

Ross-on-Wye Neighbourhood Development Plan

Notes of Meeting with Herefordshire Council 7th April

Attendees:

Herefordshire Council:

Richard Gabb	Programme Director of Housing and Growth
Samantha Banks	Neighbourhood Planning Team Leader
Jill Tookey-Williams	Area Engineer, Transportation
Liz Duberley	Senior Landscape Officer
Stephanie Kitto	Neighbourhood Planning Officer
Vicky Eaton	Senior Planning Officer (Strategic Planning)
Angela Newey	Senior Planning Officer (Strategic Planning)
Stuart Powell	Planning Officer (Strategic Planning)
Roland Close	Principal Planning Officer (Development Management)
Gavin Stephen	Economic Development Officer
Nick Webster	Economic Development Manager
Andy Hough	Head of Educational Development
Sue Woodrow	Schools Capital Investment Advisor

Ross-on-Wye NDP Group:

Nigel Gibbs	Mayor of Ross-on-Wye Town Council
Jeff Bishop	Place Studio
Cleo Newcombe-Jones	Place Studio

Background Documents

In advance of the meeting the following documents had been circulated, by each party:

Ross NDP:

- Questions for Herefordshire Council
- Draft Ross NDP v4
- Broadmeadow draft concept

Herefordshire Council:

The following documents had been prepared by the Local Education Authority:

- Ashfield Park School postcodes
- Ross Schools Review against Local Transport Plan objectives
- Ross-on-Wye Alternative Site Responses Schedule
- Ross and the Schools Capital Investment Strategy - initial comments

Notes:

Welcome and introductions

As an overall introduction there was feedback from Herefordshire Council (HC) that the Ross NDP was looking very professional, and was coming together well. All parties acknowledged the benefits of discussions at this key stage. The meeting was to be chaired by RG.

It was agreed that the discussions would take part in two parts: the first part focusing on sites including Broadmeadow and the schools review, the second part considering detailed comments on the draft NDP and dealing with any still outstanding questions.

Broadmeadow Site

CNJ and JB set the scene for the work to date on Broadmeadow as part of the NDP process. There was local consensus through work on the NDP that the site was underused, unattractive and a blight at the centre of the town. Improvements are needed and a long term plan is sought to re-develop the site.

Although there are some existing uses on the site, the level of employment it generates is very low, the access is poor and the environment is degraded.

It was noted that the owner of the adjoining caravan park had recently suggested that they were considering vacating that site.

Utilising available information from Herefordshire Council, the Environment Agency and submitted material from the Tesco application, the NDP group had prepared a first draft site concept. Feedback was sought on this.

It was noted by JB and CNJ that there still remain a number of unknown factors where information is limited, specifically:

- The Herefordshire update to the Strategic Flood Risk (SFRA) for this area, taking into account the recent flood alleviation works nearby, was not yet complete and the specific timeframe for this work was not known. The Environment Agency flood mapping still indicates that most of the Broadmeadow site is within Flood Zone 3.
- Information on contaminated land within the site is also lacking. The Environmental Health team at Herefordshire Council had noted that the site is likely to be contaminated, however, the extent of this and the costs of necessary remediation remain unknown.
- There is as yet no detailed transport assessment for the site, assessing the capacity of potential access points to the site.

JB and CNJ also stated that they would like a steer on whether or not Herefordshire Council representatives would support the allocation of the site, or the inclusion of a concept plan for the site in the NDP. Comments on the initial concept plan were sought. JB stated that the Regulation 14 Draft NDP could possibly be completed in the next 2-3 months.

The following comments were made from Herefordshire Council representatives who attended:

- It was noted that the concept would work whether or not the Gypsy & Traveller site allocation was taken forward on the triangle of Council owned land to the south of the main site. This site

would accommodate up to 5 pitches but with no facilities as it is intended to be strictly temporary. There was uncertainty about whether or not an allocation would be made for this Council owned site for temporary travellers pitches (see later).

