

Report on Inaugural Community Consultation Event 25 April 2022

Introduction

1. On 25 April 2022, the Grafton NDP Steering Group (SG) together with Andrea Pellegram Ltd. led a community consultation event in the Coronation Hall from 19.00 to 21.00. There were 41 members of the community present who engaged in an interactive event that allowed the Grafton Community to agree initial proposals for the scope and content of the Grafton Neighbourhood Development Plan (GNDP).
2. The event was led by Andrea Pellegram with a contribution by Richard Pash, the SG chair. Andrea was given a tour of the parish by SG member David Lemon before the meeting started.
3. The event was in four parts:
 - a. An introduction by the Chair to ask the community to participate and eventually volunteer to prepare the NDP and to record “non-planning” concerns on post-it notes for the Parish Council to progress in parallel to the NDP. This part of the event relied upon previous correspondence by the SG and proposed themes of resources, working, living, getting about, and environment.
 - b. And introduction to neighbourhood planning by Andrea.
 - c. A SWOT analysis.
 - d. A discussion of possible policies.
 - e. A discussion of what the NDP Vision to 2036 should be.
4. At the end of the evening, it was clear that the community had many ideas that required further consideration and that it would not be possible to decide at that time what the NDP should cover. It was agreed by all that the SG would produce a community survey to gain a better understanding of what the NDP should attempt to achieve. Everyone in the room was asked to speak to friends and neighbours in the community to ask them to participate in the survey when it was issued, and for them to join the SG to help gather NDP evidence.
5. This report has been prepared to assist the SG to undertake the survey and as a record of the 25 April event. It then goes on to consider the evidence requirements with recommendations how the SG can progress evidence gathering. Finally, it suggests content for a community survey.



Part 1: The outcomes from the 25 April Community Event

SWOT Analysis

6. The full results of the SWOT analysis are shown in **Appendix 1**.
7. The main themes were:

Community Infrastructure

8. The community benefits from high quality community infrastructure that is valued and should be protected, building on existing protections
 - a. The Nursery (Sunflowers)
 - b. The Pub (The Swan)
 - c. Wilton Windmill
 - d. The Parish Church (St Nicholas's)
 - e. Coronation Hall

Local Green Space

9. There are a number of green spaces that should be afforded long-term protection (equivalent to Green Belt)
 - a. Grafton village green
 - b. Wilton Village Pond
 - c. Various views and spaces that are locally valued and worthy of protection

Housing

10. There is a perceived need for new affordable housing to meet local needs and which should remain "affordable" in perpetuity. There is a perception that is not shared by all that the existing housing stock is predominantly large and that there are insufficient smaller dwellings available for those starting on the housing ladder.

Infrastructure

11. The main method of travel is by private car though rail services are accessible. However, despite active rail groups, rail services are being cut. Cycling is perceived as dangerous because of fast moving traffic, including lorry traffic, on the A338 making cycling unsafe. There are no segregated cycle lanes in the parish. Recreational walking routes (PROW) are good quality and valued by the community.
12. Telephone and broadband provision can be high quality in some areas, but also poor in others such as West Grafton.
13. Most houses are not connected to gas and rely upon oil for heating. Recent increases in fuel prices have increased household heating costs substantially.



14. Many parts of the parish have uncertain electricity supplies and sometimes experience power cuts. There is a general feeling that there will be insufficient electricity capacity to cope with a national switch to electric vehicles.
15. There is interest in pursuing a policy on either a community energy scheme or combined heat and power for smaller settlements such as Wexcombe. This could be for domestic heating and electricity, and EV charging.

Environment

16. The environment is highly prized for its overall landscape value and for local features such as hedgerows and banks. There are good walking routes through the landscape on the PROW network. Dark skies are valued and there is no street lighting in some parts of the settlements. The community wishes to preserve dark skies. There are some instances of localised flooding.
17. The Southern Streams Group of farmers have made good progress in combatting nitrate and phosphate pollution to local water courses.

Economy

18. There are a number of small local businesses which provide jobs and services and which are valued. The community has embraced home working post-pandemic and wishes to promote this if possible and has an appetite to consider how to make home-working more sustainable, for instance by making provision for a work hub. Small business growth is supported as is sustainable tourism.

