



# Maresfield Parish Council

## REPRESENTING THE VILLAGES OF MARESFIELD, NUTLEY & FAIRWARP



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### DRAFT Minutes of a Meeting of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group held on Thursday 12 October 2023 at 2.30pm at the Parish Office

**Present:** Cllr M Craddock, Cllr Mrs L Reeves, Cllr R Hunter, Cllr R Brickle, Cllr P Penfold,  
Cllr G Balchin

Ms R Barnes (Planning Clerk)

Mr A Farrell

**1. Elect a Chair**

The Clerk asked for a volunteer to chair the meeting. Cllr Penfold offered to chair and this was **agreed** unanimously.

**2. Public session**

Cllr Craddock advised councillors that Mr Farrell was considering joining the NDP Steering Group (the 'Group'). Mr Farrell gave some details of his background and it was **agreed** that if he was still interested, he could be co-opted at the next meeting.

**3. Apologies for absence.**

None.

**4. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**5. To adopt Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 15th March 2023**

Cllr Craddock proposed that the Minutes be **agreed**. This was seconded by Cllr Hunter and the Minutes were duly **adopted**.

**6. To note that the meeting called for 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2023 was not quorate and therefore not minuted**

Noted.

**7. Appointment of planning consultant to carry out an 'NDP healthcheck'**

Cllr Craddock explained that the Group had previously benefitted from the input of a planning consultant, Mr Lindsay Frost, but he was now retired. He said he had approached Troy Consulting, on Wealden's recommendation, to quote to provide an assessment of where the Group was in terms of the quality and extent of its draft NDP. The quote provided came in at £3,637 plus VAT (the VAT being refundable). Cllr Craddock noted that the Group currently has some £4,000 in reserve.

Cllr Balchin did not agree that the consultants should be commissioned at this point as the draft NDP needs quite a lot of editing, with some of it being out of date. Cllr Penfold agreed.

Cllr Craddock suggested there were two points of principle that needed to be considered: firstly, whether or not the NDP allocates sites and secondly, whether it stays as it is and covers all three wards in the parish or whether Nutley and Fairwarp are omitted, given that their location in/ or near to the Ashdown Forest could preclude significant future development.

It was **agreed** that the NDP would continue to cover all three wards to ensure inclusivity, breadth of coverage and to ensure that neither Nutley or Fairwarp became isolated.

Cllr Craddock summarised the tremendous amount of work that the Site Assessment Team had carried out in the last decade and the time and effort they had expended on a voluntary basis,

on behalf of the both the Parish Council and local communities. He said that the Team had engaged proactively with those developers who had put forward SHEELA sites and had considered sites in the parish in depth, against a set of criteria. Work had stalled somewhat in the last few years for a number of reasons, including the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and the failure of the most recent iteration of Wealden DC's Draft Local Plan to progress.

Cllr Craddock pointed out that the NDP should not allocate sites if Wealden DC had not allocated sites. Cllr Brickle agreed and said that if the Group did identify sites, it may put the Parish Council in a difficult position if unfavourable development proposals came forward in the future, upon which it was called to comment. Cllr Penfold expressed concern that Maresfield would be required to absorb the vast majority, if not all, of any future housing allocation for the parish.

After some discussion, it was agreed to produce an appendix to the main NDP in which sites were allocated and if/when Troy Consulting were appointed, they could consider the Plan on its own and then with the appendix attached. It was agreed that the appendix would be held in abeyance until such time as the situation with Wealden DC's Draft Local Plan became clearer, in terms of its schedule and content. Cllr Craddock noted that at a recent Parish Cluster Meeting, it was intimated that the Draft Local Plan would be published before Christmas although, as previously, this might slip. In addition, Cllr Craddock said that Wealden DC had confirmed that it would not publish the SHEELA report until the Draft Local Plan was released.

Cllr Brickle said that it was important that the final NDP should convey the type and extent of influence the parish would want over future development decisions.

Cllr Balchin asked whether the Group had engaged with any external organisations. Cllr Craddock said that the Group had done so extensively over the years and had taken advantage of the various grants available to assist in the development of the NDP.

Cllr Penfold referred to the issue of land banking by developers. Cllr Craddock agreed but noted that this was often because of complex legal issues associated with a proposed site, the need for the developer to produce detailed reports, the issue of ransom strips, etc.

Turning to the editing of the current version of the Draft NDP, it was **agreed** to 'flip' the text such that the attributes and constraints of the parish would come at the beginning of the document, followed by matters relating to planning. Cllr Balchin referred to the Ninfield NDP and read out an extract referring to how it was dealing with the 'unknowns' concerning housing numbers. It was **agreed** that similar wording could be adopted in the Draft NDP.

Cllr Balchin and Cllr Penfold **agreed** to work on the editing of the Draft NDP over the next few months.

#### **8. Report from Cllr Craddock on Site Assessment Team progress**

Cllr Craddock went on to explain the background to various sites in Maresfield, known as Sites A, B, C, D and E. He said that the Site Assessment Team had engaged with potential developers of Site D, *without prejudice and in good faith*, not just to assess this site but also to encourage community benefits *should* development at this site ever be approved by Wealden DC. It is still to be decided whether it would be more beneficial for the community to concentrate any future development on one large site with a significant community gain, or to achieve the housing numbers through pepper-potting and piecemeal development with potentially no community advantage. He reiterated that in engaging with developers, this in no way held the Parish Council to a certain view or opinion of any future proposals and certainly did not convey its agreement to the development of Site D.

Cllr Penfold queried how sustainable new housing would be given the current lack of infrastructure, including doctors' surgeries and school places. Cllr Craddock said that such issues were often outside the remit of Wealden DC; for example, the provision of school places was a matter for East Sussex County Council.

There was some discussion around the extent of consultation with parishioners throughout the process. Cllr Craddock noted that he had regularly referred to the Group and the Draft NDP in his Chairman's newsletters but never had any responses or enquiries from members of the public. Cllr Reeves agreed and said no-one ever came to the Group's meetings, did not respond to items on the Parish Council's Facebook account, etc.

Cllr Craddock asked the Group to keep the Site Assessment results and associated discussion confidential for now as these discussions with developers/landowners were all held in confidence. This was **agreed** to by all present.

**9. Any other business**

In summary, it was **agreed** that the current Draft NDP would be edited further. Once done and agreed by the Group, the Draft and appendix identifying possible sites would be forwarded to Troy Consulting for their assessment. Following any further recommended changes, the Draft NDP would be sent to Wealden DC on an informal basis for their initial comments. It was **agreed** that, at that stage, the appendix would *not* be submitted to Wealden DC.

It was **agreed** that Cllr Craddock would forward the site assessment team's spreadsheet of criteria to the Group, as well as the most recent survey results so that the figures in the Draft NDP could be updated.

**10. Date of next meeting**

The first week of December was suggested for the next meeting with exact date to be confirmed.

*There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.35pm.*