



Hermitage NDP

Report for

Annual Parish Assembly 2023

For the benefit of those new to Hermitage, for the past 4 years a small band of volunteers has been engaging with residents and other stakeholders to find out how we want our village to look, feel and evolve over the next 15 years.

To do this we developed the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan which sets out planning policies for the Parish. If accepted, it will have legal status when planning applications in the parish are determined.

Over the last 12 months we've continued to work with AECOM on the Hermitage Housing Design Code which sets out how you told us you want any new housing development to look and feel – eco-friendly designed accommodation for all which maintains rural views, reflects the local character and enables development of alternative travel routes.

Our consultant, Navigus Planning, has continued to support us professionally in gathering further evidence to inform policy development and in June 2022 we hosted a second Public Event when we shared with you our first draft Plan and the emerging Design Code.

Your positive feedback from that event enabled us to work over the summer of 2022 to fine-tune the plan and complete the Design Code.

The final draft of the plan was submitted to Hermitage Parish Council (HPC) on 7 September 2022 for approval to proceed to public consultation.

Following some minor amendments, the Parish Council held a widely publicised formal Public Consultation from 24 October to 6 December 2022. A flyer was hand-delivered to every one of Hermitage Parish's 720 households; formal consultation notices were sent to local stakeholders as well as to statutory bodies and to each and every parish and Town Council in and adjacent to West Berkshire.

A total of 13 responses were received and logged from residents and various organisations. In the run-up to Christmas and the New Year 2022/23 this Steering group, supported by Navigus Planning, scrutinised all responses to consider how each impacted the draft plan and what changes might be required.

The first few weeks of 2023 were spent making the necessary changes before the final amended Plan was submitted once more to HPC, this time to approve its submission to West Berkshire Council (WBC) for further public consultation. On receipt of that approval, the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan was formally submitted to WBC on 17 March.

The timing of our submission unfortunately coincided with the delayed completion of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review, which itself was recently out for public consultation.

Resourcing pressures at West Berks have meant their workload has had to be re-prioritised. Consequently, it's more than likely that progress of our Plan will suffer further delay through this next stage which is beyond our control.

We had expected that the formal 6-week public consultation run by West Berks would be underway already and that by now we would be involved with the appointment of an Independent Examiner.

Following this second formal public consultation, examination is a necessary and critical step in ensuring the Plan is legally compliant and that it has gone through all the required processes.

We are currently awaiting a progress update from WBC so our timeline can be adjusted accordingly.

Our initial timeline envisaged the Examiner's report in June so that queries raised could be addressed and resolved by autumn to enable WBC to arrange the Public Referendum by November 2023. This referendum will ask the question "Do you want West Berkshire Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Hermitage to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area." A voting card will be issued to each registered voter in the Parish together with instructions on how to vote.

Your vote is important as this affects the future of our village for the next 15 years.

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

Of course, all dates are provisional and dependent entirely on external factors outside our control. We will keep pressing WBC for progress reports and keep you updated via Pathfinder magazine and the village Facebook page as well as on the Parish website. At the current time however, it is looking likely that the referendum will not be held until early 2024.

I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Nicky Pierce, Parish Council Clerk for her sterling work in getting all the public consultation notices out to the relevant bodies and local stakeholders then managing the responses in an orderly and timely manner. Also sincere thanks to the local foot soldiers who delivered the consultation flyers to each household in a very short timescale.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to the Steering Group members – Ruth Cottingham, Quentin Webb and David Dobson who've each become experts on a variety of unfamiliar topics and have supported me and each other over the past year.

Your unfailing enthusiasm and perseverance have succeeded in getting Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan this far.

Rosie Healy

Steering Group Secretary