

Edlesborough Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Vision Workshop Paper

March 2016

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to capture the outcome of the revised Edlesborough Parish Neighbourhood Plan (EPNP) visioning workshop held with the Steering Group on 22 February 2016 and to make recommendations for its consideration. The recommendations relate to:

- The key objectives and land use planning policy scope of EPNP
- The potential value of informal community engagement activities prior to the Pre Submission version of EPNP being completed
- The project plan through to the submission of EPNP

The recommendations reflect not just the outcome of the workshop but also our insights into the national and local planning policy context of EPNP. Specifically, it must meet a series of 'basic conditions' relating to its general conformity with that policy context. The examination of EPNP in due course will focus on how those conditions have been met, before it goes to referendum.

Background

The parish lies on the eastern edge of Aylesbury Vale district and has a population of 2600 and the number of homes 1100 (data from John Wilkinson) in three villages: Edlesborough (a 'larger village'), Northall and Dagnall ('smaller villages'). The village of Edlesborough adjoins the village of Eaton Bray to its immediate east on the opposite side of the River Ouzel and in the county of Bedfordshire (and administrative area of Central Bedfordshire Council). It lies just off the A4146 and has grown considerably since the 1970s. It has a primary school, a GP surgery, village hall, a church, sports facilities and a small number of local shops and businesses. Along with Eaton Bray, it therefore serves a number of the small villages and hamlets in the wider area, although the much larger towns of Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard are within a few miles of the parish.

Northall lies a short distance to the North of Edlesborough, straddling the A4146 Leighton Road between Leighton Buzzard to the north and Hemel Hempstead to the south. The village has seen some incremental housing development over a number of years but remains small, with the village hall, village green, children's play area, Northall Baptist Chapel. and Swan PH as community facilities.

Dagnall lies further to the south at the junction of the B4506 and the A4146, which acts as the main spine road through the parish. It lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt at Chilterns AONB, designations which cover almost the southern half of the parish up to the B489 Ivinghoe to Dunstable road. It has therefore seen very little

development in recent years but has a small primary school (for KS1 pupils), a church, a village hall, a farm shop and the Red Lion PH.

In overall terms, the parish is a relatively remote from towns in the county of Buckinghamshire but close to Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable and remote from the strategic road network. Although it lies in the southern half of the district, and may be under more pressure in the future to help meet the unmet housing needs of neighbouring districts like Chiltern, its remoteness and the Green Belt status of Dagnall makes it very unlikely it will be seen as a sustainable location for anything more than meeting modest rural housing needs to 2033.

At present, these needs are translated by the Vale of Aylesbury Plan (VALP) Issues & Options paper of October 2015 into 'larger villages' needing to find 100-120 new homes in the period 2013 – 2033 and 'smaller villages' 20-24 new homes. The Draft VALP will be published in summer 2016 so the likelihood or otherwise of those proposals remaining valid for the EPNP to respond to, will be known then. In the meantime, they provide a starting point for each village to consider if and how it may respond. The VALP is unlikely to make any other strategic policy demands of the parish in respect of meeting employment or other needs.

In which case, for the most part, if the EPNP takes a positive approach to policy making – in effect to be a little more permissive of development than may currently be the case - the community may be able to exert some strong leverage to secure some corresponding public benefits.

The Edlesborough Parish Council (EPC) has chosen to prepare a neighbourhood plan in order to provide a greater degree of management of future development decisions in the parish. It has delegated day-to-day responsibility for the project to a Steering Group of councillors and local people from across all three villages.

Workshop Observations

The following are observations made during the course of the session, which was divided into three parts to consider each village in turn:

Northall

- A village of approx.XX homes
- the community appears to have accepted the small housing schemes that happen every few years to either modestly extend or infill the existing 'ribbon' development along the A4146
- the EPNP may therefore look to identifying additional small sites to 2033 for similar housing schemes of < 5 homes
- the village has seen no affordable housing in recent years as no housing scheme has been above the size threshold (15+ homes) at which there is such a requirement, but the 2011 Community Survey showed that the community did not want any affordable housing
- there may be local interest in new homes suiting 'downsizer' households in the village or parish but this has to be tested
- the designated village green opposite the Baptist Church is enjoyed by the community, as is the allotments, which could be extended, if demand increases in the future

