



Hermitage NDP

October 2023 Update

On 17 February this year, the Hermitage Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was formally submitted to West Berkshire District Council (WBDC) who have responsibility for taking it forward. Despite regular update requests, little was forthcoming. Consequently, it came as quite a surprise when, nearly 5 months later on the evening of 14 July, WBDC advised Steering Group that the Regulation 16 stage of Public Consultation would be held from 21 July until 1 September. Despite the short notice, we managed to print off and post notices around the village as well as publicising the consultation on the Hermitage Facebook site.

WBDC have shared copies of the 8 responses received with Steering Group, together with their comments. Steering Group convened a meeting to review them but agreed that, at this stage, no action was necessary. Any action required will be addressed when questions arising as part of the Examination process are dealt with. WBDC have since published all responses together with a copy of our Neighbourhood Plan on their website

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/41102/Hermitage-Neighbourhood-Plan>

On 29 September, we learned that WBDC had appointed the company, Intelligent Plans and Examinations, to provide Independent Examiners. We understand that on 5 October approval was granted for our Plan to proceed to Independent Examination. The following week WBDC confirmed that the Hermitage NDP had indeed been submitted to the Independent Examiner.

The Independent Examination stage of the process generally takes 6-8 weeks from Plan submission to completion of the Examiner's report.

Based on this, our expectation is that the Independent Examiner's report will be complete by the beginning of December when the next and final step in the process will begin.

The final stage is for WBDC to arrange a Public Referendum which will be run by WBDC Electoral Services so may be subject to a long lead-in time. All Parish residents on the Electoral Register will receive a voting card 28 days before the Referendum on which there will be a simple question along the lines of:

"Do you want WBDC to use the neighbourhood plan for Hermitage Parish to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

Steering Group is optimistic that Hermits will get to vote on Hermitage NDP early in 2024, before the anniversary of its submission to WBDC for completion of the statutory process.

Rosie Healy

NDP Steering Group