



# NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN NEWS

## Neighbourhood Plan Reaches Draft Stage

The big news is that the first draft of our Bardsey cum Rigton Neighbourhood Plan is at last complete.

And that means the Steering Committee can now present it to the community for your views and feedback.

You may well be asking why it has taken so long?

Unfortunately the course of true Neighbourhood Planning never did run smooth! There have been some really crucial and difficult issues to resolve.

### ***So please read on.***

It is vital we all understand those issues, how they have arisen, the compromises required and the conclusions which have been reached. Not least because ultimately we are all going to be asked to vote on the outcome, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

## The Challenge:

Lets start with a brief summary of the issues which the Steering Committee has faced:

As soon as the results of the Village Consultation Survey were known, it became clear that the Steering Committee was now confronted with a number of objectives, some of which were in direct conflict with one another:



1) The Housing Needs Survey (HNS) calls for development of some 55 manageable homes in

Bardsey, including a proportion of affordable homes for younger residents wishing to set up independent households.

2) A large majority of respondents to the Village Consultation (June 2014) expressed the desire to preserve the green belt around the village, and attributed a high priority to this specific objective (9.2 out of 10) - indeed a much higher priority than was attributed to building HNS homes (6.8 out of 10).

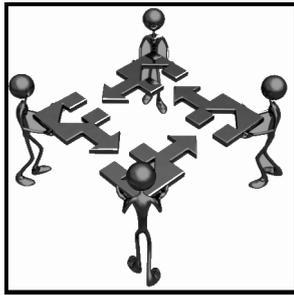
3) A clear majority of respondents favoured nominating specific sites for development of these homes in the Neighbourhood Plan, rather than limiting the Neighbourhood Plan to general policies and criteria, but::

4) The green belt boundary around the village is extremely tight. Despite a good response to requests for suggestions of possible sites, most of those put forward involved land which currently lies within the green belt (predominantly existing Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, or SHLAA, sites). Assessment of all these suggested sites also determined that the few which are not within green belt all have technical issues which would likely render development problematic and/or uneconomic.

5) ***It remains essential that the Steering Committee presents a Neighbourhood Plan which will draw the support of the community, and which will succeed at referendum. Otherwise our future would be left entirely in the hands of others - principally speculative developers, Leeds City Council and the national Planning Inspectorate. Not just an outcome that few of us would want, but a missed opportunity to play a decisive part in determining the destiny of our own village.***

## Squaring the Circle!

Quite a conundrum, as there were clearly significant conflicts to be resolved.



The conclusion in terms of the Neighbourhood Plan was aided by input from Ruralis (see page 4) and further consultation with Leeds City Council.

Both clarified that despite the Localism Act and the statutory authority vested in Neighbourhood Plans, neither the Steering Committee nor the Parish Council can determine changes to green belt. Authority for so doing remains the exclusive province of Leeds City Council. The process can only be pursued through the SHLAA system and the formal procedure for green belt review. As a result, and in accordance with current national planning policy, LCC cannot accept nomination of any green belt sites within a Neighbourhood Plan.

***Despite the expressed wish of respondents to the Village Consultation, the Steering Committee must therefore restrict the Neighbourhood Plan to generic policies defining the type and approximate volume of housing required, criteria defining acceptable sites, architectural design requirements, materials, and so forth.***

We realise that this will come as something of a disappointment to those of you who asked us to nominate specific sites, but we hope that you will understand why this decision became unavoidable. ***Most importantly of all, your support remains vital.***

## Green Belt and the HNS

In the meantime the sands have shifted once again within Leeds City Council. Indeed you may well have seen reports of this in the local press a couple of months ago.

Firstly, LCC announced that they intend to conduct a full review of all green belt within the

LCC area as part of the SHLAA site allocation plan. This process is ongoing, with a proposed site allocation plan due to go before the Executive Board soon and then out to further public consultation over the summer of 2015.

Secondly, it seems that a disagreement has arisen within Leeds City Council over the allocation of large scale strategic sites for housing development in our area.

We had since June 2013 been given to understand that these sites, (Thorpe Arch and/or Headley Fields), would provide a substantial share of the housing volume required in the Outer North East Leeds zone, thus relieving pressure on the villages. However, on 13th January 2015 LCC's Development Plan Panel voted to propose that, instead, alternatives to these strategic sites should once again be considered.

It is to be hoped that this does not signify a corresponding increase in the volume likely to be targeted at SHLAA sites in the villages, but until the final allocation plan proposal is published, the precise implications remain uncertain.

Perhaps significantly, however, local Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committees and Parish Councils were warned by our local Leeds City Councillors before Christmas that it could prove inadvisable to invite LCC consideration of green belt land to meet neighbourhood planning objectives, in case the unintended result was instead its general release for development.

***Unfortunately, however, it has not so far been possible to identify non green belt sites in Bardsey capable of delivering the homes called for by the HNS.***

***Despite the desire to provide HNS homes, and although it could have asked LCC to consider releasing green belt for this purpose, the Steering Committee therefore decided by majority vote not to pursue this course of action.***

***In doing so we remained mindful of the priorities expressed by residents, the possible risk of unwelcome outcomes, and a tight timescale which would have precluded prior consultation with residents.***

## HNS - Where Next?

The decision to take a cautious approach vis a vis green belt does not indicate that the Steering Committee has given up on provision of the homes called for by the HNS.

