

SUMMARY OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN STEERING GROUP for
ALMELEY PARISH COUNCIL
HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL ON 7th September 2016

The meeting was attended by five members of the Steering Group. Five members of the public were also present.

A meeting had been held with the Herefordshire Council Grant Support Officer to work out what actions were needed to access the new round of grant funding. We were told that all previous unspent grant money should have been returned last year but there are a few anomalies with old receipts to sort out before this can be done. Although we have registered for the new round of grant funding, we will not receive any money until the past grants have been fully accounted for and the unspent amount returned. In another meeting with the NDP Team Leader we were told that due to historic lack of feedback both to the HC and to the grant providers, we are now under close scrutiny and are being overseen directly by the Team Leader.

One condition of the new grant is that we use a registered planning expert in the process of producing the Almeley Parish NDP. We consulted with other groups who had produced NDPs and have selected Data Orchard to support us through the process as they showed the greatest understanding of this area and the workings of Herefordshire Council. We are now using the expertise of Bill Bloxsome of Data Orchard to produce a first draft of the planning policy document using the report produced by the previous group as a basis. Later in the autumn there will be a public event to reflect and comment on the first stage of his work.

Herefordshire Council have informed us that they have set a figure for Almeley Parish of a minimum of 33 houses to be added to the parish between 2011 and 2031. They have stipulated that all new housing development should be in or adjacent to the settlements of Almeley and Woonton, as specified in the Herefordshire Core Strategy document. However, there are many exceptions to this including barn conversions and the use of historic farmsteads. To date, there have been around 14 dwellings approved or built and there is a current planning application for six dwellings in the system.

The map produced by the previous group showed potential small development sites all across the parish, mainly in the most rural areas but because this does not meet the criteria set by Herefordshire Council, we have to put out a new land finder appeal to the parish. A land assessment form will be made available to everyone in the parish. Landowners whose land is mentioned in the HC Forward Planning Team map showing potential sites they had assessed around Almeley will be written to individually. The suitability of any proposed sites will be assessed by our planning expert using a set of criteria.

It is recognised that Herefordshire Council is a large landowner in the parish and that in selling off farms, many of the tenant farmers have an uncertain future. We know that Clive Skelton as our District Council member is seeking a solution for tenant farmers. As this is a matter of urgency it can't wait until the NDP has been through the various processes prior to validation so Bill Bloxsome, alongside his work in the NDP, is investigating the potential of any developments that might support the tenant farmers.

Members of the public present at the meeting made the following comments:

- A member of the public expressed concern about the value of an NDP since a Herefordshire parish council had recently ignored their own NDP in approving a development but he did accept that this was their Parish Council's decision making process rather than their NDP that was the issue.
- A tenant farmer spoke up to express his sadness about their situation and that not much seemed to be happening to help them. He recognised that from what he had heard in the meeting, something was being done both by Clive and the NDP group. It was suggested that he notify the PC clerk of his concerns.
- A member of the public sought to clarify three points: there would be no compulsory purchase orders, sites may be developed under permitted development rights and there is scope for considering pieces of land outside the HC forward planning map.

The next meeting of the NDP Working Group will be held in the Village Hall on 2nd November 2016.(tbc)