Draft NDP Vision

19. The NDP Vision will be the “goal” that the NDP policies seek to meet. The community were asked what they wished Grafton Parish to be like in 2036, i.e. their vision for the future. 2036 will be the NDP end-date to correspond to the Wiltshire Local Plan review end date of 2036. The following draft is provided:

In 2036, Grafton Parish will be a thriving and optimistic community that has a range of housing for everyone. Housing stock will be sustainable environmentally and will have resilient energy and heating infrastructure. The separate settlements of Crofton, East Grafton, Marten, West Grafton, Wexcombe and West Grafton will retain their separate identities and the community and green infrastructure will be preserved for future generations. The natural environment will retain its outstanding landscape qualities and dark skies supported as a result of protective planning policies and community care for common areas. Overall, the community will be more self-sufficient in terms of food, health, transport, education and energy.



Non-planning matters raised by the community

20. Richard collected post-it notes from the audience at the close of the event. The following matters were recorded:

Community resources

- Shop/Cafe/Workspace
- Bigger play park on the playing field
- Proper playground area for Young Children

Working

- Out of village business hubs
- Workspace/cafe

Living

- Allow building like Grove Place - four families brought to the area, better than the two bungalows that were there before

Getting about

- Centralised delivery and distribution for Amazon etc
- More regular buses to Marlborough
- Speeding problems on A338
- Large lorries Traffic speed reduced through East Grafton to 20mph

The environment

- Move away from oil reliance
- Heating oil collective
- Renewable Energy
- Power and Heating for the Community. Wilton Water. Agri and sewage

21. Most of these matters, where material to town planning, were covered in the main session responses. The remaining matters are for the Parish Council to progress outside the NDP process.

Email from community member

22. A late email was received from a community member who reflected on the event and wished to bring further ideas to the attention of the SG. This is copied in **Appendix 2**. The email provided many suggestions how the ancient footpath network could be enhanced, including the re-routing of existing routes and creation of new routes. Much of this would fall outside the scope of the NDP which must be restricted to land use planning matters, though the NDP could contain a map showing where proposals would be welcomed. It would be for the Parish Council to seek amendments to the PROW network and to maintain it.

Part 2: Recommendations for evidence gathering

23. The community meeting on 25 April 2022 did not reach a firm conclusion on which policies that the NDP should pursue. However, taking account of the main themes raised and the subsequent communication, the following potential policies could be considered.

Policy title	Policy scope	Evidence requirement
Community Infrastructure	<p>Describe local community infrastructure</p> <p>Describe possible threats to each (why they are vulnerable)</p> <p>Review Core Strategy Policy</p> <p>Review AONB policy</p> <p>Create new policy to sit beneath CS and AONB policy to protect community infrastructure. Declare that these facilities fall under Use Class F (to remove permitted development rights to change to dwellings)</p>	<p>Identify all local community infrastructure and write a description.</p> <p>Map each</p> <p>Contact landowners to alert them to the potential policy</p>
Local Green Space	<p>Identify all Local Green Spaces in accordance with paras 100 to 103 of the NPPF.</p> <p>Map all spaces on OS base (AP can do this)</p> <p>Describe how the provisions of para. 102 are met (in a table)</p> <p>Policy designating the sites as Local Green Spaces</p>	<p>Identify all sites and map</p> <p>Create a table/ pro-forma for each site describing how they meet provisions of NPPF.</p> <p>Contact landowners to alert them to the potential policy</p> <p>Create appendix for NDP.</p>
Housing mix	<p>Describe current housing mix.</p> <p>Describe housing need.</p> <p>Review Core Strategy and AONB policy context</p> <p>New policy on housing mix</p>	<p>Search parish records/voting register to understand current housing mix.</p> <p>Consider responses to community survey</p> <p>Commission Housing Needs Assessment from AECOM.</p>
Housing site allocation	<p>Describe how Core Strategy prevents growth in village.</p> <p>Refer to conclusions from Housing Needs Assessment and community</p>	<p>Write to Wiltshire Council (LPA) requesting housing requirement figure.</p>



	<p>survey showing that affordable housing is required.</p> <p>Summarise response to call for sites, site assessment and SEA.</p> <p>Allocate sites for specific purposes and probably also including requirements how sites will be designed/developed.</p>	<p>Consult Wiltshire Council housing needs register</p> <p>Community survey.</p> <p>Prepare methodology for site allocation and agree with WC if possible. They may wish to modify the methodology.</p> <p>Contact AONB management board and agree methodology with them. They may wish to modify the methodology.</p> <p>Undertake call for sites to all landowners to put forward sites.</p> <p>Assess all sites that come forward using the methodology.</p> <p>Write to WC requesting SEA/HRA¹ screening opinion on long list of sites.</p> <p>Select best site(s) based on site assessment and SEA/HRA.</p> <p>Consult community on best sites and necessary mitigation.</p> <p>Agree mitigation with site proposers.</p> <p>Prepare policy summarising the above.</p>
Sustainable Transport	<p>Review main methods of transport (car based) and explain why cycling is not a realistic method of transport (safety).</p> <p>Discuss historic role of PROW (Public Rights of Way) in the parish and how routes have become blocked or made redundant by A338.</p> <p>Describe current value of PROW.</p>	<p>Check census data on travel to work and car ownership.</p> <p>Ask questions about PROW usage in community survey.</p> <p>Consult old maps to look at former PROW network and consider how this has changed and become less attractive.</p>