- the village hall and the Swan PH are the main social facilities in the village and are successful so should be protected from loss
- the former chicken farm on South End Lane has been closed for many years and applications for housing development have been refused in the past – is there a viable housing or mixed-use scheme that would be appropriate in this location, which lies beyond the main village area but is close to other sporadic development along the Lane?
- Connecting the village to the main community facilities in Edlesborough via improved footpaths and cycleways would be welcomed if achievable
- Acknowledged that accessing the A4146 from driveways or connecting lanes will always be difficult with traffic volume and speeds

Dagnall

- A village of approx. XX homes
- Although small the village does benefit from some facilities including a play area, recreation ground and is a nice place to live – the community would not want to see a change to the Green Belt status
- The main roads are perceived as difficult barriers to walking around the village and any new EPNP development proposals must have proposals to overcome this problem – BCC has been reluctant to manage traffic in the village in the past
- The village hall is in poor condition – if there is an opportunity to fund improvements from development or even to relocate the facility to another suitable site then this might be supported
- There may be some limited opportunities for infill development but these will be small; there is also the site behind the parish church that fronts on to the A4146 – this may be big enough for new homes and a new small village store to service the village and passing traffic? Might this be enough to justify the 'exceptional circumstance' for development in the Green Belt? Would it undermine its essential open character?
- The school, two farm shops and pub are all valued community facilities and should be protected from a change of use
- There was a Rural Exception Site initiative of EPC some years ago but no land could be secured – there may be local interest in self-build and affordable for local people if land could be secured for those specific purposes - the Village Hall Trust owns the village hall and recreation ground land and may be interested in such ideas
- A planning application has recently been made for the redevelopment of a small motor repairs yard for 3 homes – the proposal seems generally supported by the local community though EPC is concerned about the homes being large detached and not of a high enough standard of design for the location
- There is concern that the school may not have a long term future – the majority of children at the school are from outside the village as there is not the scale and type of family housing in the village to support the school alone – but the community would be keen to see the facility protected from loss and the land remain in community use if the school did close
- Connecting the village to the main community facilities in Edlesborough via improved footpaths and cycleways would be welcomed if achievable

Edlesborough

- The main village in the parish of approx.XX homes.
- The village is very busy which is a good thing in terms of maintaining its vibrancy as an enjoyable place to live, but some are concerned that its public infrastructure is at or reaching a stresspoint
- The school, the surgery and The Green recreation, sports and allotment facilities are very popular and serve not just the village but the surrounding area – they need protecting at the very least and probably land to expand and/or for new facilities in other parts of the village to alleviate the growing pressure
- The large Green is regarded by the population as a 'jewel in the crown'.
- The local roads are very busy with commuters, the school run and users of The Green, the surgery and the localshops
- The local shops are a real asset for the village and the community will be very keen to protect these uses in the village centre and to resist proposals for shops outside the village (or Eaton Bray) that may undermine them
- The two main business areas – Sparrow Hall Farm and the Tithe Barn – provide local employment, though both attract the majority of employees from outside the local area and there is a normal turnover of business occupants
- There are three buildings consecrated for worship viz. the redundant CofE church on the hill, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Chapel.
- As with the other villages, there is concern with surface water flooding and the limitations of the local sewage network to accommodate the existing village needs, let alone another 100+ houses
- EPC has begun to prepare plans for a new pavilion on The Green to expand the sports and ancillary services it is able to offer to meet the increasing demand
- Although the village does have affordable housing delivered by past housing schemes it would benefit from more if it were to be able to be secured for local people
- Again, there is interest in securing housing suited to older households (smaller houses and perhaps independent living accommodation) and perhaps in local self-build schemes but this demand would have to be tested
- More generally, there needs to be more 2/3 bedroom housing to maintain a balance in the local housing stock and avoid too many 4/5 bedroom houses
- The village doesn't have a pub but the new sports pavilion may provide a licensed room as part of its upgrade – it is very unlikely that land or a developer could be found for a new pub
- In funding land for new housing development it will be important that it is close to the village centre to encourage walking trips and that it avoids extending existing cul-de-sacs or other narrow roads that were not built for such use
- There is no clear cut preference yet for whether or not the community would prefer one or two larger housing schemes (that would deliver affordable homes)
- Opportunities should be found to address the lack of additional capacity for on-street car parking – new schemes should not make this any worse and land should be found to create new off-street spaces

