

Wantage Neighbourhood Plan – Workshop 21 January 2015

Living and Working in Wantage

Housing discussion

Location

- A general desire to maintain the development boundary/envelope as it is to retain the market town size and feel of Wantage and to stop further ‘nibbling’ in to the surrounding countryside (especially the AONB), much of which does not have protected status. There was a keenness not to merge with surrounding communities, in particular Grove. Delegates wanted to maintain a separate identity for Wantage.
- Crab Hill – whilst much of the policy is already decided here, some mentioned that the development should be designed around the natural connections to the rest of the town (cycle and walking routes). Suggestion as to whether the development could take place along the bus route to ensure access to local transport.

Importance of green space

- Every group raised the importance of green and open space to the community of Wantage. It was felt that green space was being lost and not being replaced. Delegates felt that any green space that is lost should be regained elsewhere, and in addition new green space should also be sought.
- One group went a step further and suggested that the ‘greenness’ of Wantage - both open spaces and corridors connecting them (including cycle and walking paths) should be determined as a priority and aspirations for Wantage as a ‘Garden Town’ were raised. Any development should happen around the Garden Town principles (set out in the neighbourhood plan) and should only take place if it supports a ‘checklist’ of priorities.
- Support for a Green Space Strategy for the town so that green space is designed, managed and used in a coherent way – including guidelines on % of green space required in the town, how public and private space is used (for example types of native trees that should be planted), a visual assessment to hinder the ‘creep’ of plants onto paths and roads etc. Perhaps not wholly relevant to the neighbourhood plan, although there may be some planning policies that could help deliver the green strategy.
- There was some concern about people with larger gardens infilling with development, particularly around the south/south-eastern edge of the town bordering on the AONB.
- Safeguarding specific sites: The field above the cemetery was flagged as a green space to safeguard from future housing development. SHLAA sites WANT10 and WANT05 were mentioned as sites to safeguard from development. General lack of green space in the south east of the town.

Design

- Delegates were keen to safeguard the market town feel of Wantage and design of new build should reflect this.
- All new housing should be developed sustainably in terms of build and design. Incorporation of solar panels, supporting lower energy use etc.
- Sound proofing was mentioned numerous times as a way of reducing noise pollution (and in turn any resulting anti-social behaviour) particularly where houses are more densely located.

- There was some mention of the need to ensure that the design of buildings at the entrance points to the town merited particular attention to ensure that they were attractive gateways to Wantage.
- New housing needs to include sufficient storage space for growing families – can a minimum floorspace be specified?
- Garden size – needs to be usable – again can a minimum size be specified?
- Car parking – important to allocate sufficient parking spaces for each new dwelling by perhaps setting a minimum number related to size of house.
- Desire for a mix of housing types – family, older persons (Lifetime Home Standard mentioned) – to help mix a range of ages within the community.

Employment discussion

- Is there potential for incubator sites in the town? One delegate mentioned the growing artistic community in Wantage that might benefit from small start-up unit space, ideally within reach of the town centre.
- Discussion around the changing nature of work, with many now based from home, and whether there might be a need to develop facilities to make it easier for those people to access services such as printing, wifi, secretarial services – perhaps shared office space?
- Smith’s Garage (Chain Hill) was mentioned as a potential site for commercial use. The Old Post Office was also mentioned as potential employment use, not housing.
- Could the plan support the aim of encouraging people to cycle to Grove Industrial Park? There was some discussion about the development of a new cycle route along the canal route which would enable this.

Supporting Infrastructure

- There is a lack of facilities for younger people (children and teens) generally. For example few places to meet and a lack of a diversity of leisure activities available. The police representatives talked about the effects of this in terms of youths hanging around the market square in the evening because there is no-where else to go and as a result the perception of crime being raised.
- There are not enough children’s playgrounds in Wantage – reflecting the consensus about the lack of open spaces. New playgrounds should be ‘naturally’ designed as opposed to using plastic and metal, in keeping with the green aspirations for the town.
- There was a debate about whether the existing leisure centre site could be allocated for ‘youth’ facilities, creating (with the Beacon Centre) a central hub for young people to access facilities and activities. The need for a dedicated ‘youth’ space within any multi-use centre was described as critical by one delegate. An alternative scenario put forward was the development of a leisure area to the south of the town adjoining the existing football club.
- Discussions about King Alfred’s Academy (East Site) flagged differences of opinions. There was a desire to safeguard green space there but this needs to be weighed against the income that housing development for example might unlock to develop the western Academy site.
- Agreement that there needs to be further engagement with younger people to determine their needs and aspirations.