

Welford-on-Avon Neighbourhood Development Plan:

Consultation Statement

Introduction

This Consultation Statement accompanies the submission of the Welford-on-Avon Neighbourhood Development Plan to Stratford-on-Avon District Council.

It has been prepared by Welford-on-Avon Parish Council (the Qualifying Body) to fulfil the statutory requirements. In accordance with Regulation 15(2) of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 this Consultation Statement:

- contains details of the persons and bodies who were consulted about the proposed neighbourhood development plan
- explains how they were consulted
- summarises the main issues and concerns raised by the persons consulted
- describes how these issues and concerns have been considered and, where relevant, addressed in the proposed neighbourhood development plan.

Note that numbers in brackets thus [0] refer to the appendix where the relevant consultation material can be found.

Background

On 14 October 2012, the Parish Council organised a Big Society Sunday event in the Memorial Hall which promoted many village societies, clubs and organisations. Some 110 residents attended. The Parish Council discussed the Neighbourhood Plan process with members of the village through a short presentation about Neighbourhood Plans including what is involved, the statutory process and the potential benefits. There followed discussion on whether the preparation of a neighbourhood plan was worthwhile and what concerns and issues it might address. There was overall a positive reaction to the opportunity for a Neighbourhood Plan for Welford-on-Avon and a number of villagers volunteered to be part of its development process.

At the Parish Council meeting held on 6 November 2012 it was resolved to progress with the creation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the entire parish. It was agreed that the plan would guide development in the proposed neighbourhood area in accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act, the National Planning Policy Framework and the District Council's emerging Core Strategy.

A steering group for the progression of the plan was then established. The Parish Council drew up a constitution [32] for a steering group which would manage the production of the Welford Plan, though ownership and responsibility for the Plan would remain with the Parish Council throughout its development.

The inaugural meeting of the steering group was held on 23 October 2012.

Application to Designate the Neighbourhood Area

In accordance with regulation 5 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, an application was made by the Parish Council on 11 March 2013 to Stratford-on-Avon District Council for the entire parish to be designated as a neighbourhood area.

The District Council publicised the neighbourhood area application for six weeks and invited comment. English Heritage was the only statutory consultee to respond [8].

The application was formally approved by the Cabinet of the District Council on 17 June 2013.

Communications Strategy

Consultation was undertaken by the steering group throughout the plan preparation process.

In order to ensure that the entire community was kept well informed and updated throughout the development of the Welford Plan (branded as 'Welforward' for marketing purposes) all material has been posted on the 'Welforward' website (www.welforward.org.uk) for public access and residents have been encouraged to provide feedback and comment at all stages via this website. Regular articles in the parish magazine have kept the village updated on the progress of the Welford Plan.

At key stages in the development of the Welford Plan, events have organised to inform and consult with residents and to gather feedback. These events have been publicised by a combination of mail drops to all homes in the parish, emails to the parish mailing list and posters located strategically around the village.

Consultation events took place at the following stages in the neighbourhood planning process:

- A community survey to ascertain the main issues, aspirations and priorities of the local community
- Consultation on the emerging vision and objectives
- Consultation on the initial draft plan including the emerging draft policies
- Pre-submission consultation on the draft plan (Regulation 14).

A brief description of each of these stages is described below.

Community Survey, April 2013

In order to determine the main issues, aspirations and priorities of the community, a comprehensive Community Survey was developed. This survey was informed by previous village surveys, particularly the Village Design Statement adopted by Stratford District Council in 1998 and the Parish Plan which was adopted in 2007.

The Community Survey was carried out in April 2013. Every household in the parish was hand delivered a customised envelope [1] containing the householder survey form [2], a

leaflet giving an introduction and overview to Neighbourhood Planning [3]. Also included were two envelopes, one a reply paid envelope to allow the completed survey form to be returned to the Consultation Unit at Stratford District Council for onward transmission to Warwick Networks and the second envelope addressed to Warwick Networks.

The steering group engaged Warwick Networks which is an external and independent company specialising in surveying parishes and the analysis of the resulting data. Residents were able to return completed surveys by post or complete the survey online using a SurveyMonkey script developed Warwick Networks.

A separate version of the Community Survey was developed for businesses, groups and landowners either located in or with an interest in land within the parish. These organisations (listed at [4]) were either hand delivered or posted a custom envelope [5] containing a covering letter [6], the Business Survey [7] and the introductory and overview leaflet [3].

The Community Survey was promoted both by an event in the Memorial Hall on 14 April 2013 and also as part of the Annual Parish Meeting on 25 April 2013. A chaser mailer [9] publicising the latter event was hand delivered to all households. 12 and 65 parishoners respectively attended the two events.

