

Housing in Barcombe – an overview

Since the Barcombe housing survey was presented to the village in August 2015 the Parish Council, through its created Steering Groups, has been trying to make sense of the continuing changes to the Lewes District housing policy.

Alex MacGillivray (Steering Group Chairman) and I have had long exchanges of e-mails with the LDC Planning Dept. and a recent 2 hour meeting. We have read endless documents issued by the government (The National Planning Policy Framework) and Lewes District Plans (Local Plan Part Two and others) The whole process seems to have failed and I have detailed below the story as it stands today (*August 2018*).

Each bullet point has a large amount of back up paperwork, however I hope this compresses it all in a readable format.

- All Planning Departments, throughout England, are obliged by ministerial decree to find land for an increasing number of houses.
- Lewes District Council's latest target is 5,432 (6,900 when including the South Downs National Park) spread over the period 2010 to 2030.
- Locations and numbers appear in the Lewes District Plan Part 2 (LPP2) The completion of this plan has already been delayed for 18 months and is unlikely to be ready to be presented to and approved by government inspectors until 2020. Construction to begin thereafter, i.e. expected after 2022.
- Progress towards the target number is measured annually over three and five year periods (land for 810 and 1,350 houses respectively)
- As of April 2018 Lewes District council has not been able to identify sufficient land to meet their target numbers.
- Consequently, while Lewes District Council's LPP2 continues to be finalised, housing supply policies and those of neighbourhood plans are considered "out of date" and have no legal basis to be used to determine any building application. Instead, housing development applications will be determined in the context of the presumption in favour of "Sustainable Development".
- It is therefore possible that applications will arrive for Barcombe before the Plan is finally approved and thus development will be granted without policies and design restrictions of local and neighbourhood plans.

(We also understand that there is some doubt about all Neighbourhood Plans created and approved before 2016 now being valid).

Land allocation process

- All District Planning officers in England send out a “call for sites” to all land owners in their respective areas, asking if they want to put forward their land for development.
- Land put forward is then assessed by Planning Officers for their suitability against a pre-determined matrix. Land is then coloured red or green (some amber).
- This process in Barcombe produced three green areas around the “Hillside/Bridgelands” area and several red areas - around the side of the Village Hall - behind Grantham Bank - and behind the Weald View /Sidehills bungalows.
- This process is ongoing on an annual basis.
- The Parish Council is not consulted by the LDC or involved in any way.
- Further land may be in the process of assessment by LDC without the knowledge, consultation or request for comment from the Parish Council.
- Areas coloured red may turn green if the land owner/developer can overcome the reason it was denied green status.
- The current village planning boundary has no security – in pursuit of numbers, all boundaries can and will be enlarged.

Neighbourhood Plans

Barcombe has been in a squeezed position. With land already marked for development and capable of providing the number of dwellings allocated to Barcombe Cross (at least 30) any attempt to create a full Neighbourhood Plan was/is limited in its content to the size, design and sustainability of the proposed housing.

Two successive Parish Council supported Steering Groups have tried to reach a sensible and achievable list of housing policies that we felt the village would want. The intent was to follow the standard procedure and create a Neighbourhood Plan and present it to the village for comment, to then refine it, to offer it for approval via a village vote and then present it to Lewes District Council as a requirement for developers.

The LDC LPP2, in fairness does already cover and restrict building materials, heights of buildings, car parking, down-sizing and generally building smaller houses and not supporting the development of 5 bedroom houses.

However with respect to our intent of controlling;-

.Numbers

.Density

.Matching/reflecting adjacent buildings and the conservation area

.Habitat

.Landscaping, signage, kerbs, lighting, routes to school

.Securing the village boundary

.Options for locals to buy first,

- we have been told these will not carry any weight and thus not be acceptable as an objection or obligation to any development because these issues are not eligible, or are already covered in LPP2, or can only be sought when allocations of land for housing are made in a Neighbourhood Plan (not the intent in Barcombe's case).

And, it still remains possible that LDC will allow the developer to relocate their obligation to provide affordable housing (40% for sites over 10 units) elsewhere if the builder can demonstrate that this provision would affect the site's viability!.

The current inability to use housing development plans including those in the emerging LDC LPP2 has rendered the production of a Neighbourhood Plan/Village Design Statement a pointless exercise.

After meeting the Neighbourhood Plan Officer we are aware that LDC must reach their allocated housing numbers, no excuses and no ifs and buts, they must - and until LDC can identify in excess of a 5 year supply of housing land this process will take priority over building styles, design etc. advocated in the policies of LPP2 and any Neighbourhood Plan for the area.

Development plans will still come before the Parish Council for comment, however we are not convinced that any such comments will have an impact.

Alan Marler, Parish Council Chairman

August 2018