

# **Proposed Neighbourhood Plan for Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath**

## **Meeting – Knowle Village Hall**

**19 March 2015**

Andrew Marston from the Knowle Society welcomed everybody to the meeting. Approximately 25 to 30 people were in attendance. He introduced Michael Wellock and Clare Parker from Kirkwells Town Planning Consultancy who delivered a presentation entitled *Neighbourhood Planning – What You Need to Know*. This covered the following areas:

- Neighbourhood planning – why is it different
- The process of getting a plan “made”
- Kirkwells’ top ten tips

Michael and Clare agreed to circulate the slides from their PowerPoint presentation to save those in attendance from having to note down all the key points.

There was a wider discussion around the following areas:

### **Learning from the Experience of other Areas**

It was confirmed that only 60 areas have had a neighbourhood plan adopted (or “made” to use the correct neighbourhood planning terminology). Michael circulated a couple of examples of completed neighbourhood plans to those in attendance.

There was a question as to whether an association of neighbourhood forums existed that might help Knowle and Dorridge with the formation of its body. Michael conceded that there was no such group at present though he is attending an event in Litchfield in the near future where someone is attempting to form such an association. The Department for Communities and Local Government are also probably aware that such a group is needed.

Of the 60 plans that have been completed, virtually all have been submitted by Parish Councils. However in total 1400 groups have been designated as Neighbourhood Plan bodies and these will include a number of newly created neighbourhood forums who could be approached for help. Michael proposed putting Knowle and Dorridge in touch with a group in Woodford near Manchester who are only slightly ahead of this area in the process but have a similar vicinity to create a plan for. A member of the audience flagged up that there were also some examples of established neighbourhood forums in Wolverhampton who could be contacted.

### **Advantages/Disadvantages of Becoming a Parish Council**

In his presentation Michael mentioned there was a potential financial benefit to having a neighbourhood plan related to the community infrastructure levy arising from developments in an area. However this benefit is somewhat irrelevant to the Knowle and Dorridge area as it does not currently have a parish council. He flagged up that there are some instructions on the DCLG website ([www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)) about how to go about becoming a parish council for areas interested in doing this. Nevertheless in his contribution at the end of the meeting Dave Pinwell advised the group not to get carried away with the parish council idea due to the layers of bureaucracy involved.

### **Designation as a Neighbourhood Planning Forum**

It was confirmed that the local authority does not have to accept any proposals put forward by a group to become a neighbourhood forum and there is no appeal against a rejection

except perhaps through a judicial review. However such rejections are extremely rare and Solihull MBC is currently supportive of the process for a Knowle and Dorridge forum so this should not be an issue.

### **Plan Submission**

When the plan is submitted to the local planning authority for approval it will need to be supported by a number of supplementary documents including a consultation statement, basic conditions statement (explaining how the plan meets the basic conditions of the Localism Act) and an environmental report. Those in attendance asked if it would be possible to view examples of these documents ahead of preparing their own.

### **Referendum**

A question was asked about who would be able to vote in the referendum on the plan. It was confirmed that all those residents on the electoral roll within the planning area would be able to vote and potentially others outside the boundaries who might be affected by the plan. This process would be slightly different if a business neighbourhood plan was being created rather than a residential plan.

### **Engagement**

The forum should ensure it engages with the local community about the plan ahead of any formal consultation and referendum. Neighbourhood planning offers a far better opportunity to engage with local residents and groups compared to the strategic planning process undertaken by local authorities for an entire borough. Clare advised that the forum should seek to schedule its engagement events to avoid school holidays or big sporting fixtures so as to encourage good turnout. A record of engagement should also be kept so that details can be included in the consultation statement which is submitted alongside the plan.

### **Language/Authorship of Neighbourhood Plan**

An audience member asked what the difference was between a strategic plan written by the local authority and a neighbourhood plan given that the language of the neighbourhood plans circulated at the meeting seemed to be very similar to that used in council planning documents. Michael stated that whilst neighbourhood plans are owned and written by their forum's steering groups, the final plans are often finessed with the help of consultants to make sure the language used is more in line with official planning terminology. This is because these documents could be referenced in any future planning appeals.

### **Objectives of Neighbourhood Plan**

In putting together a neighbourhood plan, a forum will need to be sure why it is doing so and what it wants to achieve. There is no point in creating a plan simply because the facility to do so is available. There was a comment from the audience that the aim(s) of a Knowle and Dorridge plan were not clear at present. It was therefore suggested that a session could be held with consultants to brainstorm the objectives of the plan.

### **Limitations of Plan**

It was confirmed a neighbourhood plan cannot contradict the current Solihull Local Plan. However amidst this general need for conformity there will still be some room for manoeuvre. There was also a question about whether neighbourhood plans would be affected by any forthcoming change in government. In response it was stressed that this would be unlikely given that the Localism Act largely passed through Parliament without opposition.