- GS/NW from the Economic Development team confirmed they considered this to be an existing employment site, albeit poorly performing, but welcomed the aspiration to see it redeveloped to include employment uses. At approx. 2.2 ha., they did not consider the site of strategic importance in terms of employment, and they did not consider there was any conflict with the aspirations for Model Farm. It was suggested that the concept in the NDP should be based on at least retaining the same level of job numbers as the current uses. GS/NW mentioned they could help the NDP process by suggesting some reasonable figures to quoted in NDP policy about the level of employment to be retained.
- It was acknowledged by HC that there was still an information gap with respect to the Flood map data, and that this was key to the development options for the site. The Flood Zone 3 status currently precludes housing development, but employment development would be acceptable. HC were unclear as to when the updated SFRA would be available, and there is no indication as to whether there will be any change to the flood zoning for this site.
- There was broad agreement that parts of the site should be retained as a green link as indicated, with a need to scope further the nature of improved access via a footpath and cycleway along a linear green link along the southern edge of the site noted by JTW from the transport team.
- Transport access to Broadmeadow via the road by the side of Morrisons was agreed to be poor, and there was support to close this as a vehicular access route through to the Broadmeadow site.
- It was noted that the eastern access via the Sea Cadets site was challenging due to the level changes there and that further work would be needed to determine the feasibility of this. (The Sea Cadets will shortly be vacating their premises.)
- If small scale retail was to be included on the site, it was noted that this should be limited to 400m² area. A large scale retail proposal (such as the previous Tesco scheme) was not considered appropriate due to the impact on town centre retail - the main reason for refusal of the previous Tesco application.
- It was noted that a major issue would be lack of viability of employment development. It was suggested that a mixed use development could be encouraged, albeit contingent to some change to the flood zoning.
- It was noted that the existing car parking sites (owned by Herefordshire Council), were included in the proposed site area. The larger car park to the north east of the site was most likely needed, and it should be retained. In any case, through access as currently indicated in the concept diagram would take a road through the Plough Inn Listed Building. Any access point would need to be moved away from this location.
- It was confirmed that there was a pre-app discussion of the old garage site to the north of Broadmeadow, for housing led development (area F on plan).

JB confirmed that no contact had yet been made with Broadmeadow site owners; this to be done following the clarifications about development as above.

Model Farm

GS/NW from the Economic Development team shared the masterplan which now had planning consent. The proposal is for a 15 ha. site to be developed, with 5 ha. of landscaped green space. The current proposal is currently unviable without major subsidy.

CNJ queried the extent of and the reasons for the viability gap. GS explained the viability gap was two-fold: (i) the type of employment uses proposed were not viable - build costs exceed use value, and (ii) the infrastructure required to support the development was expensive.

GS confirmed that HC were committed to providing a 15 ha. employment site to the east of Ross, but that there was now a need to look again at the options, considering the wider landholdings of Herefordshire Council on the east of the town. For example, a housing development could cross-subsidise an employment development, and/or could support associated infrastructure.

There were also options to consider the role of Marsh Farm in providing supporting infrastructure and potentially an access road from Model Farm.

Any strategy resulting from this work would be for a timescale beyond 2031.

Marsh Farm

SB confirmed she has recently met with Savills on behalf of the landowners for Marsh Farm, and that she had encouraged them to make contact with Ross Town Council in relation to the NDP. HC saw no issues with the Town Council meeting with Savills to discuss this site and its potential future development. It was agreed that the NDP group would feed back to HC any outcomes from this meeting.

Strategic Issues

JB shared a diagram which highlighted development sites including Overross, Tanyard Lane, Broadmeadow, the Caravan Park, Marsh Farm and Model Farm, with the strategic green infrastructure corridors shown underneath (replicated from the Core Strategy). The need to develop a strategic framework to consider Broadmeadow area in conjunction with the sites to the east was discussed. It was agreed this was strategic and beyond the remit of an NDP, and something that the Local Planning Authority would address, to ensure that piecemeal development did not emerge missing opportunities for connections and green infrastructure. However, work underway on this broader strategy would help to reinforce the validity of any Broadmeadow proposals.

Strategic Schools Review for Ross

AH and SW were in attendance on behalf of the Local Education Authority. They explained their work to date (as circulated) and stated that they were focused on looking for sites in central Ross which would best fit with the pattern of where children were coming from in the town. Ashfield Park School has issues in terms of transport accessibility and also its running costs are very high. Funding to refurbish or rebuild the school on the same site was not seen to be achievable, so options involving disposal of this high value site were being seen as a way of funding the development of a new school site. The Ashfield Park School currently occupies a 2.7 ha. site, a

1.8 ha. site is required. Part of the Ashfield Park School site has a covenant on the land, the rest is unrestricted.

Other potential sites in the south side of Ross were not of interest (St. Joseph's School is also located on the south side and has room for minor expansion), and sites to the east within new development areas had also been dismissed as being too far away from where children lived in the current catchment. It was noted that the work to date had been led by the Local Education Authority, and that there was a need for further discussions with Planning.

On this basis the Local Education Authority had focused attention on Broadmeadow and Tanyard Lane (it was noted that perhaps now the Caravan Park site should also be considered, particularly as this contained a small area of zone 2 flood risk). However, there are a number of issues with these sites:

- Tanyard Lane - major access problems. Tanyard Lane itself is a private access road, although alternative access could be achieved through the adjoining Persimmon site or via the laundry site (the latter had a pre-app although development may not result due to contamination issues). JTW noted the alternative access options and said they would now be included in the assessment. It was noted that were likely to be major contamination issues on Tanyard Lane site, to the extent that viability of school development could be compromised, even if enabling housing was considered alongside this. The level of contamination and potential remediation costs are unknown.
- Broadmeadow - currently flood zone 3 and not suitable on this basis, access constrained and contamination and related cost issues unknown.
- Caravan site - not considered as yet.

