

WHY THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN MATTERS TO US ALL

AND

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO RESPOND TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

Public comment is very valuable **in identifying issues and refining the policies, and a high response rate also helps give the policies more weight.** In 2015 over 25% of households responded to one or both of the two earlier consultations and this was important in influencing inspectors and CBC planners.

The Localism Act 2011 gives local communities the right to create a **Neighbourhood Plan (NP)** to guide the vision, objectives, development and planning policy for their area. The aim is to achieve **sustainable development**, which means providing new homes and amenities whilst also protecting the local environment and vital open spaces, recreation, employment, schools, shops, healthcare and public transport, and avoiding severe traffic congestion and pollution. Many communities in England already have NPs adopted. In Leckhampton and Warden Hill we started work on our Neighbourhood Plan in 2012 and published a **NP Concept in 2013** jointly with Shurdington Parish Council.

HUGE IMPACT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The 2013 NP Concept and further work including **two public consultations in 2015** proved hugely important:

- In 2016 the draft Gloucester-Cheltenham-Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (JCS) was proposing to build around 1200 homes on the Leckhampton Fields. Thanks to the evidence from the neighbourhood planning the JCS Examiner rejected this proposal as **unsound because of unacceptable landscape damage.**
- The JCS Examiner also supported the **Local Green Space (LGS)** proposed in the NP Concept. In 2019 this LGS was formally designated in the Cheltenham Plan, permanently protecting the main areas of the Leckhampton Fields for their great value to local people.
- In 2016, the Secretary of State identified the Leckhampton Fields as **valued landscape** that must be protected both for its intrinsic landscape quality and its importance to the view from the Leckhampton Hill (a nationally significant viewpoint, one of only 28 tourist viewpoints in the whole of England identified in the AA road atlas).
- The Secretary of State also concluded that the scale of new housing proposed in the draft JCS would cause unacceptable **severe cumulative traffic congestion** particularly on the A46 and Church Road. This finding was based partly on the traffic surveys and analysis in the NP Concept.

COMPLETING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Neighbourhood Plan has had to wait for the adoption of the new Cheltenham Local Plan in 2019 and for decisions on the new secondary school. Progress has also been delayed by the Covid-19 lock-downs. The draft Plan was approved by the Parish Council in January 2021 and **its policies already count as emerging policy in influencing planning decisions.** The final steps now are:

- Public consultation on strategy, objectives and policies – Sep/Oct 2021
- Refining the Plan in response to the consultation
- Submission of the final draft for examination by an appointed planning inspector
- Updating the final Plan based on the inspector's findings
- Local referendum and adoption if approved in the referendum.

WHY THE PLAN'S POLICIES ARE SO IMPORTANT

Experience shows that Valued Landscape and Local Green Space are not enough by themselves to provide sufficient protection without more detailed policies. Gloucestershire County Council in its application for the new secondary school completely ignored the valued landscape, and developers over the past five years have damaged the landscape by cutting down trees and hedgerows that were required for screening and by erecting tall fences to urbanise the landscape. The rural character in Lotts Meadow is now at risk from proposed housing on the adjacent nurseries site being too high and visible. The Miller Homes application for 350 houses on the Leckhampton Fields actually proposes to build on part of the valued landscape and would also severely damage the character of the smallholding footpath.