

Neighbourhood plan update: February 2023

Work on Stapleford and Great Shelford's Neighbourhood Plan (NP) continues apace, with the steering group holding its first workshop in December with consultants from Cambs ACRE, who are providing valuable expert support through this complex process. We reviewed the policy background to neighbourhood planning, and then discussed the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing our NP area. Our consultants have since helped us to translate these into key themes that we could pursue in our NP and the planning policies they could give rise to. Given the external growth pressures that our area faces, we cannot possibly pursue all these within a timeframe that would make having a NP useful, so the steering group will whittle them into a set of achievable and meaningful objectives, held together by an overarching vision (see below), over the next couple of months.

Retracing our steps

Although I've been writing regular monthly updates for Stapleford and Great Shelford village magazines for over a year now, it's worth briefly reminding readers what a NP is and what we hope to achieve by it. Our NP is a document that will set out what's important to our community when it comes to planning matters. So, for example:

- what sort of housing gets built, where and what it looks like
- how our green spaces are used
- the kinds of amenities that are developed
- where and how our natural environment needs protecting.

It's being written by and based on the views of the local community – the people who know and love the area – not the local planning authority. A steering group of Stapleford and Great Shelford residents and Parish Councillors are leading the charge and there have been face-to-face and online opportunities for others to contribute, with more such opportunities to come. The ultimate output of our work will be a set of planning policies specific to our area which will be used to help decide planning applications for things like new homes, and for developments of amenities like shops, playgrounds or offices. You can read more about our NP at <https://www.greatshelfordparishcouncil.gov.uk/sgsnplan/>.

Vision + action = change

I mentioned at the top that we are now developing the vision and objectives for our NP, and in time these will also be shared with the local community. But why are we spending time on this? In a nutshell, the vision articulates where we want to be or what we want to be like, whilst the objectives show the actions required to get there. They work in tandem: a vision without actions is just a dream, and actions without a vision are, well, mere faffing about.

In NP terms, our vision will be a statement of what our villages aspire to be like at the end of the NP period, and it is the basis on which our objectives and policies will be formulated. It must be forward-looking, strategic, descriptive, consider the land use and development challenges we face, but remain uncluttered by detail. It must also clearly reflect the planning related priorities of residents, and we have a good understanding of what they are following our initial public consultation in April-June 2022.

Here are a couple of NP vision statements adopted by nearby communities:

Foxton: 'To retain and enhance the unique rural character and community spirit of Foxton. This will be achieved through positive enhancement of the parish's special landscape character, biodiversity, green spaces, historical character and assets, and local distinctiveness. Foxton's built fabric, both existing and additional modest housing growth, and appropriate new employment, will incorporate sustainability features. Foxton's vibrant community will be served by a wide range of quality facilities, and sustainability will be at the heart of tackling current and proposed transport issues.'

Fulbourne: 'In the period to 2031 Fulbourn village will continue to be a vibrant, sustainable and thriving local community with its own distinctive characteristics, separate from Cambridge yet complementary and benefiting from its proximity. It will have a locally distinctive built and natural environment and a wide provision of local services, strongly supported by the local community. New developments will ensure the ongoing success of Fulbourn providing suitable housing, employment, leisure facilities and local services whilst protecting and enhancing its natural and built assets for future generations.'

It is no great surprise that there is some overlap between the aspirations of these villages, given their South Cambridgeshire rural settings and proximity to the City. Stapleford and Great Shelford's NP vision may end up being not a million miles away from these. After all, our initial public opinion survey highlighted some similar concerns amongst our residents: maintaining our village character and community feel; prioritising starter and affordable homes; protecting important views, greenbelt and biodiversity; addressing travel and transport issues; improving local shops, services and countryside access.

It will be interesting to see how the direction of travel pans out over the next few months, and I look forward to continuing to report on it.

Jenny Flynn

Vice-Chair Stapleford Parish Council; Chair of Stapleford and Great Shelford Neighbourhood Plan steering group