

## May / June 2018

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### AN UPDATE ON THE PLANNING APPLICATION IN WATLINGTON ROAD

As you will probably have heard, the outline application for the erection of up to 40 dwellings at the corner of Watlington Road and the B4009 was rejected at the SODC Planning Committee meeting on March 26th. The Planning Committee gave a number of reasons why it had taken this decision, the main ones being that the proposed development was disproportionate for a “smaller” village (as Lewknor is defined by SODC), that the proposed number of dwellings could not be accommodated on such a small site without being “out of character with the rural character of the village” and that the lack of transport links means that the development could not be “sustainable”. The developers have now appealed (above SODC) to the National Planning Inspectorate, who will now decide if planning permission is to be granted or refused. This appeal is likely to be heard via a Public Inquiry, in Autumn/Winter 2018, and Interested Party comments are due by 22nd June 2018.

In 2012 the government issued the National Planning Policy Framework in an attempt to simplify the planning process and enable more houses to be built to address the shortage of housing in the UK. The Framework explicitly states that at its heart is a “presumption in favour of sustainable development” and that where a Local Plan is absent or out of date, planning should be granted “unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”. Unfortunately for us, the SODC Local Plan is out of date, and while a presumption in favour of “sustainable development” would seem to count against developments like those proposed for Lewknor, the absence of a Local Plan has led to successful appeals by developers in South Oxfordshire, most recently in Long Wittenham.

SODC is working on an ‘emerging’ Local Plan but it is stalled for a number of reasons including the outcome of the proposed development at Chalgrove, so our best hope of ensuring that we have some say in the future of our parish (i.e. Lewknor village and the other villages of South Weston and Postcombe) is to come up with a Parish Neighbourhood Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan, when finalized, is a formal document outlining a vision and objectives of land use, planning policies, and future building sites over a 15-year timeframe.

The Lewknor Parish Neighbourhood Planning Group is actively working on this vital project, which may be the only way that we can ensure that our villages develop in the way that we would like – a way that takes into account their rural nature, the way in which they fit into the local countryside and the way that they provide for the lifestyles of their inhabitants. We must all acknowledge that some development is necessary, but most of us would like to see it happen in a way that is sympathetic to the existing housing stock and that does not detract from the essential rural character of our villages while at the same time providing affordable housing for local young adults and families. A sufficiently robust and mature Neighbourhood Plan will be taken into account in any Planning Appeal. I would therefore ask everyone who lives in the Lewknor Parish to engage in this project, to complete and return surveys when asked, and to get involved if you can – more volunteers would be very welcome.

In summary, we are 1-0 up at half time, but with it all to play for. It is your parish – make sure that you have your say.

*Charles Hopkinson-Woolley, Chair, Lewknor Strategic Group*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN INITIAL CONSULTATION – WHAT YOU TOLD US

All households in the Parish were asked to complete a questionnaire earlier this year to give the Neighbourhood Planning team your views on where you live and what issues are important to you for the future development of the Parish. These views will help form the policies that will be part of the Lewknor Parish Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan, once approved, will be a key document used by SODC when assessing future planning applications for development in the Parish.

The overall response rate to the initial questionnaire was 59%.

The issue that most people felt most strongly about was the wish to maintain the current character of the villages which have grown gradually over many centuries at the foot of the Chilterns and what is now the edge of the Chilterns AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). However the questionnaire also revealed strong concern over the impact of motorway noise and parking management issues around junction 6 of the M40.

Two drop-in events were held recently in Lewknor and in Postcombe to provide feedback to residents on the findings from the initial consultation and to give them the opportunity to discuss issues with the Neighbourhood Planning team.

The most important issues identified by respondents are set out below:

Keeping the current mix of property types and green spaces within the villages to maintain their character

- Motorway noise reduction
- Having community facilities within the villages such as a village hall
- Parking management at Junction 6 of the M40
- Easy public access to the countryside
- The need for fast broadband and a good mobile phone signal.
- Good commuter links to local towns and to London for employment opportunities
- Community open spaces within the villages such as playgrounds and other green spaces
- A thriving primary school in Lewknor village

As the neighbourhood planning process progresses over the coming months the Neighbourhood Planning team, which is made up of local volunteers, will need to ask for your views on your existing and future housing needs, and also your views on the draft policies that emerge from the consultations and other work that is being done by the team. At the end of the process, when the Plan is complete, a referendum will be held by SODC at which time you will be asked whether you are happy for it to be adopted as a formal document that will be used to influence planning decisions until 2033.

Please continue to respond to these requests for your views.

If you would like to become involved in helping develop the Plan, the next steering group meeting is scheduled for 6 June at 7.30 pm in Lewknor Village Hall.

Facebook: Lewknor Parish Neighbourhood Plan (group)