

# Minutes of the “Droitwich Spa Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group” Meeting held at 10.30am on 18 January 2024 (Meeting Number 7).

Venue - St Richards House Council Chamber

Persons attending – Councillor GR Brookes – Steering Group Chairman. (Designated Elected Member with responsibility for NDP matters - including Communication, Liaison & the Steering Group).

- Dr David Nicholson – Appointed Consultant
- Councillor George Duffy – Leader of the Town Council and Chairman of DSTC Planning Committee
- Mrs Lyn Blewitt – representing Droitwich Spa Civic Society
- Mr Bill Moy
- Mr Paul; Jones
- Mr Michael Howard
- Mr Andy Ford - Urban Designer / Senior Planning Officer (Policy)

Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils

- Katy Prew – Deputy Town Clerk (Community & Amenities)
- Mark Keld – Town Clerk

1. Apologies for absence were noted from Mr John Armstrong, Miss Gemma Ranford (Wychavon District Council) & Mr Mike Meredith (Civic Society),
2. To consider the draft Minutes of the last Meeting of the NDP Steering Group (Meeting Number 6) from 24 August 2023. The draft had been circulated with the Agenda papers. The minutes were accepted and noted for publication on the web page with no amendments raised.
3. General Overview Summary of NDP Community Questionnaire Survey from October 2023- Results Report & Comments Document both collated during December 2023. David confirmed that the survey had achieved a 4% response rate which was within expectations and relative for a population size such as Droitwich Spa. There had been 792 individual responses which provides a sound basis for evidence gathering and is considered to proportionately align for Examiner purposes. The respondent profiles show a typical a pattern for surveys of this kind – with an emphasis on replies from longer term residents, older and retired people. These dynamics are important considerations in preparing draft policies and the draft NDP. The response themes indicate a strong sense of place , Community Spirit and Civic Pride

Five Key themes identified from the feedback are,

- 1) Identity and Spa Town Character – featuring references to the Town Centre , Heritage , Brine Baths history and vision and the former Raven Hotel site and others. These are long standing factors for the Town for which the NDP **will not** provide a solution - but **will enable** various matters to be recognised and reflected positively in the planning framework.
- 2) Housing Growth Impact – Giving the impression that developable land is relatively filled up to the Town Boundary. Concerns are expressed within the survey feedback that the provision of the Town infrastructure is not sufficient to meet the scale of growth. Common themes include – schools, medical and dentistry coverage, roads network, parking and traffic volumes.
- 3) Travel and Transport - Local issues highlighted in the feedback include the Copcut road layout congestion and commuter car parking in the Town Centre. There are thoughtful comments and suggestions on other themes including subways/underpasses, connectivity, pedestrian access from the Railway Station to the Town Centre and cycling routes.

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- 4) Business and Employment – This aspect reflects less prominently in the survey results by way of specific comments. This is considered to be for the reasons that there were only 2 responses to the specific business questionnaire and that primarily the main survey is a residents consultation document. Overall there appears no real planning barriers for business and commerce from the results.
- 5) Environmental Issues - Within this category sustainability comments captured are to use brown field land sites before green field areas and there are various opinions expressed on landscape and local green spaces.

## Summary

Overall the survey results are considered to be rich in content and provide good levels of evidence on many key themes. It is considered that the results are typical for this kind of consultation exercise and that the Town Council, the Steering Group and Droitwich Spa residents have a good understanding of local issues which now need to be categorised in the context of the draft NDP. The feedback is in part predictable and can be gauged by many current planning applications. The land use of the former Raven Hotel site and the consideration for the resurrection of the Towns Brine Baths facility both have strong legacy and longevity as key local themes. The strong sense of place and Civic Pride resonates through many of the responses for the Town Centre area and the Heritage connections.

In general discussion it was agreed to publish the survey results and the comments listings on the Town Council website – uploaded 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024. It was also recommended to arrange a press release and social media posts to draw attention to the survey results and thank residents who had provided their valuable feedback for the evidence gathering questionnaire.

To encourage wider input it was agreed to revisit the Communications strategy at a future Steering Group Meeting. Looking further ahead to the draft plan consultation stage a suggestion was put forward to host a series of local community drop in events to support public engagement and input. A further suggestion was to possibly align these sessions with the DSTC Electoral Wards layout and for Ward Councillors to assist with facilitating and help lead their area events.

