

BENSON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVISION – MODIFICATION STATEMENT APRIL 2022

STATEMENT ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGES/MODIFICATIONS/UPDATES PROPOSED TO BENSON'S ADOPTED NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN.

INTRODUCTION

Benson Parish Council is submitting a revision to its adopted Neighbourhood Plan for statutory consultation. This Modification Statement is submitted as part of the supporting documentation for this 'Revised Plan', in accordance with Regulation 14 (a/v) of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

BACKGROUND

Benson's Neighbourhood Plan was adopted by SODC in August 2018, following a referendum in which the Plan was supported by 94% of those voting. Since that time, national policy has evolved with major revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance and a new classification for Building Uses. SODC has also adopted its new Local Plan 2035, replacing its Core Strategy 2012.

Our original Neighbourhood Plan was assessed for conformity with the NPPF and with SODC's Core Strategy 2012, but as SODC was well advanced in the development of Local Plan 2035 by the time we were finalising our Neighbourhood Plan, we were also able to assess our policies for conformity with the emerging Local Plan. This has helped us to anticipate many of the requirements and provisions of the (now adopted) Local Plan 2035 and thereby indirectly reduced the work required in this Revised Plan.

The approach we adopted for our original Neighbourhood Plan was to embrace positively a level of housing development well above both our Core Strategy and our Local Plan 2035 quotas, work closely with the developers of all our allocated sites and use the relationships built to negotiate the infrastructure necessary (Relief Road, Community Hall, transfer of significant green spaces and much more) to enable our community to absorb the new developments effectively. As a result, despite the inevitable disruptions that major developments bring, after three years we are starting to see the benefits of some of the early infrastructure realised – and we are confident that the next three years will deliver a lot more to the benefit of the whole community.

Nevertheless, enough has changed in the planning landscape to make a plan revision necessary and we have taken the opportunity to include a number of changes in the Revised Plan to clarify and fine-tune policies that have not been as effective as we would have wished and, in a couple of areas, to introduce new policies to enhance and safeguard some of the things that our community value most. The impacts of the Covid pandemic and the imperative for every organisation, community and individual to reduce their carbon footprints have also inevitably sharpened our views of what needs changing and how.

This statement has been drawn up to meet the requirement laid down in Regulation 14 for the Neighbourhood Plan Development Team, acting on behalf of Benson Parish Council (the qualifying body) to assess whether or not the changes and modifications proposed in this Revised Plan are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the existing Neighbourhood Plan, and to give reasons for the conclusions reached.

REVISED PLAN CHANGES TO POLICIES

The changes listed below are all the substantive changes in our Plan. The following types of changes are not recorded:

- Cosmetic changes (e.g. improvements in grammar, typographical corrections, introductions of more current examples)
- Factual update changes (e.g. updates on delivery of infrastructure specified in our Original Plan)
- Minor wording changes that do not change the intentions, scope or policies of our Original Plan.

Climate Emergency

Addition of introductory text and many detailed points/examples throughout the Revised Plan. No new policies, but minor changes to several policies incorporating additional biodiversity and environmental measures – these changes are covered policy by policy below. Minor change

Introduction of Settlement boundaries

Addition to existing policy NP1 – Housing Policy – Material change

Our intention is to define separate settlement boundaries for Benson and Preston Crowmarsh, in order to clarify what sits within the 'built area' of each settlement and what lies outside it (i.e. in the countryside). This policy addition is accompanied with maps showing the precise form of the boundaries and a detailed 'boundary methodology' (in Appendix M) which has been applied consistently to determine the boundaries. The main element of Policy NP1 covering our housing allocations is not changed in the Revised Plan, but the wording for infill and other housing development has been modified slightly to reflect changes in LP2035 and how those changes relate to the new boundaries.

Site Allocations Policies

Reference made now in Policies NP2-4 to new 'Concept Plan' – Minor Change

We have introduced a 'Concept Plan' to show the public open spaces committed in signed S106 Agreements for each of our allocated sites, as the precise locations of these cannot be defined at this stage. The slightly altered text of these policies refers to this Concept Plan to ensure that both the overall scale of public open spaces agreed and their approximate locations can be defined and realised.

Allocated Sites Map

Amendment to Allocated Sites Map - Minor change

Map amended to remove two small strips of land no longer required to meet housing quota for BEN3/4 consented site.

Removal of Burial Plot allocation

Removal of Policy NP5 – Allocation of land for Burial Plot) – Minor change

Our Original Plan allocated land for a burial plot, but we have been unable to secure the land that would be necessary for this and have therefore removed the allocation in this Plan Revision.

