

Neighbourhood Planning Public Meeting, St Just WI Hall

Wednesday 8th November 2017, 6.30pm

By 6.15pm the hall was full and all the remaining chairs were brought out, but still many people had to stand, crowding into every corner and the corridor outside. There were in excess of 150 people present.

Zoe Baxter (St Just Town Councillor) welcomed everyone and briefly outlined the long journey over several years which had led to this evening's meeting. She explained that this meeting was to gauge public interest in neighbourhood planning, explain what a Neighbourhood Plan is, and to invite members of the community to get involved in helping to produce it.

Sue James (Cornwall Councillor for St Just) explained that maps on the CC website just record land being offered for consideration for housing, with no assumption that planning would be either sought or granted. This issue had brought some people to the meeting, concerned at a perceived plan to build more estates, and some upset that this issue had been raised. It was explained that a NP is the community's chance to consider and identify preferred sites for housing, decide green areas for protection and consider other community needs between now and 2030.

James Hardy (Cornwall Council West Penwith Community Link Officer) gave a presentation (PowerPoint attached). He explained that he supported the fifteen towns and parishes of West Penwith.

Cornwall as with every Local Authority has to publish a Local Plan. The government has insisted that Cornwall build 52,500 houses 2010-2030, of which 3150 are allocated to the wider 'West Penwith' area, with 2150 in Penzance, leaving 1000 for the remainder of West Penwith. The Cornwall Local Plan sets this out in detail.

A Neighbourhood Plan can be an important tool to help a community shape how future development happens. There is less detail in central government planning policies which can result in a default position of pro-development at a local level. A Neighbourhood Plan isn't about stopping development from happening but is a way of bringing the community together to help shape development. At the moment Town and Parishes are 'consultees' in the planning process; the fundamental difference is that through a Neighbourhood Plan locally written planning policies become part of the statutory planning process. A NP can be simple or complicated.

What are the priorities here? - This is your opportunity to shape where, how, what it looks like, considering your environment assets. Phased development is possible, over some years rather than all at once.

The plan covers the period up to 2030, but it is a living document, so can be reviewed.

The Town Council is the responsible body in this, having designated the Parish boundary to start the process. But a NP has to be community-driven and community-led, with a statement of community involvement, and has to pass a technical inspection before going to referendum. There are four work streams – the Steering Group, and subgroups for Community Engagement, the Natural Environment and the Built Environment (Built Environment includes employment space and economic growth – what kind of businesses do you want?)

There were questions and discussion about

- infrastructure demands, and where development might happen
- affordable homes > answer: housing needs work has already been done
'We can put all sorts of measures in place to make it affordable, but if it isn't viable then no developer will build them'
- whether we can go against the government > answer: no, we can't
- what support the community has to ensure that any plan passes the examination > answer: specific planners at CC have the technical advice to offer
- how much it will cost > answer: depends on the size of the plan and the amount of expertise bought in. The hope is that much can be done using skills within the community. Central government provides a grant of £9000, and some of the major costs are covered by CC
- what is the definition of a home > answer: it is a unit of accommodation, ranging from a one-room flat to a mansion
- the timescale > answer: probably two years. But the NP holds weight at every stage of its development. If you have developed sites etc. in emerging work, that holds weight

The discussion moved on to how to progress a Neighbourhood Plan for St Just and who can help.

- We are not looking for a room full of planners. We need people passionate about local community and who can work together with us.
- The priority is - what is important about this area that we want to protect? What are the development opportunities?
- There is no need to start from scratch, but to look at the MCTI work of ten years ago, the Community Survey of three years ago, and build on that. The public consultation St Just in Penwith rural priority parish (May 2010) led to the Gews Farm estate being the preferred site
- It is essential that we reach out to the whole community – it will need lots of volunteers to join the community engagement group.
- We can look at examples of neighbourhood plans already written in other parts of Cornwall.
- This is about empowering our community.

Debbie Shephard (St Just Town Councillor) closed the meeting around 8.15pm, thanking James Hardy, and encouraging people to get involved. 68 people then signed up to indicate their interest in helping with the Neighbourhood Plan.