



What *is* the Hermitage Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)?

- It sets out **planning policies** for the whole of Hermitage.
- It's used to **make decisions about planning applications** – including new buildings or changes to existing ones.
- It's **written by us**, the local community, the people who know and love the area, to ensure we get the **right types of development in the right place**.
- When adopted it becomes **legal**:

This legal status gives neighbourhood plans far more weight than previous local documents, such as parish plans and village design statements

What's happened so far?

Three years ago on 26 April 2019, West Berkshire Council formally designated the whole of Hermitage Parish Council (HPC) area as the Hermitage Neighbourhood Area. A handful of local residents, plus a couple of Parish Councillors formed the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

The first year was a steep learning curve as we strove to get our heads round the task ahead!

The second year was focussed on raising NDP awareness within the community and discovering what villagers thought about development. We also scrutinised and commented on West Berkshire's -

- proposed changes to the Hermitage settlement boundary and
- assessment of the potential development sites in the village

In **October 2020** we hosted our first **Public Event** at Hermitage Primary School. All comments were collated and a summary published.

Key themes were beginning to emerge:

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Green Spaces
- Environment
- Sustainability
- Traffic

Some of you told us Hermitage didn't need any more houses. Others told us there weren't enough – particularly for young people and older residents who had to move away. It's important to stress that creating an NDP *won't stop* houses being built. So, to find out what housing might be needed for the future and where best to build it, early in 2021 we commissioned -

- **a Housing Needs Survey and**

- **an independent report** on which sites in Hermitage were potentially available and suitable for future development.

By mid-2021, the Steering Group had dwindled to 4. Reluctantly we had to admit that this wasn't enough to succeed. Anxious not to lose the considerable amount of evidence already gathered, Hermitage Parish Council commissioned an external viability assessment. Undeterred, we continued to meet monthly and -

- published updates in Pathfinder and on the Parish Council website.
- drafted a Vision Statement
- attended **affordable housing** and **sustainability** events
- met the promoter of **HER4**, the only potentially developable site identified by West Berks, to gain an understanding of how their development proposals might affect Hermitage.

The viability report reassured us that all our work over the past 2 years hadn't been in vain and that, with support, we could produce a robust Neighbourhood Plan for Hermitage.

December – We welcomed **Navigus**, a specialist in Neighbourhood Planning, who would lead on producing the NDP for Hermitage. Each SG member agreed to work on one or more sections of a **Skeleton Plan**

2022

January – Over the past two years many of you raised traffic issues with us. Although NDP can't address these, we managed to secure a meeting with West Berkshire officials who agreed to include them in their coming year's Workplan.

February - Technical support was secured from AECOM to develop the Housing Design Code, quite complex and critical to developing NDP

So, what happens next?

We continue to work with AECOM on Housing Design Codes and with Navigus to gather further evidence to support policy development. We hope to host a Public Event towards the **end of June** to share with you the draft NDP. We'll need you to give us your views on what we've got right, what's not quite right and what's missing. We welcome constructive criticism. **Without your input this plan will fail!**

Throughout the **summer** we'll be reviewing the NDP and working with Navigus to make sure it reflects what you've told us. The plan then goes to HPC who will then consult the community (hopefully this **Autumn**). After that the Plan will be submitted to West Berkshire Council towards the **end of this year**. They will then hold a public consultation.

2023

Early Spring – An independent Examiner will review the plan and provide a report. Necessary amendments will be made

May – Public referendum vote

If successful at referendum, our Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the statutory development plan for West Berkshire.

Of course, these dates are provisional and dependent on a number of external factors!

Our biggest **challenge** to date has been getting people from our village actively involved! The current population of Hermitage is probably close to 2000. Your Steering Group of 4 has been working constantly for 3 years to find out -

- what new housing Hermits need;
- where it should be;
- how it should look;
- what buildings, views, natural habitats and green spaces Hermits value and would like to see preserved
- what more can be done to improve access to the countryside while allowing wildlife and bio-diversity to survive

I think we've broken the back of it but there's still a lot to do.

If you can help in any way do speak to one of us, email us or simply leave your contact details at the stand and we'll get in touch.

I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank all those past members who've given their time to us – Andy Bunyan, Sue Russell, Dick and Charmian Bird, Colin Lovell and Cathy Stagg. You might think your contributions seem insignificant but they've made a huge difference in getting us to where we are now. I'd also like to mention our two newest recruits, Quentin Webb and David Dobson who've speedily got to grips with all that's been asked of them. The one person I've yet to mention is Ruth Cottingham, ex chair of Hermitage Parish Council, who has served from the outset, a walking encyclopaedia of local knowledge and directory of useful contacts! Thank you one and all. Without your enthusiasm and perseverance, Neighbourhood Development Plan would probably just be an obscure location on What3Words!

Rosie Healy

27 April 2022