Riverside

New Policy NP5 – Riverside Buffer – Material change

Our Original Plan sought to promote awareness and respect for the area of the Parish that borders the River Thames, merely by providing character assessment and design guidance. Experience since the Plan was adopted has shown how valuable the Riverside is to the community (Covid experience has clearly accentuated this) and how vulnerable it is to inappropriate development, habitat reduction and increasing flood risk. This Revised Plan now looks at the policy context for the

Riverside and introduces a new buffer policy (and associated map) for the residential area - the residential area to the south of the Waterfront and Rivermead. This policy seeks to ensure that any development in this area respects the river landscape and its position on a beautiful stretch of the River Thames, alongside a national trail (Thames Path) and that it therefore maintains a sense of openness.

(The Revised Plan also designates another part of the Riverside - the flood meadows to the north of the marina - as 'local green space' - see NP21 'Protection of Green Space' below)

Design

Addition of further details to Design Guide (referred to by policy NP7 – Design) – Minor change

This policy remains unchanged in substance, but the Design Statement to which it refers has been revised to include more detail of measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Sustainable Transport Policies

Reordering and slight wording changes of policies NP10 – Pedestrians and Cyclists, NP11 – Access to Public Transport, NP12 – Electric Vehicle Charging – Minor change

We have reordered these three policies, changed the title of one of them to reflect more accurately what the policy is about and made very slight wording changes, but these changes have not altered the intention or effect of our Original Plan policies in any way.

20 mph Zones

No Policy. Description added for proposed 20mph Zones for Benson and Preston Crowmarsh. No policy is required, as this accords with new OCC policy and will be executed by OCC, including being subject to separate consultation run by OCC. Minor change.

Village centre

Restructure of policies NP14 – Village Centre – Changes from Business Use, NP15 – Village Centre – Changes to Business Use – Minor change

These changes are necessitated by the Government's introduction of a new classification of building uses, which render our previous policies unworkable, and reflect precisely the same intentions as in our Original Plan.

Protection of Local Green Spaces

Designation of new Local Green Space under policy NP21 – Protection of Local Green Spaces – Material change. Update of supporting text re future designation of land committed to parish, but not yet established. - Minor change.

This Revised Plan includes the designation of the two Flood Meadows north of the marina as an additional Local Green Space under policy NP21.

In addition, the text associated with policy NP21 refers to the 'Concept Plan' (described under NP1 above) and the public open spaces, associated with our 3 major development sites, which will become available for designation as Local Green Spaces over the next 3-4 years, once they are properly established.

Creation of New Green Spaces

Addition to NP22 – Creation of New Green Spaces - Minor change

This addition to NP22 is simply an encouragement to developers to think creatively when developing green spaces in order to offer people a range of ways in which to connect with the outside world.

Street Trees

Addition to NP23 – Biodiversity - Minor change

This addition to NP23 states that developers need to demonstrate that they have considered opportunities for planting street trees, as these will become more necessary in the future, to provide space for nature and shade in a warming climate. Otherwise, the policy is unchanged.

Watercourse Buffers

Amendment to NP24 - Benson Brook – Minor change

The Plan Revision changes the wording of this policy to specify a 10-metre buffer between development and watercourses, reflecting the standard cited in LP2035. The Original Plan simply stated a buffer was needed, but provided no metrics.

Landscape, Distinctiveness of Settlements and Important Views

Amendments to NP27 – Distinctiveness of Settlements & NP 28 - Landscape and Views

– Material change

The Original Plan policy stated that “Development should maintain adequate open landscape space, rural in character, between Benson and other neighbouring settlements to allow perception and experience of the settlements in the area as separate, distinct and rural.” Experience shows this policy wording is too imprecise to be effective. These linked policies (and their supporting Landscape Assessments in Appendix E, Part 2) seek to clarify what makes a landscape distinct and which landscape gaps between settlements are important enough to merit individual mention. Some new views are also added in NP28.

Sustainable Drainage Systems

Amendment of detail of policy NP30 – Sustainable Drainage Systems – Minor change

Original Plan text amended to add mention of permeable surfaces and water butts as other examples of appropriate measures to help manage risks of surface water flooding.

CONCLUSION

This Revised Plan does not include any new housing allocations and benefits from the relative timing that allowed our Original Neighbourhood to comprehend many aspects of SODC’s emerging Local Plan 2035. As a result, though we have made many changes, there are only four that we believe are ‘material’. These are the introduction of boundaries to clarify the built areas of Benson and Preston Crowmarsh; the Riverside buffer policy; the designation of the Flood Meadows north of the marina as Local Green Space; and the widening of the previous Landscape policy to clarify the distinctive characteristics of our settlements and identify which landscape gaps play the most important part in preserving that distinctiveness. All four changes arise from our recognition that the policies we put in place in our Original Plan are not adequate to deliver what we intended. None of the changes made alter the ambitions or intentions we stated for our Original Plan and which are all maintained in this Revised Plan. We believe that none of these changes are so significant, individually or collectively, that they change the nature of our Plan.