears to be sufficient time for the Plan to be submitted for examination prior to the two appeal inquiries, for which dates have still not been set and are therefore not likely to happen until late October at the earliest.

Although neither of the appealed applications was supported by the community or by MSDC – and for good reason – both were part of the 2013 SHLAA alongside two other sites (Land East of Ardingly and Middle Lodge). None were favourably assessed in the SHLAA and no other suitable sites have since emerged.

But, the Plan needs to show it has been positively prepared and is in general conformity with the development plan and NPPF. It must therefore include a policy proposing approximately 30 new homes and allocate land for that purpose.

My understanding of previous voting by the Parish Council suggests it is likely that, of the candidates available, the Standgrove Field site would gain more support in the community and therefore pass the referendum. But I expect this support will be contingent on the allocation policy requiring a smaller housing scheme and, at the very least, makes provision for a new natural green space (SANG) on site as part of the scheme (as per Policy 4) and for the affordable homes to be subject to a local lettings policy. The fact that the land is owned by the College, an important and valued local employer and source of income to sustain local shops and services, may also be a factor in the community's preference for this site.

My understanding is that the landowner has informally expressed an interest in this proposition but will make no such commitment until the outcome of both the appeal inquiries is known. I do not believe that the owners of the other two sites have either made an equivalent offer or that they have been given the opportunity to make such an offer.

In my view, the Standgrove site is large enough to make provision, not only for the SANG but also for other community benefits, if its developable area is restricted to 27 dwellings. This may provide an opportunity for the Parish Council to secure land for new allotments and, if no other sites are suitable or available, a replacement scout hut. Whether or not the Steering Group wishes to exert this leverage on this site using the Plan is its decision – I merely state that the Plan may present this timely opportunity.

The evidence base, which is essentially the Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), given all the sites in question lie outside the built up area boundary, does little to distinguish between the sites:

- they are all subject to the same policy criteria in the NPPF and development plan (hence the reasons for refusal were very similar)
- they are all within reasonable proximity of the village centre to the extent that it makes little difference (though Butchers Field scores better in this respect)
- they are all in sensitive AONB landscapes (though part of Land East of Ardingly was assessed as having relatively greater landscape capacity for development but is very difficult to access on its own).

Those LCA character areas that were deemed to have the greatest capacity for development have not been proposed for housing development and, in any event, would raise other policy issues than landscape sensitivity.

In overall terms, the evidence base provides no clear winner. All sites require significant trade offs with other policy objectives and some simply will not be acceptable to the community, no matter what planning gain may be offered.

Local Green Spaces

There are a number of potential candidates for designation, not least because the NPPF criteria are not tightly defined. My initial review of the evidence base suggests four sites in or adjoining the village are worthy of further consideration and I will complete a final site inspection of each of them to advise the Steering Group of my conclusions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, I suggest that the Draft Pre Submission Plan is approved for consultation, subject to:

- the group agreeing which site to select as the allocation in Policy 3;
- the initial Ardingly Site Assessments Report being refreshed to take account of the allocation site selected (and then published alongside the Plan) by containing sufficient analysis to support the proposed allocation; and
- The group agreeing which sites to designate as Local Green Spaces in Policy 6.

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