### **Types of Neighbourhood Plan**

Michael went through the six types of plan the forum could create. He noted that roughly 60% of plans that had been created were policy plans and 40% were policy and allocation plans (plans used both to implement specific policies and designate sites), although a small number of areas had opted to be mini 'local' plans (imitating local authority strategic plans). It was suggested that fewer areas had chosen to pursue allocation plans than simple policy plans because designating sites involved granting money to landowners and this process required much stronger arrangements being in place to ensure transparency and accountability.

There was a question about whether a forum could decide to change a neighbourhood plan from one type to another during the planning process. The answer was yes but not after the plan had been adopted (“made”). Once “made” the plan will last for the duration of the Solihull Local Plan and only the Council will be able to make changes to the plan.

### **Issues for the Forum**

There was a query about whether the Forum could genuinely claim to represent local residents if Solihull Council had the power to change or override the neighbourhood plan after its adoption. In response it was confirmed that such occurrences would only happen if the Borough wide Local Plan itself was amended or other exceptional circumstances.

It was proposed that the neighbourhood forum could continue to exist after plan is “made” to monitor how it is being implemented and to suggest any amendments to the Council.

Michael stressed that there was no ideal structure for a neighbourhood forum. Although the forum officially needs to be 21 strong, only a key group of individuals have to attend every meeting. Michael linked identifying the key forum members to pinpointing what the key tasks are and what skills particular individuals could bring to the neighbourhood planning process. Michael was also keen that the forum should make use of those individuals who only attend meetings on a sporadic basis (‘toe dippers’) as they may still be able to make a valuable contribution. He also encouraged the Forum to seek out those who do not like attending meetings but may be able to contribute to tasks in other ways.

There was a question about what the relationship between the Forum and local councillors should be. In response it was noted that the national advice is that neighbourhood forums should consist of residents, business and councillors but this is not mandatory. However it was suggested that Knowle and Dorridge councillors should be approached to join the forum or to attend meetings where they can.

### **Project Planning**

It was stressed that the forum would need both a project plan to work from and a project manager to oversee this as well as a designated individual to be the key point of contact for any communications with consultants.

There was a question about how the forum would get to the point where it knew what the key tasks were and thus could set these down in a project plan. In response it was re-emphasised that the forum will first need to identify its aims and objectives and then break these down further into a project plan. The project plan could be set up on Excel or some specialist software and could be amended as required as the process goes on.

### **Working with Key Organisations**

Michael stressed the need for a forum to work effectively with key bodies and individuals including the Council, neighbouring areas, local experts and local organisations. Andrew confirmed that local businesses had been invited to attend tonight’s meeting but he had only received one response from a solicitor who confirmed that she wanted to be involved in the process but could not attend the meeting.

Michael also urged potential forum members not to be afraid of making full use of the skills and expertise of any consultants who have been enlisted.

The types of consultants that the forum would need to employ would be dependent on the issues being pursued in the neighbourhood plan. However there are common themes emerging in the neighbourhood planning process at the moment including strategic environment assessments, transport and landscaping so consultants may need to be found in these areas.

National support is available from Locality, a network of community led organisations, who can offer both technical and financial support in setting up a forum. The financial support could potentially be as much as £14,000.

### **Costs**

There were questions about managing the financial aspects of the Neighbourhood Plan in terms of how much the Forum would have to pay for consultants and other costs and who would fund this if Locality were unable to pay for everything.

Michael confirmed that (out of the nine stages described in Kirkwells' presentation) any expenditure would be completed after the first four stages of the planning process.

Kirkwells' consultancy costs in supporting a neighbourhood planning bodies range from £6,500 to £18,000 depending on the remit and elements included in a neighbourhood plan. However the average cost so far has been £7,000-8,000.

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Following the end of the presentation Andrew asked if those in attendance were still interested in joining the proposed Forum. There was some agreement.

### **Constitution**

Dave Pinwell, Chief Executive of the Colebridge Trust spoke about the support that Sustain (an operating arm of the Trust) could provide in terms of helping to set up a neighbourhood forum and advising on governance issues. He stressed that those who had volunteered to join the Forum should really think about whether they want the new body to become a legal entity. This is something Dave would advocate due to the risks around personal and financial liability issues should problems arise. He therefore suggested that the Forum should consider becoming a company. Sustain can support this process at a cost of approximately £20.

Dave drew attention to a range of example constitutions for neighbourhood forums which he had brought with him to the meeting. These constitutions largely all consist of a core committee and working groups that report back to the core group. A minority of forums encourage wider membership and actively recruit organisations, residents and businesses that they seek to report back to through mechanisms such as a newsletter. The Knowle and Dorridge Forum will need to consider what kind of approach it wants and whether it would like Dave's help in creating the body's constitution.

### **Next Steps**

Andrew and Martin Lambert of the DDRA are now ready to pass on responsibility for setting up the neighbourhood plan to those individuals who have agreed to join the Forum. It was therefore agreed that those who had volunteered would attend a meeting on 16 April at 7pm, probably in Knowle or Dorridge Village Hall where the leadership and core committee of the Forum can be discussed and agreed. Dave Pinwell was also invited to attend to offer further advice on the constitution of the group. Email contact details for everyone will be available when the minutes of this meeting are circulated.