

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FOR DORE TO DOOR

A Bit of History

While Dore now lies within Sheffield City boundaries, much of it also lies within the Peak District National Park boundaries. Dore once lay within Derbyshire and at its heart still retains the character of a Derbyshire village, but the growth of urban Sheffield and local government boundary changes brought the village within Sheffield's enlarged boundaries despite its continuing significant physical separation from Sheffield suburbs by Ecclesall Woods and Green Belt fields.

The importance of identifying, celebrating and protecting the distinctive character of Dore has been at the heart of Dore Village Society's mission and led it to embark on producing a Village Design Statement long before localism became a political mantra. With the active help of many local people that Statement was published in 2005 with the intention that it should be accepted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (within the suite of Sheffield City and National Park Planning policies) to manage acceptable development change in Dore.

The Localism Act of 2011 made provision for the devolution of certain decision-making powers in England and established a facility for certain community organisations to prepare Neighbourhood Plans which would guide development change in a local area provided that the Neighbourhood Plan is in line with national planning policy (the National Planning Policy Framework or NPPF) and the strategic planning vision for the wider area set by the local authority (in our case both Sheffield City Council and the Peak District National Park Authority). While Dore had got off to an excellent start with its Village Design Statement, six years later the Localism Act provided a formal procedure for producing a Neighbourhood Plan which would sit within a hierarchical nest of development plans from national, to local authority to neighbourhood level. Again Dore got off to a flying start in 2012 to take advantage of the new devolved powers and initiated a detailed exercise, involving working groups, to produce a first draft of a new-style Neighbourhood Plan.

From Village Design Statement to Neighbourhood Plan

Surely, you might say, job done: Dore Village Society had already produced a quasi-Neighbourhood Plan, first as a Design Statement in 2005 and secondly in Neighbourhood Plan format in 2012 after considerable research and drafting by working groups. Well, it's not that easy. First, the 2012 exercise had to be put on hold because the City Council was not yet ready to manage the formal introduction of Neighbourhood Forums. Secondly, most Neighbourhood Plans are produced by Parish Councils in countryside villages. Dore does not have a Parish Council and needed to be able to demonstrate the appropriate credentials to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in an inclusive and transparent manner which could secure the eventual support of the majority of those residents voting in a local referendum. While Dore Village Society (hereafter DVS) has a large membership within Dore, it is not a formally recognised local government body. However, the Localism Act provides for both Parish/Town Councils and Neighbourhood Forums to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. Neighbourhood Forums can be formed by appropriate community groups with the agreement of the relevant local authority. DVS was able to convince both the City

Council and the National Park that its large membership could itself constitute a Neighbourhood Forum. Indeed, the DVS membership of nearly one thousand members makes this Neighbourhood Forum one of the largest in the country!

So, on 12 November last year DVS members were invited to the first formal Dore Neighbourhood Forum meeting at King Egbert School to make decisions about how the 2012 Plan could be reviewed and redrafted afresh in the manner laid down in the Localism Act. The Forum listened to a presentation given by the DVS Chair, Keith Shaw, and David Crosby, the co-ordinator of previous work on the Plan and an experienced development planner himself, on the work done to date and how that needed to be thoroughly reviewed afresh.

The Forum decided that:

- A Steering Group should be formed with terms of reference agreed by the Forum to oversee the fresh drafting work and it should consist of both DVS Committee members and non-Committee members
- Working Groups should be formed from some DVS Committee members and a wide range of fresh volunteers to cover the seven principal sections of the eventual Plan – the Green Belt, Housing Areas, the Peak District Eastern Moorland Fringe, Open Spaces, Conservation and Archaeology, the Village Centre, and Sustainable Transport
- The Working Groups would in the New Year review the vision and aims produced by the 2012 drafters in each of these areas and then research and consult widely before producing fresh drafting recommendations for the Steering Group in the early summer of 2016
- Volunteers should be sought to populate the Working Groups

The Principles Governing the Working Groups' Work

As Chair of the Steering Group I have written to every Working Group member welcoming them on behalf of the Steering Group and setting out how each Working Group should approach its task. This guidance will be sent out by David Crosby as each Working Group is invited to its first meeting in January or February alongside an agenda for the meeting and an extract of the 2012 draft Plan on that Group's subject area.

This guidance stresses the following points:

- While Dore has the advantage of having produced an early draft of a Neighbourhood Plan, it is important to both fully review what has been done in the past and then to open out fresh information-gathering and debate. What has been done before is not the end-point for this exercise, but only a highly useful starting-point.
- Working Groups should treat this as an inclusive exercise and should therefore err on the side of consulting widely and taking great care to consider any views expressed to them.
- Working groups should not hesitate to co-opt new members with interesting perspectives to offer, particularly those from normally hard to reach groups.
- Each Working group should painstakingly record who has contacted it or has been contacted and what views they have expressed and produce full minutes of their own proceedings. Without high standards of recording the Steering

Group will have difficulty in monitoring progress and the Forum will have difficulty in demonstrating that it has initiated a thorough, inclusive, transparent and valid process when that is scrutinised by the City Council, the National Park Authority and the Planning Inspectorate.

- Working Groups will be advised by David Crosby on the distinction between Planning *policies* and Planning *proposals*. The principal output from Working Group deliberations will be to produce viable local Planning policies which are consistent with the NPPF and the Local Plans of the City and of the National Park.

