

Cllr Neil Hargreaves – report for Council 19th May 2020

The brief for these reports is 'to update members on items outside your normal committees'. Taking that literally we may therefore report on anything we are doing, so this report is not strictly about my portfolio

I am Chair of the Newport Quendon & Rickling Neighbourhood Plan steering group. We have just received our examiner's draft report for internal fact checking. Although he recommends deleting or significantly altering some policies, other parts he supports and has we think strengthened some policies. The draft is not public, but I would say he is a tad more enthusiastic than our Local Plan inspectors.

The requirement is that Neighbourhood Plans be consistent with the adopted Local Plan - emerging plans get no mention. In practice we have aligned it with both, although the withdrawn Local Plan references will now have to be stripped out. With no draft Local Plan policies to carry weight, members whose wards have no NhP may wish to now consider this. Where we incorporated some withdrawn plan policy texts (against advice!) he has accepted these with little amendment. In particular the 2005 Plan has no protection for existing viable commercial space from residential conversion, but the withdrawn plan policies are excellent, and we have adopted and tailored them. Similarly the withdrawn plan policies to replace S7 are good and the pre-NPPF S7 blanket prohibition was replaced by specific landscape protections (and a wide list of permitted types of development) – which we have also incorporated. Unfortunately it is now too late for us to lift other text, which had we known the Local Plan would fail, we could have done. But not too late for others.

Like assembling an Ikea wardrobe, doing a Neighbourhood Plan a second time we could do a better build and in a fraction of the time. If members and residents are concerned over the cost of an NhP, there are grants available up to £19k. Our one will come in less than this, but we only paid for one professional report and got £10k from a developer to fund another one. Contrast this however with the cost to a parish of fighting a large appeal, which could be anything from say £25k to £100k.

The functional part of a Neighbourhood Plan is purely land use policies which inform planning applications. The rest of the aspirations in the Localism Act are subsidiary. In my opinion we spent too much time on 'wouldn't it be nice to have' things and noting that the villages were in Domesday. Our evidence base of every permission since 2011 has proved invaluable and neither UDC (nor developers at appeal) has that information to challenge it. Lists of missing or desired facilities and infrastructure are also helpful. Given a more focussed approach to do only what will likely have a practical use would, I think, allow new NhPs to come to fruition more quickly than ours.