



Horsmonden Draft Neighbourhood Development Plan, a ‘virtual’ open meeting

A ‘virtual’ open meeting was held on Zoom (video conference) on 1st October at 7pm. Over forty residents and stakeholders including representatives from Lambert and Foster and Persimmons attended. The purpose was to update everyone on how the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) was progressing. After a brief welcome and introduction from Diana Morton (Chair of the NDP Steering Group) and Jane March (Chair of the Parish Council), Jim Boot (who has been advising Steering Group and Council) gave a presentation on the NDP which is reaching a key point in its development.

This started with a reminder from Jim’s colleague and chartered planner Michael Thornton on ‘important events since work started on the NDP’. This included the government’s commitment to Net Zero Carbon by 2050, more sustainable construction standards for new homes by 2025, and stopping the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030. The Covid 19 pandemic’s impact had also accelerated change for commuting and homeworking, emphasised the value of local green spaces and the challenges of social distancing on narrow or non-existent pavements. The government’s Planning for the Future White Paper meanwhile is seeking to increase house numbers and speed up building rates but reduce developers’ requirements to build affordable housing and contribute to infrastructure. More positively, the government’s commitment to NDPs appears to remain strong, particularly in relation to design.

Jim then outlined the structure of the NDP which would start with an overall strategy chapter and follow with chapters on housing, design, access / movement, landscape / environment and business / employment. The NDP would be based on a combination of evidence gathered including: the visioning event (2018), household questionnaire (winter 2018/19), community workshops (2019), the Housing Needs Survey (2020), Local Green Space and Views assessments (2020) as well as specialist work such as the Masterplan and Design Guidance by AECOM.

Next, he outlined some examples of how the evidence gathered had started to be turned into NDP policies that would in future be used to decide on planning applications. For example information on traffic through the village gathered by the Horsmonden Speed-watch had led to a draft policy: **Housing development located within walkable distance of the village centre (400m) to the west or north of the central crossroads will be favoured, where able to meet the other policy requirements within the Neighbourhood Plan.** The intention was to ensure that all new residents could walk to services within five minutes of their homes without the need to get into a car or add to traffic at the busy cross-roads.

The lack of pavements in the village, highlighted by the recent need to social distance had led to another policy: **Planning permission will be given where developers are able to provide pavements from the development to the nearest [existing] pavement, either on both sides of the road (at least 1.5m wide) or on one side of the road (2m) – to accommodate push-chairs, wheel chairs or mobility scooters and enable physical distancing and safe pedestrian access to the village.** This as

illustrated by a slide from the government's Manual for Streets (guidelines for the construction industry).

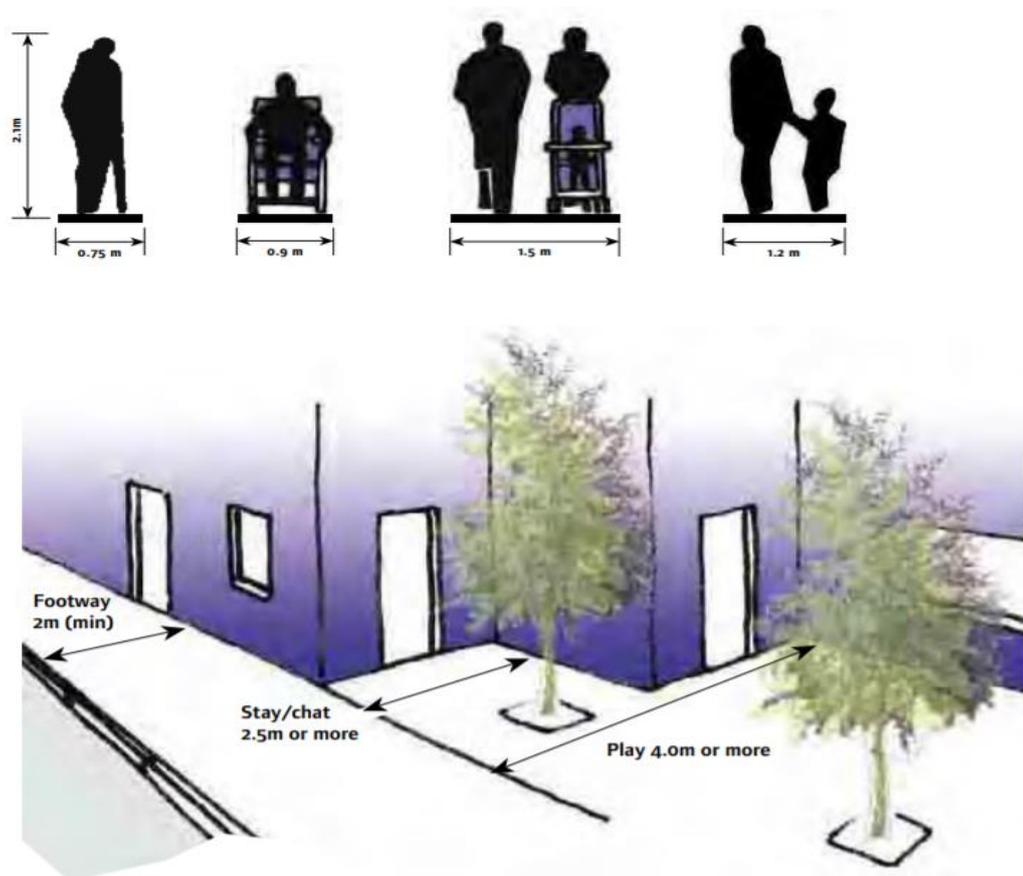


Figure 6.8 The footway and pedestrian areas provide for a range of functions which can include browsing, pausing, socialising and play.

In terms of design, developers would be required to maintain the character of the existing village by following guidance produced by AECOM, illustrated with photos from around the village. Also, to follow the High Weald AONB Design Guidance (2019) including using tiles and bricks that conform to a palette of colours typical of the area. Also, to blend in with the surrounding countryside.

Important landscapes, the environment, and cherished views would be protected by policies including: **The recreational, historical and ecological value of the Local Green Space listed ... including Furnace Ponds should be protected from development and be designated as Local Green Space.** New developments would be sited to avoid flooding or causing surface water run-off into neighbouring properties.

For economy and employment, especially given the shock caused by Covid 19, policies would aim to: **Retain employment land: Buildings and land that are currently used by businesses should be retained for an employment related purpose.** Also, to provide fast broadband and mobile phone coverage in new developments and where possible share those improvements with the existing community. Given the value of key workers highlighted by Covid-19 the plan will also seek to include a draft policy to provide housing for local workers.

Following the presentation participants were able to ask questions or comment on the plan. These included:

Qu. Can the local design guide push to require new homes built to higher than Build Regulations?

Ans. These are already much higher than people might think and as stated the government is committed to further ramping these up. The NDP should not duplicate existing policies.

Qu. Planning permissions usually require some form of planting [of trees]. However, they don't emphasise the need to achieve established planting.

Ans. The NDP will require developers to plant trees and can require them to be maintained for a minimum period.

The next steps for the NDP were then set out. Please keep your eye out for these over the coming few months:

1. Draft plan goes out for six week consultation with residents and local stakeholders
2. Plan is amended and submitted to Tunbridge Wells for further six week consultation including with statutory bodies such as Natural and Historic England
3. Plan is 'examined' by a qualified planning examiner.
4. If found 'sound' will be put to a 'yes/no' referendum for residents

All the slides are available on <http://horsmondennp.co.uk/>.