



Hermitage NDP

July 2023 Update

Firstly, I must apologise for the lack of updates since March but sadly there's been nothing to report!

As you may recall, at its meeting on 16 February, Hermitage Parish Council formally approved the Hermitage Neighbourhood Plan for submission to West Berkshire District Council (WBDC) for the beginning of its journey towards formal adoption. Our understanding is that our Plan successfully completed the mandatory Legal Compliance Check on 16 March.

So it's immensely disappointing that despite Steering Group's regular enquiries to ascertain its current status there's been less progress than was expected.

However, having enlisted the help of our newly-elected District Councillor, Heather Codling, we finally received a response explaining that the 4-month delay has been due to a significant reduction in WBDC Planning Policy resources. Furthermore, resourcing pressures have been compounded by the simultaneous passage of The West Berkshire Local Plan through the regulatory process plus a lengthy planning enquiry.

It appears that recent changes to the Council's Constitution have also thrown a spanner in the works! Unfortunately, it looks like this will mean additional delays to the Plan's progress with the Consultation period likely to be extended to 8 weeks rather than the 6-week minimum prescribed by legislation.

Additionally, WBDC procurement processes are likely to change so that the streamlined appointment of the Independent Examiner will now have to go through a lengthy tendering process. Planning Policy are currently awaiting clarification of the impact of these changes from their Legal Team but have told us they will endeavour to commence the 8-week Consultation as soon as clarification is received.

Our original timeline expected the Consultation would have been completed by Easter with the Independent Examination completed by mid-June so at the time of writing this report (mid-June) we're already 17 weeks adrift with no revised projected timeline from WBDC.

Based on these changes, I loosely calculate that the remaining work required by WBDC to get our Plan ready for the Public Referendum (when all Hermits will be able to vote on it) will take over 30 weeks! In light of this, our earlier hopes of having our Plan adopted by Autumn or Christmas have been shattered.

Once we get an indication from WBDC that the process has restarted, I'll provide a further update.

Rosie Healy

NDP Steering Group