

North Marston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

REPORT FOR ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING

19 May 2020

7.30pm

Since last year's meeting, the Steering Group has used the analysis of the Parish Questionnaire to produce the structure of a Plan which, as well as the essential facts and figures about North Marston, will contain 4 main chapter headings:

- History and Heritage
- Green Environment
- Community and Sustainability
- Built Environment

Much of the Group's work over the past 12 months has been geared towards developing sets of objectives and draft policies for each of these chapters, and painstakingly gathering evidence to validate the objectives and ensure that they not only support answers and opinions expressed in the Questionnaire, but also have a basis in fact!

With the exception of "Built Environment", which is being developed following whole group discussions, the work on each of the other chapters has been the responsibility of one or two members of the Group, and it has taken much time and effort to produce. I would, therefore, like to thank my fellow Group members - Trevor Jenkins, Katherine du Plessis, and Bev Davies - for their (mostly) uncomplaining hard work over the past year, and record my appreciation.

With regard to "History and Heritage", I would also like to thank personally the History Club Committee for the help that they have given me, and for their co-operation and interest. In particular, I would like to thank John Spargo for the interesting discussions we have had, and for the great amount of work that John has done to provide us with a comprehensive evidence base for the chapter. This will be invaluable.

North Marston's History and Heritage is the parish's USP - its unique selling point - and its rich historical past is unrivalled anywhere else in the area. Heritage will be an important element in the Plan, and will very much be a factor in our plans for the parish's development. Our independent consultant recognises this, and fully supports us in this approach.

The objectives, and, to some extent, the draft policies, have been completed for all chapters except "Built Environment", and we originally expected to have everything completed and agreed by the end of April, in time for presentation to the Parish Council at their Annual Meeting on 12 May.

We were then planning to hold an Open Parish Exhibition during June to display and discuss our draft plans with residents, and to follow this with other presentations over the summer months as the Plan took more definite shape.

By the end of April, too, we had anticipated having the results from our other major initiative of 2020 - a Young Person's Survey drawn up with the co-operation of all youth organisations and North Marston School, This has been printed, and was on the point of being distributed in early March when Covid-19 intervened.

The intention of this Survey is to try and access the thoughts and opinions of younger parish members, a group under-represented in the Questionnaire returns, and to examine whether they differ significantly in any respects, The Steering Group has a duty to try and reflect the views of as wide a resident population as possible.

Again, I would like to thank all the organisation representatives who not only gave up their time to help and advise us at specially arranged meetings, but also agreed so readily to co-operate in presenting the Survey to their members. Cathy Gouldstone, in particular, managed to conduct group discussions with her pupils about the Survey in what were very trying and confusing times for the school.

All these plans and initiatives are, of course, currently on hold as we await developments with the Covid-19 lockdown. Official guidance currently prevents Group members from venturing out into the community to carry out any work or research on the Neighbourhood Plan, so we are restricted to desk-bound activities and virtual communication, meaning that any significant progress is difficult at the moment. We can do little beyond refining existing objectives and gathering what further evidence we can from internet sources.

Like everyone else, we are looking forward to meeting in person once again, but it is almost certain that our progress has effectively been delayed by at least 3 months, and maybe longer. The Group will only be able to hold meetings again when it is possible for over-70s and the clinically vulnerable to attend. This is because we have only 4 members, the minimum possible under our Terms of Reference, so all members need to be present for an official meeting to take place.

Any Open Parish Exhibition also needs to wait until all residents can attend, to ensure that every resident has an opportunity to express their opinions.

Our original timetable envisaged the Plan's completion around September 2020, ready for submission to Buckinghamshire Council and other third parties for their consideration. This should have cleared the way for the Plan being presented for final parish acceptance around March 2021.

We now hope to have the Plan completed by the end of 2020, with parish consultations taking place during the autumn months - but even that is uncertain at the moment.

Michael Lane
Steering Group Chair
11 May 2020