In short, the Planning policies produced should aim to represent the views of Dore people while being consistent with the upward hierarchy of Development Planning policies. The language used will need to be the language of development planning rather than a catalogue of ‘nice-to-haves’. The process should be demonstrably open, inclusive, transparent, consultative and involving and, remember, the output will be subject to a popular plebiscite.

How to Contribute

Even now it is not too late to volunteer for a Working Group (see subject areas above): you do have to be a member of DVS and ought also to be a Dore resident or have business or work in Dore. If you wish to do so please let David Crosby know as soon as possible on 453 9615 or david.crosby@dorevillage.co.uk . If you wish as an individual or local interest group (whether a member of DVS or not) to express views to any particular Working Group, also contact David (although in due course we will publish the contact details of the Secretaries of each Working Group)

The Timetable

The aim is for Working Groups to report back with detailed recommendations to the Steering Group in June and for the latter to co-ordinate a full draft Neighbourhood Plan over the summer. It will then fall to the Steering Group to present the draft Plan to a meeting of the Neighbourhood Forum (potentially all members of the DVS) for debate and approval and subsequent publication within Dore for public consultation. Once any necessary adjustments have been made, the draft Plan will undergo a compliance assessment by the City and the National Park to check that it is not inconsistent with their Local Plans and for an independent external examiner to assess whether it satisfactorily meets the national standards for a Neighbourhood Plan. So long as these checks are satisfied, the draft Plan can then be put to a referendum of all those on the electoral role for Dore and will be approved if supported by a simple majority of those voting. At that point both Sheffield City Council and the Peak District National Park Authority will be obliged to adopt the Dore Neighbourhood Plan as part of the suite of Planning policies (from the NPPF and the two Local Plans to the Neighbourhood Plan) which determine which planning applications for development succeed in Dore.

The Opportunity

This is a major opportunity for Dore people to directly influence how Dore develops in the future; so the Steering Group hopes as many people who care about Dore’s

character and development as possible take the chance to contribute to this devolved process as the Working Groups plunge into their tasks over the first half of 2016. Dore to Door and the DVS website will keep Dore residents up to date with progress, as will the DVS public notice-boards which will carry minutes of meetings and the DVS committee members at the Old School office which is manned every Friday morning and also at monthly Saturday open mornings (see Dore to Door guidance on times)

Citywide Options for Growth

Of course there are many developments and initiatives other than our own Neighbourhood Plan which could impact on Dore's future. For example, Sheffield City Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan to guide development in the city. It is intended that the new Plan will be worked up and consulted on with the aim of adoption in 2018 and will then last until 2034. In November 2015 the Council produced a public consultation document proposing a vision for what our city will look like in 2034. The 78 page document can be found on the Council's website and is entitled "The Sheffield Plan – Our City, Our Future – Citywide Options for Growth".

One of the first tasks which your Steering Committee in Dore felt it must undertake was to study this document and register detailed comments from Dore's point of view because the choice of options for the city will have major implications for both the city's development and for Dore. Our views, helped enormously by David Crosby's expert analysis, were duly submitted to the City Council before the end of 2015.

In essence the detailed comments submitted boil down to the following:

- We generally support the document's Vision for Sheffield and its 8 supporting Aims, except that we feel that the central Vision itself needs to be less myopically focussed solely on a 'strong and sustainable economy' and instead state that underpinning the Vision will not only be the strong economy but also the city's valued and thriving natural assets. Unless Sheffield aims to make much of its glorious natural assets, its vision will look much like any other city's vision.
- We endorsed the Council's provisional view that *"the majority of Sheffield's Green Belt is too environmentally sensitive to be suitable for development, and Areas bordering the Peak District National Park [which of course includes rural Dore] are particularly valuable, and the countryside around Sheffield is one of the city's distinctive characteristics which makes it a great place to live."* It is important, of course, that this thinking is followed through as the Council reflect on the proposals made to them by landowners and developers in response to the Council's March 2014 call for potential development sites on Green Belt, because the Council is carrying out a review of its Green Belt at the only time it is allowed to do so, namely when it is reviewing its Local Plan.
- Our comments make a well argued case for the protection of the Green Belt in the Dore Neighbourhood Area.
- We have no objection to the Council's assessment of future housing need (under pressure from Government) of between 40,000 and 46,000 new homes by 2034 with a central estimate of 43,000, so long as the location of those new homes is wisely planned and there is adequate provision for affordable homes within the total.

- We rejected the estimate of potential windfall development sites as possibly too high, particularly if it was to endanger the distinctive character of housing areas in the south-west and we reminded the Council that the NPPF guidance states that windfall sites should not include residential gardens.
- We welcomed the proposal that by far the largest contribution to the 43,000 estimate would come from better exploiting urban capacity (19,300), urban intensification including increasing densities in central areas (12,750) and urban remodelling in Neepsend/Shalesmoor and Attercliffe (4,300).
- We reluctantly accepted the case for ‘confident bite-size’ incursions (6,100 homes) into the Green Belt in the north and east of the city where there was the opportunity to create distinctive new or extended neighbourhoods with a good range of services, shops, local employment and infrastructure, including improvements to public transport networks, such as extending existing Supertram links.
- We rejected the notion that a balancing figure of 550 homes might be provided in smaller Green Belt releases because this was an arbitrary allocation within a 40,000 to 46,000 range which might not be needed and was contrary to the general policy thrust of the rest of the consultation document.

Christopher Pennell