

Notes from the initial meeting of the Firbeck Neighbourhood Plan held on 20th March 2024 at Firbeck Village Hall, New Road Firbeck

Present: Parish Council Chair, Cllr Caroline Jopling, Neighbourhood Plan Advisor
Andrew Towlerton
35 Parishioners

Introduction

The Chair began by stating the purpose of the meeting was to establish whether or not the village wanted a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). She identified what a NP was, what kinds of things it could achieve and what the next steps could be.

The Chair outlined the steps taken so far:

1. Permission had been received from RMBC for Firbeck to create a NP.
2. Andrew Towlerton (AT) had been appointed as the specialist advisor to develop the plan should that be what the village wished.
3. A grant had been applied for and received for a sum of £1150.00, which would cover most of the advisor's fees.
4. A grant had also been applied for, to receive technical support but no decision had yet been made on this grant.

The Chair categorically stated the NP must be a **village** plan and **not** a parish council plan. As many views/inputs as possible were required, along with volunteers from the village to assist in the plan's development.

A NP has a legal status and could attract further funding once approved, and was something that could prove to be very beneficial to the parish.

Andrew Towlerton, Neighbourhood Plan Advisor

AT introduced himself and provided a short resume of his planning experience and background in development of NPs. He provided more detail on NPs, stating that communities can effectively write their own planning policy provided it was within the existing legislation and was in general conformity with RMBC's adopted Local Plan. Once approved, local authorities must take account of a NP when making planning decisions affecting the NP area. He then provided an overview of how a NP would be developed, a draft plan submitted for consultation, government inspector review before being submitted to the parish for approval (or not) at a referendum. A 'Steering Group' for the parish is essential to develop the NP.

Costs – depends on the parish requirements but basic grants of £10k are available, with a 10% contribution from the parish (c.£11k estimated overall). Technical support packages are also available and RMBC must cover the costs of the referendum. Once approved, the parish council will receive 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy appropriate to the parish rather than 15% without a NP.

Questions from parishioners:

1. What examples are there of what can be done for the natural environment? Lots, an example being non-protected wildlife sites can be identified for future protection.

2. What about historical buildings? A NP can identify locally historic buildings not currently listed for future protection.
3. What if the village did not develop a NP? There would be no detailed plans for the village unless they are covered in RMBC's Local Plan.
4. How enforceable is a NP? A NP must conform with the Local Plan and therefore has the same status. RMBC must be cognisant of the NP in planning decisions, e.g. local desires on housing design.
5. What housing plans are there for Firbeck? No allocation currently for Firbeck.
6. How much is a NP about preservation versus change? That is up to the community to decide what it wants in its NP.
7. Can a NP be 'aspirational', e.g. for 'wildlife corridors'? Yes
8. What about flooding? This can be covered in a NP, e.g. a requirement to include flood defence/protection in designs.
9. Are any changes expected with a possible change in government? Funding is guaranteed for the next year, but not beyond that.
10. Could a NP protect against future expansion/development? A NP gives greater status and protection but it can't be a 100% guarantee.
11. If the referendum returned a 'no' vote, does the process stop fully or start again? It could be either, depending on the reasons.

The Chair finished the meeting by stating she would take the lead to form a Steering Group by whether or not any volunteers came forward. If there were none, or only 'a few', that would be taken as a lack of interest and the process would not proceed any further. Any interested volunteers should register their interest with the Clerk.

The meeting was closed at 7:55pm

Signed

Dated.....