1. ¹ Strategic Environmental Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment



	<p>Describe deficiencies in current PROW network.</p> <p>Identify priorities for PROW improvements and methods for implementation.</p> <p>Policy setting out PROW priorities to enable improvements to be made.</p>	<p>Undertake a detailed survey of all PROW (that will be mentioned in the policy) identifying and describing where change is required.</p> <p>Prepare an OS base map with table that describes all necessary improvements.</p>
Community Energy Scheme	<p>This will be a difficult policy to progress (put potentially very valuable) and it is not possible at this stage to say what it will contain.</p> <p>The policy might contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A preferred site (as an allocation) and/or • A policy that allows certain forms of energy generation. <p>There will be many non-planning matters that must be progressed and agreed alongside the policy such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits to landowner for use of site • Creation of a management entity to run the project (such as a Community Interest Company) • Business plan • Energy industry partner to design, build, commission, <p>There are also different ways that the scheme could be progressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning application • Community Right to Build Order • Neighbourhood Development Order <p><i>As a first stage, it is recommended that only the community survey questions are asked to determine the level of support for this very major project.</i></p>	<p>Undertake a survey of existing community to understand current energy sources/problems/aspirations.</p> <p>Find a sample site (which can be switched later) to determine which the options are possible based on existing grid connections and capacity.</p> <p>Commission a specialist consultant for this process. This is a difficult process for planning policy which needs to understand the specific proposals, but this cannot be determined without a site.</p> <p>Identify a suitable point of connection to the national grid. The consultant will supervise an application to the relevant DNO. That usually involves a cost of a few thousand pounds. There is a form to fill in.</p> <p>An indicative offer will identify where there is a potential connection with an idea of maximum import and export capacity. The “import” could go towards a battery which could store electricity generated at off peak times to be used in peak times.</p> <p>The application will require a site with an address (which will</p>



	<p><i>It may prove that this policy is so complex and slow that it should be started immediately but dealt with in a review of the NDP. This way, the remaining NDP can progress and this project can follow its own timetable.</i></p>	<p>become an allocation if successful.) The actual site may be switched following a call for sites if this appears to be necessary.</p> <p>Once the response to the application to the DNO is considered, it will then be possible to understand what is being proposed (battery? turbine? Anaerobic digestion plant? Solar farm?)</p> <p>These proposals then need to be discussed with the AONB management board and the planning authority.</p> <p>After all this is completed, it may be possible to prepare a policy using the same process as for the housing allocation. A SEA will certainly be required.</p>
Economic development policy	<p>Describe existing businesses and their impact/benefit to the community</p> <p>Map attractiveness of area to different types of business. New and existing businesses – tourism, agriculture etc</p> <p>Describe community aspirations for retaining businesses, growing local businesses, and home working.</p> <p>Review Core Strategy and AONB policies towards businesses.</p> <p>Policy to protect existing businesses and allow for growth in business activity, including home working.</p>	<p>Undertake community survey to understand nature and scope of employment activity.</p> <p>Consider census data on employment activity focusing specifically on home working (the census was during lock - down so should provide insights here).</p> <p>Possibly do a survey of local businesses to understand their needs and how many local jobs they provide.</p>
Dark skies	<p>Describe current state of “dark skies”.</p> <p>Show dark skies map.</p> <p>Policy to prevent light pollution to preserve dark skies.</p>	<p>Ask AONB for any evidence they have on dark skies.</p> <p>Gather other evidence from the internet.</p>
Environmental protection	<p>Since the parish is “open countryside” in planning terms and located in the</p>	



	AONB, I do not consider that it is necessary to have a policy on environmental protection since this is already covered. However, the value of the environment can be explained in the supporting text.	
Broadband	It is likely that there will be a policy in the Local Plan Review that will address this so recommend that the NDP does nothing on this matter.	

Planning Policy Context

24. The current development plan policies are in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. This will be the main document that the NDP will need to demonstrate compliance with. However, the Local Plan review (LPR) should be at Regulation 19 stage by the end of this year and it will contain the “emerging policies” that the NDP will need to seek to address. The LPR policies are likely to be very different from the Core Strategy policies because of the climate emergency, changes to the NPPF on design and trees in particular, the Environment Act, the phasing out of the combustion engine for cars, etc.
25. Because the change in policy direction is likely to be significant, this document is not assessing the policy context this time. The evidence will stand on its own merits and must be used to support emerging policies as they are revealed.