David clarified that there were two further formal parts for public consultation remaining – including the Regulation 14 Consultation over six weeks. Input and interest from local Groups, Clubs and Societies will be very helpful for this stage.

4. General overview summary of Design Guidance and Codes Final Report produced working with AECOM dated November 2023. David explained that the Design Codes was a component of the evidence base together with the Housing Needs Assessment. Both of these pieces of work had been produced as part of the Technical Support Packages provided through working with AECOM. The Design Codes sets out guidance at a global level for the Town and within a series of 8 character areas. These are the Town Centre extending south through Lido Park to St Peters and 7 other wider areas. The codes document includes a specific narrative on land use for Union Lane and the Canal Basin areas. These have detailed design suggestions for both sites and it is proposed to include specific policies for the sites in the draft NDP – informed by the AECOM work and the residents questionnaire feedback (Oct 2023).

Paul commented with the suggestion to include historical place names within the draft policies content for the importance of heritage and posterity – examples quoted were Union Alley and Union Warehouse. Lyn added that the Civic Society already has comprehensive views and comments prepared for the Canal Basin and the Netherwich areas which can be made available for inclusion.

5. Update from Wychavon District Council / Place Board – including the evaluation of possible development sites for allocation – and specifically the car parking land use question referred by DSTC on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023. Andy updated that the Local Plan – SWDPR had now been submitted to the Inspector for examination and review stage. For this reason it may not now be possible to add in potential car parking land as a developable sites allocation option. The anticipated target date for adoption of the Local Plan still remains as 2024. To this effect the DSTC NDP would then need to align with the newly adopted revised Local Plan. For timescales other factors prevail including the requirement to gauge and discuss future land use intent

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and potential development release with land owners. For the reason that the NDP is still currently at the pre-drafting stage there is an opportunity to complete a review of car parking by Wychavon District Council. Andy has agreed to take this forward with the WDC Executive and report back.

Andy commented that Central Government- Levelling Up approaches have determined that the new style Local plans will have strategic allocations for development, with Development Management Policies expressed at national level. David summarised that within the WDC Town Centre Prospectus there were six sites detailed with potential for economic town centre development. All six had been looked at but site availability remains the unknown factor at this stage.

## 6. Structure of the Plan ( Draft NDP)

David reaffirmed that an important aim is for the emerging NDP to align with the SWDPR timeline such that the NDP is examined against SWDPR policies when these are adopted. Policies should be aligned to stand together between the NDP and Local Plan. To this effect anticipated timescales for completion of the NDP are currently 18 months to 2 years and this will dovetail well with anticipated continue to be determined by the SWDPR timeline.

The Next stage for the NDP is to consider the setting of draft policies and how these align with the Local Plan. It is important to focus on what the NDP can deliver for land use, for example - adding Community aspirations and comment towards future land use options. Other key factors include

- Defining ongoing strategic projects and coordination in the realm of the Town Council collaborating with other Agencies – for example with WCC Highways over the next decade on local initiatives.
- The adding of local value and detail for draft policies- Not to duplicate wider Local Plan policies but to “stand on” through specific definitions , local enhancements and Community input.
- Ensure the Draft Policies shaping is concise and focused. For example are,
  - Specific and useable terminology – “less is more” approach and tailored for a wide and diverse audience, such as is used for planning appeals preparation.
  - Relevancy – adds local value and focus is tied towards specific developable land opportunities.
  - Consider the “principles of use” – for example Union Lane where there is a requirement for archaeological Investigation given the heritage connections of the site.

Overall the Structure for the NDP content should be categorised in a similar layout to the Autumn 2023 residents questionnaire – to comprise an introduction covering vision and objectives , followed by 5 main sections –

- Housing
- Community Facilities
- Town Centre
- Economic Development
- Environment & Sustainability

Each section will have a set of policies, illustrative material & narrative and defined Community Actions. Many of the infrastructure related points gathered from the recent residents questionnaire feedback will be for the Community Actions – rather than specific draft policy setting. It was commented on that the policy content will help determine Section 106 – Community Infrastructure Levy Spending, but will not set it.

David confirmed that he will provide a more detailed ‘skeleton’ structure of the NDP in advance of the next meeting to assist with further guidance.

Next Steering Group Meeting date was agreed to be Thursday 29 February 2024 at 10.30am in the same venue – St Richards House Council Chamber. Agenda to follow.

Meeting Closed 11.50 am

Mark Keld.  
30.01.2024