

Newent Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group

Report on progress

As previously reported, the Steering Group has had fewer formal meetings than usual so far this year. We intend to rectify this, possibly by forming working groups to report back to the Steering Group, as the Terms of Reference specify only one meeting of this body per month.

We are keen to proceed to the stage of formulating our Vision and Objectives, which must be based upon the views and hopes of Newent residents, including those in outlying areas. We have collected evidence of these over the last four years and at present two surveys are still open, one on Housing and one aimed specifically at local businesses, for which we are keen to receive further submissions. They have been promoted online via social media and on our website, Newentourfuture.co.uk as well as by word-of-mouth and in the main branch of the local Co-op. In July, our GRCC advisor, Barbara Pond, met with Helen Selwood, (a long-term Steering Group member) to review evidence collected so far and to identify gaps for further data collection and research. This information was shared with the Steering Group and, as well as planning further surveys, we are seeking new ways of collecting evidence.

The plan had been to hold a first workshop on the Vision and Objectives at the Steering Group meeting on the 19th September, but this was not possible due to the resignation of the Chairperson, Gill Moseley, at the meeting, following a conflict of views about how to select suitable new members for the Steering Group. This arose out of her strongest concerns over the pressure on the direction of travel by two current Steering Group members, away from the basic requirement for the NDP to work in general conformity with the FoDDC Local Plan. This meeting has in any case been deemed inquorate, as the new Town Council has a different interpretation of the Terms of Reference from the preceding incumbents. Following the revisions to the Terms of Reference, and with the need to elect new officers and to work towards a balance of representation on the Steering Group, there is likely to be a short period of change, which may not be comfortable for some, and it may be that the Vision and Objectives workshops have to be deferred slightly. However, as their adoption will be a key step on the road to producing a full draft NDP, it is essential that the Steering Group works on these as a major theme in the coming months.

The Steering Group is now seeking to bring in specialist help, initially to review our evidence so far, advise us on next steps, to write draft policies in preparation for another major public consultation, and to work on to the production of the draft Neighbourhood Development Plan. We have had submissions from several consultancies and at present are considering three. The plan is to have meetings with them, at least one of which will be by video-conferencing.

To conclude: the Steering Group must pick up the pace of progress in collecting, collating and analysing evidence. It will need to regain strength in numbers, impartiality and cohesiveness to face the challenge of preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan that fairly represents the range and balance of views held by Newent residents. We look forward to working more closely with the Town Council to help us achieve this goal.

Helen Selwood

Interim Chairperson, Newent Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group

6th October 2023