

Neighbourhood Plan Panel Review – 19th February 2013

Location: BioRegional, 24 Helios Road, Wallington, SM6 7BZ

Present:

Cabe at Design Council:

Colin Haylock	Chair
Liane Hartley	Panellist
Penelope Tollitt	Panellist
Kathy MacEwen	Head – Planning & Enabling
Mathieu Proctor	Advisor – Planning & Enabling
Thomas Bender	Senior Advisor – Design Review (Observer)

Hackbridge & Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Development Group (HBCDG):

Helena Barrowclough	Chair
Lysanne Horrox	
Sue Riddlestone	
Tony Killespy	
Roy Bennett	
Peter Alfrey	
Peter Lloyd	

LB Sutton:

Dean James	Planning Officer, Spatial Planning
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Locality:

Tony Burton	Observer
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Documents tabled:

- Hackbridge & Beddington Core DG – Draft Neighbourhood Plan – February 2013

Thank you to all that attended the Design Council Cabe Neighbourhood Plan Panel Review on the 19th February 2013. We appreciate the time and effort you made in preparing for this, and for taking the time to attend the session in Hackbridge.



Listed here are the informal review notes. These are not Design Council Cabe formal comments, and are merely to act as an aid for any points you may not have captured on the day. We hope that you find them useful.

Key points

- Be 'hard-nosed' and pragmatic, focussing on what you want to change in your neighbourhood, alongside what LB Sutton can do for you – attempt to work from 'specific issues out to the strategic', rather than 'general topics into detail'
- Be conscious of the fact that Hackbridge & Beddington is 'more than a plan' – you're an organisation who are already making changes and *doing* neighbourhood planning – even if you edit your emerging plan, nothing you have done will be wasted
- You have already completed an impressive quantity of work, and are considering some very interesting challenges – you will benefit from further definition of your priorities and a greater degree of clarity around 'this place'
- The 'Heart of Hackbridge' concept is strong, and would benefit from greater attention to make it work better – think about how to accommodate 1500 new residents who will contribute more than just outward commuting
- The policies you develop will be utilised as Development Management tools – endeavour to make them user-friendly

We were hugely impressed with the volume and quality of the work that has gone into the draft Hackbridge & Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Plan. A tremendous start has been made on developing your Neighbourhood Plan, with the level of maturity you have as an organisation, and the positive aspirations you have for your place, clear to see – you should take great strength from this as you move forward in the plan-making process. The emerging plan would perhaps benefit from a clearer sense of the unique characteristics of Hackbridge, and those issues and qualities of place you feel are most significant to you as a neighbourhood group – this prioritisation exercise can then feed into your Vision for Hackbridge and Beddington Corner, and the policies required to achieve the outcomes you want to see. In addition, by establishing what is important to you, it may be easier to show how the Hackbridge & Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Plan differs from the LB Sutton Core Strategy, and those principles any potential developer should adhere to when negotiating a planning application.

There is real power within the planning system, and the way in which your plan will be used as a development tool. There are some issues, such as supply chains, that are clearly linked to the 'sustainable suburb' concept, but which fall outside the statutory planning system – consider developing an Action Plan alongside the Neighbourhood Plan to capture these issues, and to reflect the wider role an impressive organisation like the Hackbridge & Beddington Corner Neighbourhood Development Group could assume.



The discussions held in the workshop can be summarised under the three headings taken from [Planning for places](#): telling the story, set the agenda and say it clearly.