Suggested EPNP Vision

This vision is a suggested response to the above observations – note they do not include all of the potential ideas observed above but should be seen as ‘work in progress’ as the EPNP evolves:

“Edlesborough will have grown to remain a busy and vibrant village with a wide range of services and facilities to serve its own community and surrounding villages. Its growth will have been well contained to ensure that new homes have fitted in with the existing fabric and life of the village. It will also have enabled the community to invest in improving its school, recreation ground and other local facilities and the footpaths and cycleways that connect it to some of its closest villages. Its village centre continues to meet local shopping needs. Although its roads and lanes remain very busy, [new land has been found for car park] this statement was challenged by the Edlesborough member of the team as being unnecessary and undesirable.” Walking should be encouraged with the provision of pedestrian crossings together with additional traffic calming measures. The design standards of new buildings have improved to reflect the rural character of the village.

Northall remains a small community benefiting from a small number of facilities supported by the facilities of Eaton Bray. It has grown a little but has retained its ribbon development character. Its new homes have included a selection of self-build and downsizer homes to meet local needs. Investment has been made to improve the footpath and cycleway to Edlesborough to enable safer leisure and school journeys without needing the car.

Dagnall remains a small Green Belt community but has found acceptable ways of meeting some local housing needs by some small, sensitively designed housing schemes for downsizers and self-builders. Its precious community facilities have survived and prospered as the main roads have new pedestrian crossings, so they are not seen as the barriers to safe journeys they once were. Connectivity with Edlesborough has improved with the provision of footpath and cycleway access”.

Suggested EPNP Key Objectives

These key objectives are a suggested response to the above vision:

Northall

- To manage the incremental growth of the village through sensitive infill and to protect the surrounding countryside from harmful development
- To protect essential facilities in the village to serve the local community
- To improve the walking and cycling connections of the village with Edlesborough
- To realise a beneficial reuse of the South End Lane agricultural land

• Dagnall

- To maintain the special landscape beauty of the AONB character of the village
- to protect the Green Belt from development that would harm its essential open character

- to protect and improve the essential facilities in the village to serve the local community
- to identify opportunities for small scale, infill housing development to meet local needs

Edlesborough

- to plan for development that minimises the stress on local roads and public services infrastructure
- to protect and improve the essential facilities in the village to serve the local community
- to maintain the vitality and viability of the local shops in the village commercial centre
- to secure a wider range of types and tenures of new homes, especially for downsizers and key workers
- to reserve space for the expansion of the surgery and surgery car park
- to reserve parking spaces next to the shops for disabled drivers only

Suggested EPNP Policy Ideas

These policy ideas are a response to the above observations, vision and key objectives:

- a policy that establishes a settlement boundary to provide for and contain the growth of Edlesborough and Northall (Dagnall is 'washed over' by the Green Belt and therefore can't have such a boundary unless AVDC proposes otherwise)
- policy(s) that allocate, reserve or safeguard for the longer term specific sites for one or more uses, including their key development principles
- a policy that defines Edlesborough village centre to protect its shops from change of use
- a policy defining a network of green infrastructure assets within and around the edge of the village, including the improvement/creation of footpaths/cycleways and the designation of Local Green Spaces
- a policy that proposes the emphasis of new housing types and tenures in each village to achieve a balanced housingstock
- Policies for managing detailed design in each of the villages
- a policy establishing a car parking standard for new developments
- a policy that identifies key views and landmark buildings for protection
- a policy defining existing community facilities for protection and supporting their continued viability through appropriate improvements and extensions

As a general comment it was agreed that a clear and concise definition of 'infill' is required.

