



## **Hermitage Neighbourhood Development Plan**

### **March 2022 Update**

Since my last update, things have been moving apace in developing a Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) for Hermitage! Our consultant, Navigus, has drafted a very basic skeleton outline of how the plan might look. It was sobering to realise just how much more work remains to be done by our tiny Steering Group (SG). How naïve was I, three years ago, to think that I was simply volunteering to pop flyers through letterboxes!?

SG met late January (courtesy of Zoom) with West Berks Council Traffic team to discuss concerns raised by residents at our October 2020 public event about speeding, traffic volumes and how future housing developments (both within and outside Hermitage) might impact on traffic levels in our village. Although the scope of NDP doesn't allow us to address traffic matters, we felt it was important to find some answers. The meeting was most helpful in gaining an understanding of what's already being done by our own Parish Council on these matters and what is planned by both WBC and HPC for the future.

SG welcomes David Dobson, our newest member, who's been exploring the extension of an Active Travel Route from Hermitage to Newbury as part of the section covering 'Getting Around'.

Ruth Cottingham continues researching and engaging with outside organisations to look at ways of protecting our precious green spaces, rural environment and wildlife which residents have told us is one of the things they love about living in Hermitage.

Quentin Webb has been looking at housing and views which will form a significant part of the plan. We've secured technical support from AECOM for Housing Design Codes and this will dictate the timescales for producing NDP.

Colin Lovell has taken a number of photos around the village to illustrate some of the spectacular views of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which surrounds our village.

As a relative newcomer to Hermitage, I've been tasked with researching the history of Hermitage. In February, I accompanied Sue Ellis, chair of West Berkshire Heritage Forum, on a walk around the village to look at some of the remaining historic buildings and monuments within the parish. She seemed surprised at how many buildings we still have which reflect the rich past life, businesses and industries of the village. Who knew we had a cottage said to date back to the Civil War, a World War II air raid shelter, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century granary and stable block, all within a stone's throw of Hermitage Parish Church, not to mention a pair of 18<sup>th</sup> Century cottages at the Forest Edge end of the village, one of which was intermittently occupied in 1917-1918 by the writer DH Lawrence?

All of our work is proceeding against a backdrop of constant change in national and county policies. Just as West Berkshire was expected to publish in December last year, their draft Local Plan to 2037 (with which NDP must align), the Department for Communities and Local Government announced sweeping policy changes, throwing all local planning timescales into disarray!

Despite this, SG remains positive. We hope to provide a brief update at The Parish Assembly on 27 April with the hope of being in a position to share the draft Neighbourhood Plan with you late Spring/early summer.

Rosie Healy