The potential to retain the school on its current site needed further scope to show that this was not possible in planning terms. In addition, a risk was flagged that the capacity of the Ashfield Park School site for housing development may be being over-stated (and hence its value overstated). The site is within the Conservation Area and there may be a need to keep parts of the site open on character grounds. The need to retain playing fields, or consider retaining playing fields and an adequate disposal process for this aspect was flagged.

It was agreed that the Local Education Authority would need to work fast to assess sites and identify their preferred school site, in agreement with the Local Planning Authority, so that a robust evidence base, with sound rationale could be produced. This could then be used to slot the site allocation into the NDP. Ross TC are not expected to undertake this technical evidence or bear the cost of this detailed work.

In advance of a site allocation being included in the NDP, the Local Education Authority need to make sure that the proposals were in the public domain as it would not be appropriate for this to be released through the NDP process; it would put undue pressure on the NDP and the Steering Group.

A number of officers left the meeting at this point, as employment and education issues had been discussed.

Pre App Engagement

JB asked whether Ross TC could be included as part of pre-app discussions with developers, as they are a statutory NDP group undertaking statutory plan-making. RC stated that most pre-apps were no longer confidential, and in many cases there was no commercially sensitive information. HC were asked to confirm their position on this and suggest any conditions for the inclusion of Ross TC in any discussions.

Gypsy & Traveller DPD

AN confirmed that they were seeking to prepare a pre-submission draft DPD for consultation in summer 2017, although site assessments were still underway. The call for sites had yielded very few sites, and the focus for the 15 permanent pitches, and 3 temporary pitches was being focused on Council owned land. Only by allocating sites and bringing forward pitches could enforcement action be taken and appropriate spaces for these communities to use be found.

It was noted that there was a potential conflict with the current Council site, it could be used for an alternative higher value use and therefore it was still uncertain. Recent evidence also showed that the site was not in zone 3 in terms of flood risk, so other development use could be considered here.

It was noted that the NDP was not expected to include a policy or a site allocation (this is a strategic matter), however, a reference to travellers and travelling showpeople in the NDP would be welcomed. Contact details for the travelling show people locally could be provided for the purposes of consulting them on the NDP.

Comments on Draft NDP:

It was noted that the NDP was very comprehensive and that there were no major issues with the content.

In addition, it was agreed that the background evidence, particularly when it is explicitly referred to within the policy, also needs to be made available for public consultation and comment (there must be evidence of this) and for the planners to consider.

A few detailed comments were made:

- P.17: Site Allocations are strongly encouraged and the wording in relation to the Ministerial statement needs review. The reasons for site allocations not yet being included was understood, as these had been discussed earlier in the meeting. In addition, the desire to allocate slightly above the minimum required housing number was supported by HC.
- Ref. policy E5: Primary and Secondary Retail frontages must be reviewed in the NDP (ref. Core Strategy policy) as they are out of date. In theory retail frontages could be re-classified as primary ones. SB to share Leominster example where a review has been done.
- A policy on householder extensions should be considered as such policies have been deleted at the Herefordshire Council level, and there is now a policy gap for development management.
- The extent of the town centre boundary and the rationale for this will need to be assessed (map not yet included).

- The town centre retail policy is supported but there is also a need to include a presumption against out of town retail (pressure in the Starbucks area via pre-app was noted).
- The AONB policy on p.13 was deemed overly restrictive as currently worded.
- HC would need to see the Pre-Application Protocol in order to endorse the policy approach.
- P.20: The reference to around 20 in the policy wording was a bit confusing and should be reviewed (or moved to the policy preamble and explained).
- Policy H4 was supported, although the wording around parking was seen to be overly restrictive.
- It would be valuable if the NDP team could consider other possible and permanent travellers' sites, and any action on the Homs road storage site.
- E3: Out-of-town retail should be referred to as not being supported within this policy.
- It was noted that the options for the bus station to be relocated were unclear. The movement patterns across Ross in transport terms could also be explained further. Detailed comments from the transport team to follow. The NDP team should share idea with the bus companies.
- Policy is probably needed for Open Spaces. Work is underway on this.
- The evidence for the requirement for new allotments on development sites of over 100 dwellings was queried. This should be included in the evidence base.
- The need to refer to the three strategic ecology areas in Ross in the Environment section was noted, although it was noted that this particular section was currently work in progress.
- References to green transport should refer to the hierarchy, prioritising transport in the following order: pedestrian, cycling, public transport and private vehicle.

There was general agreement that HC officers would be able to work to the 2-3 month timescale suggested for completion of the first formal draft NDP.

Further detailed comments to come from SB, JTW in transport and RC in Development Management, to be circulated to JB and CNJ following the meeting, to share with Ross NDP group.

The meeting was closed and Ross NDP representatives thanked all for attending and for convening the meeting.