302 completed residents survey forms were returned comprising both household and individual responses. 12 of the 58 businesses surveyed responded, together showing a high level of interest and support for the Welford Plan. Warwick Networks completed their analysis of the Community Survey results by late May 2013 and provided the steering group with a report [10] and a list of the free-format responses to each of the survey questions [11]. Both of these reports provided invaluable guidance to the steering group and were used to:

- Guide initial formulation of residents' vision for the village up to 2031
- Understand the areas for which policies would need to be drafted
- Support the conclusion that site allocation would not be appropriate given the wide divergence of residents' views on site suitability.

Key conclusions from the Community Survey were summarised on to a double sided sheet [12] which were laminated and displayed on notice boards around the village for information.

Vision and Objectives Consultation, December 2013

By December 2013, early drafting of the Welford Plan was underway. An event was held in the Memorial Hall to consult on the emerging Vision and Objectives and to inform the steering group on their appropriateness for the draft plan. The event, publicised by a mailer [13] to each household, comprised a short presentation [40] given 3 times during the afternoon summarising the status and content of the draft Plan. Attendees were encouraged to engage with members of the Steering Group and to complete a short survey [14] supported by consultation notes [15].

All but one resident approved the draft Vision. Average ratings of between 7.8 and 9.9 (0 = totally object, 10 = totally support) were given to the draft Objectives. 59 questionnaires

were returned and were summarised in a spreadsheet [16]. These responses, together with free-form comments, were used the basic input to refine the draft Welford Plan.

Policies Consultation, April 2014

In April 2014, a consultation on an early draft of the Welford Plan was held in the Memorial Hall with particular focus on obtaining feedback on all the emerging policies. Again, an invitation mailer [17] was hand delivered to all households and over 60 villagers attended. 2 short presentations [41] were given during the event. Through engagement with members of the steering group, particular questions and concerns from attendees were addressed and they were encouraged to complete a questionnaire [18].

59 completed questionnaires were returned either at the event, to the Parish Clerk or online to the Welford website and the results were summarised in a spreadsheet [19]. Ratings of between 6.4 and 10 were given to draft policies and, as a result of these rankings and free-form comments, some draft policies were discarded and others merged and revised. 60 residents attended the Annual Parish Meeting on 1 May 2014 where there was the opportunity for the Steering Group to engage with residents and encourage responses.

One developer with an interest in land in Welford-on-Avon responded to this consultation [28]

Pre-submission consultation, December 2014 – January 2015

The pre-submission (Regulation 14) consultation on the Welford Plan was undertaken between 10 December 2014 and 31 January 2015.

All households in the parish were hand-delivered a custom envelope [20] containing an 8 page digest [21] of the pre-submission draft of the Welford Plan. In addition to a summary of the Plan's vision, objective and policies, the digest also included:

- Background to the consultation
- Guidance on obtaining a copy of the full Welford Plan [31]
- Options for returning the completed questionnaire

The simple questionnaire [22] asked for agreement or otherwise to the draft vision and objectives and comments or criticism of any of the draft policies.

In addition, the digest, questionnaire and a covering letter [23] were either hand delivered or posted to 38 'non-resident consultees' (listed at [24]) including developers active in the village, local business and landowners with an interest in the village.

Statutory consultees were emailed the complete Welford Plan together with a covering email [25] using an updated version of a distribution list [26] provided by Stratford District Council.

The following feedback was received:

- 54 responses from residents supporting the Vision and Objectives with no further comment.
- 44 responses from residents offering detailed comments on the Vision and Objectives and/or on individual policies

- 12 responses from statutory consultees, including one with comments from multiple departments within Warwickshire County Council, and a separate response from WCC Education [42].
- 2 responses [33 - 34] from an agent representing two landowners with separate planning applications in the village which were waiting determination.

All feedback was correlated by an external, independent auditor contracted by the steering group. Results were summarised into 3 sheets of a single spreadsheet [27]. The first sheet listed the residents responding positively but not offering comments. The second sheet tabulated the substantive responses from residents against vision, objectives and each of the 23 draft policies across by column. Because of the size of responses [33 – 39] from some statutory consultees and the landowners' agent, a third sheet summarised the response from these respondents in a single column against the respondent's identity.

With the results thus summarised, the steering group was able to annotate each cell with a note of how each concern should be addressed. The particularly detailed response from SDC was annotated point by point with proposed wording changes [43].

For each draft policy, the relevant column was reviewed and a change log [29] was developed which showed:

- The policy wording as consulted on
- Each response requiring a modification to the policy wording
- The resulting, modified policy wording

The issues and concerns raised by consultees, how these were taken into account by the steering group and how they were addressed by the proposed Welford Plan is clearly demonstrated in this log.

Other consultations

A detailed timeline of all communications to residents, statutory and other consultees (such as Stratford District Council) and other organisations is given in the schedule at [30].

Conclusion

The statement demonstrates that the Parish Council has met the statutory requirements to publicise the preparation of the neighbourhood plan and taken steps to actively engage key partners and people who live, work and have a business interest in Welford-on-Avon. They have thereby been given every opportunity to influence the content of the neighbourhood plan throughout the various stages in the preparation process.