Recommended Action Plan

On the basis of the above policy ideas, the following actions are recommended:

Community Facilities

- Identify all those facilities (buildings and any operational land) that justify protection from unnecessary loss and/or may have the potential/need to expand to serve the local community and/or to remain viable facilities
- Identify any facilities that require potential relocation to grow their size (and where they should go and what use their existing sites should be put to) as well as any surplus land that could be put to better use (inc. any Parish Council, public or charitable trust land) – RCOH may assist
- examine the extent to which housing development may create value and/or enable the release of land for the development/extension of these facilities – RCOH may assist
- for Edlesborough, identify the retail and other village centre uses on a plan and draw a boundary around the village centre to distinguish it from the surrounding area (for the purpose of consolidating these uses in this area and by definition, no where else in the village)
- Summarise all work in a short report with summary analysis, site proposals and plans

Green Infrastructure

- Identify all existing open space, footpath and cycleway assets/corridors/routes in the villages and the wider parish
- Identify opportunities to improve the quality and connectivity of these assets etc, especially where they coincide with potential site allocations
- Identify candidate sites for Local Green Spaces using NPPF para 77 criteria
- Summarise all work in a short report with summary analysis, proposals and plans

Design

- describe the distinctive characteristics of the villages (or of different parts of Edlesborough as it has different areas) to provide simple design guidance, e.g. plot sizes, plot orientation, building forms, materials, boundary treatment, architectural detailing etc - RCOH may assist
- identify key views inside, into and out of the villages worthy of protection from obstruction – RCOH may assist
- identify 'landmark' buildings in the streetscene of each village by way of their prominence at key locations at the centre of, part way along or at the entrance to each village – they need not have any special merit in themselves but future redevelopment would need to be handled carefully – RCOH may assist
- Summarise all work in a short report with summary analysis, proposals and plans

Housing

- review the AVDC HELA for Edlesborough and add any sites that are not in the HELA but may be worthy of consideration (both there and in the other villages that were not included in the HELA)
- assess each site to see how it may contribute to the above objectives – for those that do, assess their housing capacity (and their suitability for particular types of homes – see below) and identify any key development principles that would caveat an allocation policy – RCOH may assist
- in the above for Dagnall, ensure that a case can be made to justify your ideas in the Green Belt (i.e. what public benefit will arise from the idea to provide the 'exceptional circumstances' for development and how will the idea avoid harming the open character of the Green Belt by being able to be defined as 'infill'?)
- for sites that may be preferred but are not in the HELA contact the land owner to confirm the land may be made available for allocation in the EPNP and to allow them the opportunity to consider your assessment and key development principles (in writing or by meeting) – you may start with a long list of sites but then reduce them to a short list if there are too many or some are non-starters
- review (and update if necessary and possible) the housing stock data (i.e. number of homes of each type and tenure in each village) and compare to the most up-to-date demographic profile (use the latest AVDC SHMA report), then analyse if there is likely to be a future mismatch between local supply and demand
- review self-build demand data sources (via AVDC Planning) and the current supply of 'independent living'/'extra care' homes in the area (speak to AVDC Housing), then assess if there is local demand that the EPNP can provide for
- Summarise all work in a short report with summary analysis, proposals and plans

Edlesborough Parking & Traffic

- Quantify the existing numbers of on-street and public off-street spaces by road/street and compare to the number of households in each road/street
- Use the data to identify the specific roads/streets with deficiencies of spaces
- Identify the potential sites for new off street parking and estimate their potential and availability (plus any likely dependencies, e.g. the land may only be made available if as part of a housing allocation)
- Summarise all work in a short report with key data sets, analysis and plans

Additional Actions covered.

Village Groups

It was agreed to establish Village Groups to cover the development of Policy Ideas and the elements in the Recommended Action Plan

Group meetings will be set up asap initially to put 'more meat on the bone' for the questions and actions arising. The Groups will then consider sub-dividing the tasks and bringing more residents into the groups and/or sub-groups.

Group Leaders

It was recommended and agreed that the Group Leadership role would be performed by the Ward Councillors
viz.

Dagnall – Trish Owen
Edlesborough- John Wilkinson
Northall- Kevin Cabbage

Other Meetings

Set up meeting with AVDC and EPC councillors (core team) and NH? - Action Alan Williams

Set up meeting with Eaton Bray Parish Council - Action Alan Williams

Timetable

Above tasks to be completed end March/Early April

Additional tasks as follows

Mid-April

Next SG meeting to include feedback from Village Groups

Village Group meetings continue

Early to Mid May

Next SG meeting. More input from Village Groups

End May -Early June

SG & Village Groups prepare visual displays and handouts for public meetings

Mid June to Mid July

Two public meetings in each village to contain Village specifics and Parish overview

Mid-Jul

SG review and synthesise summary of feedback from public meetings

End July

Pre-Sub to SG from rCOH

Meeting closed at 9.20pm