

Warminster Neighbourhood Plan

Approved Minutes - Steering Group Meeting Wednesday 13th November 2024, 2pm Warminster Civic Centre

1. Attendance

Chris Bowden (CB) from LUC, Molly Andrew from LUC, Vaughan Thompson (VT) from Place Studio, Cllr Keeble (chair), Harriet James (HJ), Iain Perkins, Len Turner, Lorraine Dobbins, Sam Hill, Nick Earle, Peter Ruscoe, Tom Dommett, Clare Collier.

Apologies

Jon Ellis (declared conflict of interest), Jeremy Stadward, Cllr Allensby, Cllr Jones, Cllr Fraser.

2. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

3. LUC to present draft Site Assessment

15 sites had been submitted from the Call for Sites process. Chris Bowden (CB) explained that the assessment framework was bespoke to Warminster and is a high-level exercise. The aim of the task is to ensure views are put forward to the community about the sites' overall contribution and sustainability and that the sites can make their contribution to the wider objectives of the WNP.

Sites that aren't likely to represent sustainable options were sifted out. Sites 6 and 7 were sifted out because they are separate from the Settlement Boundary. Site 9 is already within the strategic allocation therefore it can't be included within the WNP site allocation. Sites have been assessed on their potential to provide benefits and have been given an overall colour coding to represent their appropriateness. With the majority of the sites there will be some potential impact that will require mitigation. The Site Assessment framework should not be interpreted as a summing exercise. Each of the individual criteria has been assessed on their individual merits. The purpose of the exercise is to identify the nature of issues or opportunities of the sites to provide benefits to the WNP.

Harriet James (HJ) questioned the methodology used for the WNP Site Assessment as it is different to the criteria used for the Local Plan review. CB confirmed that the criteria between plans will vary although there will be core themes. HJ questioned why the Local Plan classified many of the sites unsustainable. CB confirmed that Wiltshire Council (WC) had been consulted. Since the Local Plan review, WC has undertaken more work on a number of areas including the impact on Special Areas of Conservation. He confirmed that some of the issues will need to be looked at in more detail. It was agreed that the Site Assessment report should include a commentary to explain WC's change in views on the sites' suitability. CB also explained that climate change wouldn't be assessed at an individual site level. Vaughan Thompson (VT) recommended that WC should be contacted to gain their opinion on the WNP Site Assessment.

Action: LUC to invite WC to comment on Site Assessment.

CB confirmed that that the WNP objectives need to be taken into consideration. He stated that the Site Assessment criteria shouldn't be overly specific otherwise it may overly favour one site or disadvantage another. CB gave an overview of the individual site assessment criteria used.

CB confirmed that the two sites identified as proposed Local Green Spaces (LGS) still need to be evaluated as they haven't been designated as an LGS. CB clarified that an LGS designation will restrict development, however a non-designated heritage asset or key view does not automatically prevent development. VT confirmed that the Steering Group will need to decide whether these sites are progressed as proposed LGSs or allocated for development.

HJ enquired whether the draft Dark Skies Policy should be included. CB confirmed that any development would need to mitigate the impact of light. He also confirmed that on some sites an Appropriate Assessment would be required. He stated that biodiversity net gain is a policy requirement and it's not feasible to undertake a full biodiversity net gain assessment on all the proposed sites. CB reported that a Strategic Environment Assessment would need to be undertaken on the sites that are going to be put forward for development. Following consultation with the community on the merits of sites, an engagement exercise should be undertaken with application promoters to discuss more sustainable options that could be incorporated in the individual developments.

The Highway Authority need to broadly agree with the Site Assessment. VT asked if the Site Assessment excludes sites with primary access onto A roads.

Action: LUC to gain feedback from Highways Authority about site access and take into consideration WC policy regarding access on A roads.

Action: Steering Group members to forward specific comments about individual sites to Clare Collier by 10am on Wednesday 20th November.

The Steering Group agreed that the Site Assessment should be shared with WC for informal comment and sent to site promoters to check for technical errors.

4. Way forward with public consultation

Once the LUC Site Assessment has been finalised, VT suggested that a workshop should be held with the Steering Group to start selecting and excluding sites for the WNP. A shortlist of sites will need to be produced by selecting the most suitable and sustainable sites. This stage can look deeper into the site objectives and will refer to other gathered evidence including wildlife infrastructure corridors. The Steering Group will need to identify how to make the sites suitable e.g. only developing half the site, screening or setting the development back from a local heritage asset.

Once a shortlist of sites has been drawn-up, the next step will be to engage with the shortlisted landowners. This will give them the opportunity to confirm what they could bring to the development e.g. mixed use, 50% of site being set aside for biodiversity net gain, mixed dwellings etc.

VT clarified that the housing allocation is still set at 90 houses and stated that it isn't a requirement of the WNP to meet that number. The revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework housing requirement may result in a need for WC to increase the future housing requirements through an immediate review of the Local Plan following its adoption. However, the Steering Group should focus on the current allocation. He suggested that any future increase in the housing allocation for Warminster will need to be reflected by carrying out another review of the WNP. The Steering Group need to focus on getting the WNP made as soon as possible which will then provide protection from speculative development.

VT commented that The Warminster Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) identifies the needs and tenure for the town which may be different to assessments undertaken by Wiltshire Council. The HNA can influence the type of housing on a site however, it's virtually impossible to set an affordable housing threshold higher than the level set in the Local Plan. The emerging Wiltshire Local Plan's affordable

housing threshold is set at 40% and therefore it's recommended that the WNP should align with this figure.

Following the landowner engagement, VT suggested that an informal community consultation should be undertaken. It should address the matter whether the WNP should allocate housing through a Site Allocation and give people the opportunity to provide feedback and rank the shortlisted sites. The WNP will eventually need to go to referendum and therefore the WNP should not be dictated by a Housing Allocation.

Outlined schedule and timescale:

- Steering Group to provide feedback on Site Assessment – 20th November.
- LUC to update Site Assessment – w/c 25th November.
- Update assessment to be shared with application promoters, allow 3 weeks for feedback – w/c 25th November.
- LUC to invite WC to informally comment on Site Assessment and give thoughts on sites. Request who to contact at Highways regarding site access – w/c 25th November.
- Steering Group workshop to be held – mid January.
- Landowner engagement (face to face session) to be organised – late January.
- Community consultation, online survey/drop-in session, allow 2-3 weeks – Feb/March.
- Recommended Site Allocation and writing of allocation policies – March/April.

VT confirmed that once the sites have been decided upon an updated Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) will need to be undertaken.

Action: Place Studio to gain clarification from Wiltshire Council about SEA and HRA requirements following the Site Assessment process.

VT stated that currently a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan with housing allocation will provide 5 years' protection from unplanned speculative development.

5. AOB

No issues were raised.

6. Date of next meeting

Steering Group workshop with Place Studio to be arranged for early January (daytime). Date to be confirmed. Next Steering Group meeting to be held after the workshop.