

PUBLIC MEETING – JANUARY 28TH, 2015

ECCLESHALL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The meeting was attended by approximately 95 residents of the Parish.

Copies of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan had been distributed by Royal Mail to all properties in the ST21 6 postcode area and a public meeting was arranged during the six week consultation period. The meeting had been publicised on the Parish Council Website, various sites throughout the Parish and in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor David Pimble took the Chair and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to garner comments from local residents regarding the draft policies that formed the Plan. It was noted that the whole document was available on the Parish Council Website and copies were also available in Eccleshall Library.

Councillor Pimble asked whether anyone was unclear what the purpose of the Plan was and explained that the policies proposed in the document had to conform to The Plan for Stafford Borough, which in turn was required to agree with the National Planning Policy Framework.

The process had commenced following a public meeting held in January 2013 and the results of subsequent questionnaires and consultations had led to the identification of the five main areas covered by the Plan, Housing, Jobs and Employment, Traffic and Parking, Green Space and Historic Fabric. The Plan for Stafford Borough required Settlement Boundaries to be established around the eleven Key Service Villages and site surveys had been undertaken to determine the sites most suitable for development.

Written comments were invited by February 28th, 2015 from local residents and businesses as well as statutory undertakers and other bodies, together with adjoining parishes. All comments received would be recorded and analysed by the group along with any proposed actions. At the end of the six week consultation period the document with any amendments / additions arising from the consultation, would be sent to the Borough Council for a further period of consultation. The Inspector would then check the Plan for complicity with the Plan for Stafford Borough and the NPPF before it could proceed to a referendum. If the Plan was rejected there would be serious implications as the Borough Council would determine the Settlement Boundary and the extent of development.

Several questions were raised by local residents:-

Q. Why has the preparation of the plan taken so long to reach this stage?

A. The Neighbourhood Plan had to comply The Plan for Stafford Borough, which had only been adopted 6 months ago.

Q. Why could a weight restriction not be implemented on the roads through Eccleshall? Why did the Parish Council not object to the development off Stafford Road, which would increase traffic?

A. Weight Restrictions could not be implemented on A and B roads and it would impractical to require HGV's find alternative routes. The Parish Council objected to proposals to expand Raleigh Hall and create a new access off the A519 but both these objectives had been included in the Local Plan and would undoubtedly generate more traffic through Eccleshall. With regard to housing developments, the Local Plan stipulated that some development would be required and the group had endeavoured to prepare a Plan within the limitations imposed.

The proposals put forward by Richborough Estates were for a low density development that would provide parkland, play facilities and traffic calming the application would most likely have been approved by the inspector on appeal even if the Parish and Borough Council had opposed it and there would have been no benefit for the town. Councillor Pimble cited a similar application for a development at Baldwin's Gate, which had been approved by the Inspector on appeal.

Q. What governed the decision about the numbers of houses allocated to each site?

A. The sites had been surveyed and explanations and criteria were provided in the document.

Other questions were raised regarding a bypass, the capacity of the school and doctors and car parking provision. It was noted that aspirations for a bypass and additional car parking had been included in the Plan but at present there were no funds, means or method of achieving these aspirations. Other residents expressed concern that a ring road could be at the detriment of the town and businesses.

Concerns were expressed that a link road between Stone Road and Stafford Road would create a rat run. Also a resident enquired how long a settlement boundary would remain in place before it was further extended. Councillor Pimble replied that the Plan period was until 2031 although the 5 year housing supply was constantly being reconsidered. Further planning applications were expected and the importance of establishing the settlement boundary as soon as possible was reinforced.

It was queried whether the outline permission granted for the Richborough Estates development could be changed by a developer? It was considered that there was potential for change however, Richborough Estates had endeavoured to ensure that certain details could not be amended, although the devil was in the detail.

Councillor Jones stated that it was vital that the Neighbourhood Plan was adopted as soon as possible to restrict undesirable development. Councillor Jones indicated that he hoped as many people as possible would respond to the consultation and thanked the Neighbourhood Plan Group for their efforts. There was applause from all those present.

Councillor Pimble encouraged residents to submit their comments to the Parish Council Clerk, either in writing or by email prior to the deadline of February 28th.

The meeting closed at 8.25pm.