Part 3: Community Survey

26. The community meeting set a firm basis for policy development, but it was agreed collectively that further evidence was required to understand which potential policies should be prioritised. It was agreed that since the meeting did not represent the entire community, nor could it determine which policies to pursue, that a detailed online community survey would be a useful exercise.
27. Surveys are best administered online. The Parish Council may wish to do this themselves, or Community First Wiltshire (CFW) provides a very useful and cost-effective service (putting the survey questions onto the survey platform, running the survey, reporting on the survey results). CFW have done NDP surveys for Chippenham, Salisbury and Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire.
28. A draft set of survey questions is provided in **Appendix 3**.

Part 4: Conclusions and recommendations

29. The steering group is asked to consider this report in its next meeting. If it would be helpful, Andrea could join the meeting online.
30. The next step will be to agree the final wording of the survey and agree how to advertise and administer it.
31. Once the survey results have been analysed, preferably by Andrea, it will be necessary to draw up next actions, for instance appointment of AECOM for a housing needs assessment, further consideration of how to progress a community energy scheme, asking Wiltshire Council for a housing requirement figure and housing register results for the parish, etc.



Appendix 1: SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- The Green
- Peaceful, tranquil environment
- Fields to walk around
- Beautiful downland on the horizon
- Interesting local history
- The windmill is functional and defines Wilton
- The Crofton Beam Engines also work and define Wilton
- It is pleasant to walk along the canal
- Hedgerows and banks are flowering and beautiful
- There is a wonderful range of wildlife
- The community works very hard to protect natural environment and collectively maintain communally accessible growing areas such as verges, banks, the Green, the pond, etc.
- The villages have good transport access (mainly by car) to other parts of Wiltshire and the Southwest. It is quicker to commute to London from Grafton than some places in the Southeast.
- Public Rights of Way
- The area does not flood (on the whole!)
- There is a good nursery and a good pub
- Friendly people who look out for one another
- The “Southern Streams Group” of farmers work together to ensure that water flowing into Wilton and the source of the river Shal and the canal are not polluted. This group covers 25,000 acres of farmland. There are some naturally occurring phosphates, but they are successfully tackling nitrate pollution. One member of the audience stated that their own well water formerly contained nitrates but there are none now, so the Southern Streams Group’s efforts are proving successful
- Significant numbers of homes have their own spring water.
- There is good access to fibre broadband
 - Wexcombe, Marten – super broadband
 - East Grafton – fibre
 - West Grafton – not that great
- Good schools in neighbouring parishes
- The Church
- Coronation Hall
- Local businesses, small businesses, good range

Weaknesses

- A busy road (A338) runs through the parish. Lorries travel fast on very narrow roads, there are potholes, speeding cars, danger to cyclists



- Wexcombe houses are heated by oil
- Declining rail services (Hungerford, Bedwyn, Pewsey)
- Flooding in some areas
- Some properties are difficult to fit to fibre optic network
- Most people need to use their cars for most journeys (cycling is difficult and distances substantial)
- Cycling is not attractive because of traffic on the A Road and no safe verges/cycling lanes
- Lack of retail facilities in the parish
- Phone connection in West Grafton is patchy/bad
- Wexcombe is end of the line for electricity and experiences power cuts
- It will be difficult for some houses when EV is required for all cars because of lack of power supply
- Lack of affordable housing for young people
- There is a view (not supported by all) that there is not a good range of house types and that there are not enough smaller/affordable homes

Opportunities

- Local district heating scheme in Wexcombe)
- Better insulation for homes (especially Wexcombe)
- Affordable housing in perpetuity
- Better performing and more sustainable homes to be built in future
- Right size of houses to meet local needs
- Protection of community assets
- Local Green Space designation
- Protect dark skies
- More barn conversions
- Community energy scheme
- Promote sustainable tourism
- Encourage small local businesses and help homeworking (work hub?)

Threats

- Traffic
- Russia
- Energy costs
- Wiltshire LP policy for small villages (prevent growth)
- Electric cars – need electricity to charge and expensive to purchase electric vehicles
- Staying still/stagnating
- Rural crime
- Flooding on the roads
- Potholes
- House prices
- Lack of infrastructure (water, electricity, home heating, EV charging, cycling)



Appendix 2: Email correspondence following the meeting to Chair of the SG.

My main reason for writing to you today was to raise an issue which I personally feel very strongly about, which didn't really come up at the meeting, and time ran out for me to raise it verbally. I then had to rush off and didn't even get to write a Post-It note!

