Neighbourhood Plan Update

The reason for writing this is twofold

Firstly to update you on progress in the writing of the Neighbourhood Plan and the impact of the latest changes in the draft Melton Local Plan

Secondly to correct some of the statements made in the recent Parish Council Election Leaflet circulated by Mr Sparham.

What follows is explained in more detail in the Pre-Consultation Neighbourhood Plan that will be delivered to every household in the Parish. Delays in its publication by events, mainly out of the control of the Steering Group (SG), have identified a need to appraise residents of how we have progressed.

The need for a Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan (NP) was agreed by residents attending a Public Meeting in June 2014 where the benefits of having a NP were explained. Since then the Steering Group has been meeting at monthly intervals to progress the work. None of the members or helpers are professional planners so we have employed experts in the field to advise us to reach correct and appropriate conclusions. In order to find out what the parish residents want from the plan we have carried out a number of consultation meetings and at the end of 2015 circulated a questionnaire to every house in the parish which contained proposals and criteria which we wanted to test with the whole parish.

The criteria were developed with the help of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) who are part of the Design Council. The criteria were first shown to the public at a meeting in June 2015. The criteria were supported at that meeting and were taken forward, modified with comments received and then formed the basis of the questionnaire.

A tight timetable for the return of the questionnaires was set in order that we would get a reasonable number in and assessed by the time we had a subsequent public meeting. The return date was subsequently extended in order to give as many residents as possible the option to reply. This public meeting was held in December 2015 to test the level of agreement and to then give residents the opportunity to apply the criteria to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) sites in the parish. All parishioners were invited to this meeting, the invitation being included in the questionnaire.

Melton Borough Council (MBC) along with all similar authorities in the UK, invite applications from landowners to put forward land that they would consider for development. From these plots of land MBC produces a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The plots are then checked against a number of elements to see whether they are suitable and deliverable and plots that meet their criteria are brought forward as Potential Options. Of the 24 original SHLAA sites in the Parish, only 2 were so identified and the SG were notified of this only
four days before the December meeting and after the questionnaires had been delivered to each household.

So at the meeting we were able to say which sites had been identified as potential options but since this can change with time and other pressures residents were asked to apply the criteria to all of the SHLAA sites in the parish.

The status of the sites in the Parish and indeed the status of all sites in the Borough was contained in the Melton Local Plan Emerging Options (Draft) issued for a 12 week consultation in January 2016. This document set out MBC’s Plan for the Borough for the period 2011 to 2036 and included how the Borough would develop and grow. An earlier document had been issued for consultation and the Emerging Options included the comments received during this earlier consultation. The document was over 200 pages long but the indication for Bottesford, being the second largest settlement in the Borough next to Melton Mowbray, was that 370 additional houses would be required in the parish in the plan period 2011-2036. On that basis around 300 would be required to be built between now and the end of the plan period since some houses had already been built between 2011 and 2016.

The SG was aware from the consultation exercises that there was widespread resistance to extra housing in the parish and that wherever the houses were built there would be dissatisfied parishioners. The SG produced a response identifying the problems and difficulties of extensive building in the parish and arguing the case for a reduction in the number of houses allocated. This response was agreed by the Parish Council and both returns were submitted to MBC within the consultation period.

Our Neighbourhood Plan must conform to the Melton Local Plan in respect of numbers and so the SG started to write our NP in line with these figures as we had identified two sites that could accept most of this housing allocation.

A first draft of the NP was sent to both MBC and our Parish Council and the text was agreed in principle although a few changes were made. The document is being written in accordance with feedback received with the aim of providing an acceptable way forward for the majority of the Parish. It is clear that there were concerns from those adjoin the Rectory Farm site and the means of addressing those concerns is given below.

We were proceeding with the writing of the NP, which owing to the commercial and other contents is required to be kept confidential. However on completion it will be issued to every house in the Parish for comment. After any adjustment following receipt of the comments and assessment by others it will be reissued as the proposed Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan and you will then be able to vote for or against it in a referendum.
As stated above the NP cannot disagree with numbers set on the Melton Local Plan but can influence the sites on which they are built. It was announced recently that the numbers allocated to Bottesford had increased and these figures have been confirmed in the Draft Melton Local Plan issued this week for consultation.

The figures for Bottesford are now 428 houses up to 2036. Easthorpe has been reclassified as a Rural Hub, building is now also permitted in that hamlet and a further 20 houses are allocated there bringing the total for the Parish to 448.

Previously all the building was to have been in Bottesford with Easthorpe, Muston and Normanton deemed unsustainable for building because of the lack of facilities, car travel would be necessary for retail, employment, leisure activities and so on. The Draft Melton Local Plan has also now identified additional sites in the Parish as Potential Options and to meet the numbers now required all of these identified sites within Bottesford and Easthorpe need to be used to meet this building allocation.

![Figure 1Bottesford and Easthorpe SHLAA sites Nov 2016](image)

An enlarged map showing the sites is shown below

While we can’t argue with the numbers via the Neighbourhood Plan it is perfectly valid to object to the Melton Local Plan and if you disagree with these numbers I strongly recommend you to write to Melton Borough Council within the next five
weeks. The Parish Council and the Steering Group will certainly be doing so and welcome your support.

