

Membury Neighbourhood Plan Update

Examiners first report

Our Neighbourhood Plan has been formally submitted to Mr Meads, the Examiner jointly appointed by EDDC and ourselves.

He has, to date:-

- confirmed that the parish has been a properly established Neighbourhood Plan area
- decided that the Plan has been correctly prepared
- agreed that he has all the necessary supporting documentation
- confirmed that the Plan meets all the necessary European, UK and local legal requirements.

However, he has submitted an early report to EDDC and the Parish Council for fact checking which somewhat decimates our housing concepts.

Despite all our public consultations and questionnaires and the significant local majority for the policies put forward in the Plan he is minded to **delete the named hamlets** of Furley, Longbridge, Rock and Webble Green from all aspects of our Housing Policies because he is "uncomfortable" with the concept of dispersing our low level of development into them, despite the restriction of a maximum of 2 to 3 new builds in the village or any hamlet.

Further, although he confirms that Strategies 6, 7 and 27 in the Local Plan allow properly formulated Neighbourhood Plans to take precedence, he **does not regard any of the hamlets as "settlements"** and therefore defines them in planning terms as "open countryside" - thus precluding any new development. Also, despite the Local Plan defining the whole parish (including the village) as "open countryside", he suggests that there should be up to 15 new developments within the village only - a vast increase on what your consistent feedback had suggested. He **does not consider the flood risk to be sufficient reason to prevent this** as, he reasons, large areas of the parish are covered by the Environment Agency Flood Risk category 3, so the village is no different to, say, Longbridge in risk.

To my mind, (and I stress that these are my conclusions and may not represent those of the rest of the Steering Group or the Parish Council) this makes a mockery of the principles of Neighbourhood Planning, namely that "*Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.*"¹ Thus, local people can make planning rules based upon local needs and local knowledge - of course providing what they want is legal and meets with all necessary rules and laws. Our Plan meets these criterion but the Examiner appears to be ignoring all local opinion, all consultation and all housing questionnaire results together with the EDDC Local Plan by deciding, with no evidence, that 15 new homes should be built in Membury village. Amazingly, having challenged our Plan housing proposals, EDDC have not challenged the Examiner!

¹ Taken from the government guidance "What is neighbourhood planning?" Published 6 March 2014 as part of the Localism Act (Last updated 22 February 2018) by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.

On your behalf the Steering Group have attempted to challenge the factual basis for Mr Meads conclusions. We await his response!

Alex Tasker