

NPSG Report for Annual Parish Meeting 16 April 2018

First of all, may I pay tribute to the whole Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for their sterling work on behalf of the whole community in getting to where we are now. Each of them has used their own talents to make sure that the Plan reflects, as much as possible, the views of the whole community. May I offer especially thanks to Karen Ripley who is technically not part of the Group but has done so much behind the scenes to progress the Plan.

I am pleased on behalf of the NPSG to be able to report that we have made significant progress towards realising our dream of a Neighbourhood Plan for the parish. This is despite the many challenges we have faced.

These have been:

- providing enough sites to meet RDC's minimum number of houses - 155 – which is the highest figure for any village in Rother,
- overcoming the basic problems we have of topography and flooding,
- overcoming all the problems for redeveloping the Mill Site,
- coping with the lack of resources to help us from RDC Planning Department,
- having a public examination of the Plan required by the Examiner, held in September last year,
- dealing with all the Examiner's required changes including providing more affordable housing.

It may seem an awfully long time since we submitted our final version of the Plan to RDC – it was back in December 2016 but planning bureaucracy (especially at RDC) grinds exceedingly slowly.

What we have achieved through hours and hours of discussion with RDC is an agreement on a Plan which we are proposing to you and you will be able to vote on in a referendum.

We have managed to convince the Examiner and RDC of the merits of redeveloping the Mill Site. You may recall that 84% of you in our huge opinion survey (questionnaire) back in September 2015 said you wanted to see the site redeveloped. It has been a monumental struggle to overcome all the difficulties placed in our way to achieve this goal, but we have now succeeded. So, we should get around 100 homes built, employment and commercial space provided to give us more local jobs, the restoration of the two iconic buildings, the Mill and the Oast, getting rid of thousands of tonnes of concrete, and an end to 14 years of dereliction.

The Examiner insisted that we add Grove Farm 1 as an extra site, because he felt we were not providing enough affordable homes. To have resisted this would have meant going back for a probable year's worth of further consultation, whilst in the meantime the present application for Grove Farm would almost certainly, in the current planning climate, have been approved.

What we will get as a result of having a 'made' NP is that the proportion of the new tax on new homes that comes to the Parish Council is increased to 25% from 15%. So, on my rough calculations this means with the housing now in the Plan, a sum of £660,000 will be coming into the Parish Council's coffers as and when the development takes place. The uplift (included) by having a 'made' NP is £266,000.

During the Plan process we consulted on what villagers would like to see as improvements to the village, and the Parish Council will continue to consult, but you can see from the figures, many things can be achieved with this money: for example, a professional Traffic Management Plan to address the traffic and parking issues which plague the village, improving footpaths, improving the facilities at the Recreation Ground and many other ideas.

The latest news, and it is late news, at 5 o'clock tonight, I had a call from the RDC Chief Officer confirming that our Referendum will be held on Thursday 31 May. So, here in the Village Hall, just like a normal election but with the future shape of the village community at stake, (you will have a postal vote if you need one) you will be able to vote on the NP. I simply urge you to vote on 31st May.

Stephen Hardy

Chair, Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
16 April 2018