



Hermitage NDP

February 2023 Update

Since my January update, the Steering Group (SG) has been involved in a whirlwind of activity to ensure all the required documentation is in place to accompany the submission of Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) to West Berkshire District Council (WBDC) for the beginning of its journey towards formal adoption.

At its meeting on 16 February, Hermitage Parish Council (HPC) is expected to formally approve the final draft Plan (amended to take account of Regulation 14 Public Consultation comments) and its supporting documents for submission to WBDC.

WBDC will manage the next stage over the coming months. Firstly, their Planning team will check all submitted documents to ensure that proper legal process and legal requirements for consultation and publicity have been followed.

Regulation 16 Publicity: If all is found to be in order, WBDC must then publicise HNP for a 6-week period. At this stage, any representations received are passed to the Independent Examiner. Only those representations about whether the proposed HNP meets the basic conditions (and other requirements set out by law) will be considered by the Examiner.

During this period, WBDC will work with HPC to appoint an Independent Examiner, an appropriately qualified and experienced person, who will carry out an independent examination of the HNP.

Independent Examination: The purpose of the Independent Examination is for somebody with no connection to WBDC or HPC to objectively scrutinise the HNP to see whether it meets the basic conditions and requirements set out by law. Following scrutiny, the Examiner will make a report setting out any recommendations for modifications that need to be made before the Plan can proceed to referendum.

Examiner's Report: In consultation with HPC, WBDC will then decide what modifications are required and whether the Plan can proceed to referendum.

Public Referendum: Hopefully the HNP can proceed to Referendum, funded by WBDC and organised by their Election Unit. There will be at least 28 working days' notice. Information about the Referendum and the date will be posted on the WBDC website. Residents on the Electoral Register will be entitled to vote. Our current understanding is that the question likely to be asked is:

"Do you want West Berkshire District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Hermitage Parish to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

Referendum Outcome: If the Referendum results in a majority 'Yes' vote, it becomes 'Adopted' immediately.

We're still hoping the Independent Examination can take place later this Spring so the whole process will be complete by October but due to external factors beyond our control there may be slippage. We'll continue to keep you posted.

Rosie Healy

NDP Steering Group