Telling the story

- Though HBCDG's aspirations are identifiable at present, it is difficult to sense your priorities
- Clearly presented ideas about what would constitute successful outcomes for the community in future, will help in your negotiations with developers and stakeholders – this will require you to identify your priorities and areas of significance – it might be useful to think about what you would say about a future Hackbridge in 10 minutes
- It is important to clearly state areas of difference between the HBCDG Neighbourhood Plan and the adopted LB Sutton Core Strategy – there seems to be overlap on sustainability and the Wandle Valley Park – think about what your Neighbourhood Plan is adding to extant policy
- Map and discuss particular areas of intervention and specific important sites – it would be good to look at some places in much more detail
- The key issues matrix you have developed is good, well realised, and attractive
- The plan would benefit from an Executive Summary – this can help in discussing what you want and where you want to go – a 3-5 page plan summary document can act as a basis for consultation with stakeholders
- At present the Vision is overly broad, and could be used to describe anywhere – this is a missed opportunity to talk about things that are significant to the community, such as Beddington Country Park – developing a Vision should force you to think about what really matters for your place – it's a process of establishing what is uniquely significant to you, and what your specific priorities are - an example might be that HBCDG is considering a 'green economy', and not just a 'traditional' economy
- Consider and list the Principles derived from community consultation that can and should drive site organisation - the Vision is a statement of the outcomes from this process - it may also be beneficial to incorporate a hierarchy into your vision, ranging from the wider strategic to the site specific
- At present, the 'Environment' section doesn't bring out the big things in your neighbourhood like Beddington Regional Park or the River Wandle – your presentation touched on how important these features are to you, so bring them forward in your plan
- The idea of being an 'exemplar suburban sustainable community' is attractive – ensure that readers know what being a sustainable community this actually means in terms of your plan, and how it will be delivered
- The Neighbourhood Plan has the potential to include a richer range of aspirations than the LB Sutton Core Strategy, such as the future of the Felnax site and **your** community objectives to maximise sustainability – remember that 'simply summarising' isn't simple!



- Neighbourhood Planning does not exist in a vacuum – the wider socio-economic context is constantly changing – think about the possible future scenarios your completed Neighbourhood Plan might be used within
- Think about drafting a Community Charter
- Policy and outcomes must be related to one another, with ‘policy’ showing the thinking required to achieve desired ‘outcomes’ – it is acceptable to develop detailed policy after you have made decisions about the key things you want to influence, and what you actually want to achieve – also give consideration to those things that must not happen if your objectives are to be realised
- It may be useful to develop an Action Plan alongside the Neighbourhood Plan to contend with those problems that can't be solved through planning - for example, planners can't control supply chains - be clear what will be delivered through the Neighbourhood Plan, and what will require other measures
- The Felnax site and Hackbridge Station clearly show as places needing stakeholder negotiations
- Understand the need for stakeholder engagement in the Wandle Valley – think about where is it likely you will want to significantly diverge from LB Sutton policy – where will you make a difference?
- Take this opportunity to define those neighbourhood qualities and characteristics you value, and which must be set aside – the Neighbourhood Plan should be a tool for discussions about development applications, with applicants being told ‘these are the things we value as a community, so how your application will add to them?’

Setting the agenda

- Hackbridge's development has been piecemeal – don't replicate this in the document – strive for a coherent single document – e.g. be aware that at present your Policy Objectives are different to your Initial Objectives
- Ensure the plan is realistic and feasible – consider how do you deliver? How do you fund?
- The concept of ‘streets as places’ is good, and a lot can hang from this – great idea
- You are right to focus on the green grid as the jewel in the crown
- Consider your plan as a live document
- Think about the power that the legislative framework of the 1990 Town & Country Planning Act actually gives you – the Localism Act 2011 is an ‘insert’ to this – the real power is to use the planning system to your community benefit



- Use Section 3 'Specific Site Proposals' to set out a development brief – you are developing a document against which applications will be assessed – be clear about what you want to see in terms of contributing to the wider community
- Felnex is the 'big site' in your plan, incorporating all the debates around zero carbon development and/or offsets to upgrade existing building stock – you need to make sure you use planning in the optimal way
- Hackbridge is highly constrained, and you need to confront the harsh realities about where to direct your energies with the limited resources in your possession – in concise terms you have 5 key themes and the 1 Planet Living concept informing the emerging plan – it is important to 'hammer out' a collective view and related site specific proposals
- Be confident about questioning the Felnex master plan – gain education about systems and policy areas – there is a danger of it ultimately changing into something you don't want it to be
- Decide how important the issue of social housing is to you - is Felnex or Hackbridge Station more important? This is a tough question but requires clarity
- Know that you won't have time to achieve all your contents page, and it's likely you won't be able to solve all your problems - some issues are better resolved through negotiation beyond the plan making process - by chasing a 'perfect plan' you may lose the biggest opportunities for change, such as the Felnex site
- It is always hard to set plan deadlines as you can't know don't know the number of consultation responses you will receive – September 2014 is probably a realistic target
- The initial consultation phase is valuable as the plan becomes a reality at this point, and the local authority can see what your objectives are – work towards making this happen
- You appear to be a very strong group, but be aware of things that might overtake you during the plan making process - strong leadership is important if you are to avoid producing a bland plan
- Be confident about your capabilities as you are already *doing* neighbourhood planning – not having an adopted Neighbourhood Plan at this point in time need not, and should not, stop your other group activities
- Where Neighbourhood Plan delivery comes 'too late' e.g. during re-negotiations with a developer on a consented application such as at Felnex (it's possible the developer may be rushing without care and attention) apply a set of principles during negotiations which would result in a satisfactory outcome for all - developers will only respond to change if they can sense the benefits to themselves
- Be clear about what you absolutely need from Felnex, such as a supermarket with street frontage, which could be 'exchanged' for allowing more units elsewhere on site – be hard-nosed as a group and seek a balance during negotiations - by trying for perfection you could lose everything