Firstly, although it has not yet been possible to identify enough specific sites for these homes, this does not mean there are none:

- a) Leeds City Council may decide of its own accord to release some green belt land under its green belt review. For example, SHLAA 1153, next to the Catholic Church, has already been identified as suitable.
- b) The emergence of windfall sites over time has always occurred (e.g. Bank Top and Hetchell Court). There is no reason to suppose there won't be further such sites coming forward in the future.
- c) Longer term, the achievement of other serious aspirations (such as the desired consolidation of Bardsey School into one state-of-the-art building), may lead to the availability of land for development.

In addition, although the majority of HNS homes are required by older residents wishing to downsize, there is of course a second equally important strand to the HNS requirement: that is the provision of affordable homes for younger residents wishing to establish independent households within the village. On this front there is also positive news.

## Affordable Homes

Making homes affordable in a location with high property values implies some form of assisted provision, and realistically can only be delivered in partnership with a Registered Provider such as a housing association, or by means of a Community Trust.

The rules relating to this kind of development, which is community based, modest in scale, and can be offered conditionally to local people, are different. In particular, such projects can legitimately be given planning consent within green belt without changing the green belt boundaries or the status of the land.

The Steering Committee is to open a dialogue with a specialist Rural Housing Enabler who has offered to look into the provision of such a project in Bardsey.

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## Village Consultation Survey - The Full Story!

Another major milestone in the consultation and communications programme for the Neighbourhood Plan was of course the Village Consultation Survey, which concluded in mid June 2014. That's not the end of this particular story of course—



actually more the beginning. With responses received, the hard work began analysing and interpreting the results.

Consultation packs were delivered to just under 1000 households covering Bardsey cum Rigton. The Steering Committee received 172 responses, representing a response rate of 17.3%. This is a very respectable result for a survey of this nature, and the Steering Committee would like to say a big thank you to all those who participated.

Analysis of questionnaire responses may be summarised as follows:

**1) Vision Statement:** A high degree of satisfaction was expressed with the draft. A total of 89% of respondents agreed it expressed what they believed the Neighbourhood Plan should achieve either 'very well' or 'quite well'. There were a number of comments favouring simplifying and sharpening the drafting in places, and this has been addressed.

**2) Relative Importance of Objectives:** Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each objective proposed for the Neighbourhood Plan out of 10. The results were as follows:

<u>Objective</u>	<u>Importance</u>
Maintaining the natural environment	9.3/10
Preserving the Green Belt	9.2/10
Quality of the built environment	8.9/10
Safety and amenity of public highways	7.8/10
Pedestrian, cycle and equestrian amenity	7.5/10
Encouraging healthy lifestyles	7.3/10
Nominating assets of community value	7.2/10
Providing the HNS identified homes	6.8/10
Encouraging business activity	6.1/10

### 3) New Homes According to the Housing Needs Survey:

76.6% of respondents considered that the Neighbourhood Plan should aim to identify specific potential sites for the 55 (approx) manageable homes called for by the HNS. 23.4% expressed a preference for an approach citing only the criteria for acceptable sites. Thus a clear majority favoured the 'site specific' option.

62.1% of respondents would only support the development of new homes if green belt sites can be avoided, however, while 21.4% would want to pursue development whatever it takes.

Views on where such homes should be sited were much more varied and less polarized. 10.4% thought they should only be located in the village core, and 14.1% only well away from it. A further 23.7% thought any development should be close to the core, 32.8% favoured some in the core and some elsewhere, and 18.6% would locate them wherever suitable sites could be found.

**4) Site suggestions:** 38.4% of respondents put forward one or more suggestions for potential sites: 74 suggestions in total. Most of these actually involved existing SHLAA sites, with 16 mentioning the only SHLAA site in Bardsey to be flagged green by Leeds City Council – i.e. the 1 acre plot next to the Catholic Church on Keswick Lane. The vast majority of sites proposed lie within the green belt. *The Steering Committee has conducted an appraisal of all sites suggested, but unfortunately has identified significant technical difficulties with all of the few non green belt locations.*

**5) Open Comments:** In addition to the 'response box' analysis and site suggestions,

many respondents offered a wealth of additional comments too numerous to list. The Steering Committee reviewed these at a special meeting, and classified them into three categories:

- Points already under consideration for the draft Neighbourhood Plan.
  - Suggestions which should be added to that list, and be specifically considered in the formulation of the plan.
  - General comments to be taken note of.
- Full details have been posted on the web site, and will be made available during future public consultation.

## Strengthening the Team: Enter Ruralis



Neighbourhood Planning is complicated enough, but being entirely new the process itself is undergoing rapid evolution. We find ourselves aiming at a fast moving target.

The Steering Committee therefore concluded that it was essential to bring in some additional expertise. We needed someone conversant with both rural development and the latest expectations of Neighbourhood Plans. Most importantly, we also needed someone with the right outlook, who would take Bardsey's best interests to heart.

We were fortunate to find David Gluck (above), a professional with 25 years experience.

David has proved invaluable in helping to draft our Neighbourhood Plan policies professionally - especially those relating to planning and development. You can find more information on David and Ruralis on line at: [www.ruralis.co.uk](http://www.ruralis.co.uk).

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