It is regarding public footpaths. I feel that these should be a relatively simple way of connecting the different parts of the parish, being an environmentally friendly way of getting around, bringing business to our beloved pub, hugely promoting our health and wellbeing, and improving road safety. My particular issue is obviously with the footpaths within Marten, but I am sure that there could also be improvements to others within the parish, and surely this is something that we, as a parish, can realistically manage?

Public footpaths (and I could get going about bridle paths too, but I'll start with the most straight forward, and least offensive to landowners!!) are historical rights of way, many of them extremely ancient. Surely with the passage of time, the modern world emerging around them, and for our parish, the routing of a major A road right through the middle of us, we should think about "updating" some of the routes to make them more relevant and useful once again?

I have attached a map to illustrate the routes which I believe could be updated and improved.

1) the public footpath which originates at the foot of Marten Down, linking up with the long-distance route, The Mid Wilts Way, and ending abruptly at one of the most treacherous stretches of the A338. I can categorically say that nobody EVER uses this path, and yet a small adjustment to its route, or the creation of a new section of path on the opposite side of the main road could make it an attractive route for locals and tourists alike. In an ideal world, it could relatively easily be linked to the quiet, narrow lane which leads up towards the Windmill and Bedwyn Brail, or some imaginative re-routing of the bride path (Marked No. 4 on the map) could also provide a safe and beautiful onwards path, linking us to both Wilton and Bedwyn.

2) The long footpath which links Tidcombe and Marten, and then again ends abruptly at the A338, at the Wexcombe junction. Living, as I do, within direct sight of this footpath, I can say that we see walkers on it maybe once a month, mostly in the summer. With nothing to link up to, apart from long stretches of road, this path has also become largely irrelevant. Given that the path is carved straight through the middle of an arable field, surely it would be relatively easy to slightly re-route it (Just weed kill the path in a different direction and move a sign?!!) so that it at least links up with the Roman road to Wilton? I appreciate that the whole process is a lot more complicated than this, but the simple, on-the-ground logistics really are quite simple.

3) If we are really taking this subject seriously, and trying to truly update our parish transport and footpath network, then why not also slightly re-route the footpath linking Hollow Lane to the Roman road, so that it links up with the footpath to Marten, as above?

4) The Bridlepath from near Hillbarn Farm to near Piccadilly. Once again, this is a route which ends at another treacherous stretch of the A338, with no onwards route except for the main road. As its route is also directly carved through the middle of arable fields, surely it should be possible to re-route it, either to the Piccadilly crossroads, or if we really are to be promoting the safety of our parish riders, then re-route it to link up with footpath described in 1) above, and upgrade the wide, grassy, field-



edge path to become a bridle path? A 200m section of the Mid Wilts Way, already a wide, tractor-churned path, could then link this new bridle path to the Oxenwood road.

5) The tiny, dead-end footpath within the grounds of Marten Manor. I know we have issues here with the landowner, but surely a public footpath should be accessible to the public from both ends? Are there any old parish/land records we could access to clarify where this path originally went and how it could be better accessed, without compromising the privacy of the landowner?

Regarding the other footpath routes within Marten:

- The route from Marten to Tidcombe is completely inaccessible without a chainsaw, or imaginative scrambling through hedges and across ditches, off the official route.
- The Tidcombe end of this footpath is currently unmarked, due to ivy growing over the sign. I appreciate that the owner of the cottage whose garden is the footpath route may be happy about this, but maybe this is another footpath route that needs rethinking?
- The route from Marten to Wexcombe is completely inaccessible in summer, due to massive undergrowth, especially nettles and fallen trees. Once the footpath signs which clearly direct walkers through The Manor land finish, it is impossible to tell where the footpath goes next. This route needs maintenance, some clear signage, and some reconsideration of the official path route at the Wexcombe end would also be beneficial. Signs are also sadly lacking here, with the official route also being through somebody's garden.

I am sorry that this email has ended up being rather longer than the intended verbal meeting point I hoped to raise, or indeed, far more detailed than I would have been able to fit on a Post-It!! But I sincerely hope that the "modernisation" of parish footpath routes can be included in the Parish Plan, and serious consideration can be given to how these ancient lifelines could be so beneficial in our modern world. If we were to be REALLY ambitious, we could even consider entirely new footpaths/bridlepaths/cycle paths - landowner co-operation is obviously key to all of these proposals, but with many fields having wide conservation/run-off margins, even the creation of "permissive pathways" could surely be a compromise to help achieve the aims of the overall "Parish Vision" which so clearly emerged from the meeting on Monday?