- Is there some detail to insert into the Project Proposal sections? Is there potential in the idea of 'Felnex – A Sustainable Development'?
- Policy can be seen as a lever to obtain the outcomes you want – a 'crunch point' - if you need a policy to achieve your objectives, it will emerge – as a consequence don't worry about 'policy' unnecessarily – 'setting the agenda' is what you want to achieve – it actually doesn't matter if explicit 'policies' aren't drafted as in legal terms every word in the plan has equal weight and is a material consideration– at this point prioritise listing your objectives with 'policy' details to follow
- The Upper Eden Neighbourhood Plan identifies specific areas where Neighbourhood Plan policy has been required to differ substantially from local planning authority policy – this is a valuable exercise so think about giving sufficient attention to areas of difference from the LB Sutton Core Strategy
- Talk about specifics in your plan, e.g. Hackbridge's specific Green Corridor, and not all Green Corridors in LB Sutton, as these are discussed in LB Sutton's Core Strategy
- Even if you only produce a small number of key policies that are beyond those contained in LB Sutton's Core strategy, always think about their use in the context of Development Management
- Throw some darts in a map of the neighbourhood, and ask yourselves whether you have sufficient policies to protect against unwanted applications of varying kinds – residential, commercial – in the sites you hit
- Look to develop cross-cutting objectives throughout the plan – construct further support for arguments where necessary in this manner
- Local authority Local Plans contain some very definitive policies - 'we require' – in addition to 'we encourage' policies – be aware that these 'encourage' policies contain far less weight, and can leave the public disappointed as they may not appreciate the difference and therefore get frustrated with perceived non-delivery – in this instance a 'we require' policy might be 'demonstrate 1 Planet living principles' – this decision could be an action point
- The plan would benefit from requiring development to 'complement' the area, as well as 'demonstrating' application of principles
- The plan must say something about Metropolitan Open Land – don't miss this opportunity

Saying it clearly

- Bear in mind the audience for your plan, and the ways in which the document will actually be used – at present you have 4 documents in 1 – return to the document to separate objectives from aspirations from outcomes
- The 'Site' section of the draft plan is strong – look to replicate this approach throughout the document



- Map the contents of Section 2 (Initial Policies; Neighbourhood Proposals; Neighbourhood Projects) to show the relationships between them, and with other sites – this can help negotiations with developers
- Planners can favour words over maps and images – this is a shame as maps can function as a discussion and carry a powerful message – look to be as graphic as possible where possible
- The purpose of including ‘objectives’ under policies is unclear – perhaps don’t spend any more time on these
- The ‘high quality design’ policy in Section 2 features in virtually every plan in England – you don’t need to include such a general policy in your plan - focus on place specific design policy
- Avoid attempting to produce a ‘mini District Plan’ – be as place specific as possible
- Policies can be described as simple expressions in good English of what you want to see
- In general terms, the draft Neighbourhood Plan seems to ally with the LB Sutton adopted Core Strategy
- Include as much or as little detail as is necessary to meet your objectives – focus on these, and reduce any detail beyond specific issues which would be contained in other strategic policy documents – any detail you edit out can be used for other projects and rest assured your work isn’t wasted

Further Design Council CAFE support

Design Council CAFE run a number of services that can help deliver your planning objectives. These services include:

- Mapping and visioning exercises
- Councillor design training
- Councillor visioning exercises
- Neighbourhood planning design support
- Design workshop days

If you are interested in any follow up services from Design Council CAFE, then please contact cabe@designcouncil.org.uk