A copy of the Pre submission Draft Melton Local Plan is in Bottesford Library along with forms on which you can submit any comments to Melton Borough Council.

The Document can also be seen on [www.meltonplan.co.uk](http://www.meltonplan.co.uk), and click on *Pre submission Draft Melton Local Plan*

The consultation period is now underway and ends on Monday 19\textsuperscript{th} December 2016.

![Figure 2 Bottesford and Easthorpe SHLAA sites Nov 2016 –Enlarged view of sites](image)
The publication of Mr Sparham’s election leaflet contained inaccuracies and a misrepresentation of the work of the Parish Council, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, and Borough Councillor David Wright.

The facts are presented below.

The means of covering the allocation of 300 houses to Bottesford over the next 20 years was to have been provided by two sites, a small site near the centre of the village and the Rectory Farm site.

The Rectory Farm site was first shown to Parish residents at a public meeting in June 2015, it was shown as Devon Park, a name given to the site by the owners of the land. Rectory Farm is the identification given by MBC and Rectory Farm will be used in this paper. A photograph, taken at this event, is shown below.

![Rectory Farm Public Meeting](image)

At this time it was one of the 24 sites in the SHLAA list for the Parish. In December 2015 it was identified by MBC as a potential option and this was confirmed by its inclusion in the issue of the Melton Local Plan Emerging Options (Draft) in January 2016.

The Steering Group has encouraged the involvement of those considering developments in the Parish to present their proposals to the Group in order that we can have an input to the scheme and start to set out the elements in the evolving NP that we would wish to see included.

The Agent for Rectory Farm, representing the three owners of land on the site, has been keen to address our concerns and offered to employ a designer to work with the Steering Group and some representatives of the residents living near the site to produce a plan that would add to the village without undue impact on those living nearby.

A series of workshops was proposed using an Urban Design expert, author of the national guidance publication *Design for Life 12*. A meeting was set up for April this year to announce the workshops and get the residents neighbouring the site...
to select delegates for those workshops. Unfortunately the meeting was spoiled by the 'Stop Rectory Farm' campaign and the response from the meeting was that only one resident came forward to represent the area.

Given that there was no design for the area, no planning application had been made and there was not even a definitive view as whether the scheme was viable, the 'Stop Rectory Farm' campaign was inappropriate and only served to prevent local residents from getting involved. The involvement of local residents in the design of a scheme, paid for by the landowners, is unusual if not unique and this opportunity was missed.

The proposal for Rectory Farm was well founded, CABE recommended the site as the best option for the village during their visit to the Parish and in subsequent sessions in concert with the SG. It met most, if not all, of the criteria and provided a confined site with natural boundaries that would not permit future uncontrollable expansion. It was also close to the village centre giving the option for those living on the development to walk to the village centre.

The suitability of the site was further supported by MBC by selecting it as a potential option.

Given the concerns in the parish over flooding we have spoken to the Environment Agency and to the local Flood Warden and ascertained that it is one of the safest areas from flooding in a village that has many areas of high flood risk. There is an issue of surface water flooding that can be rectified in the course of any development.

Finally the meeting in December last year after the issue of the Questionnaire to which everyone in the Parish was invited did produce a poor response but there were a high proportion from the west end of the village and the results still indicated support for Rectory Farm.

Mr Sparham in his circular indicated that “68 people objected to the Local Plan in April”. These objectors may be mainly those living near Rectory Farm but he doesn’t indicate whether it is that specific element or whether some of those objecting were simply objecting to the numbers allocated to Bottesford.

The SG has always stood by the ideal that the NP should reflect the majority of the residents’ wishes, 68 objections to the Melton Local Plan does not demonstrate a majority view for the Parish as a whole. The views of the Parish to the final Neighbourhood Plan will only be definitively found through a democratic referendum.

Mr Sparham claims the Neighbourhood Plan is “written to a large extent by my opponent.” In fact Sue Love is part of a team of 7 engaged in writing the Plan in response to the decisions of the NP Steering Group, who are trying to follow as
far as possible the wishes of all the residents expressed during the consultation exercises.

He also claims that the draft Neighbourhood Plan “appears to be nothing more than 60 pages of biased marketing in support of Rectory Farm”

Mr Sparham has seen the document and his comment is grossly inaccurate.

The pre-consultation Bottesford Parish Neighbourhood Plan

a. Is a comprehensive document which explains to residents why the Parish needs a NP and how to engage in it.

b. Explores the history and character of Bottesford.

c. Identifies green spaces which should be protected in the Parish.

d. Examines local housing need.

e. References consultation with experts (including the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and the independent landscape sensitivity study commissioned by MBC (Influence).

f. Details consultation with residents and their responses to the questionnaire delivered to every household.

g. Details all the public meetings organised by the SG.

h. Examines all the sites brought forward for development.

The document is a draft and incomplete and therefore presently confidential. You will be able to test for yourself Mr Sparham’s comments when the document is published.

The budget for the Neighbourhood Plan is mainly for Consultants Fees and printing costs related to circulars and publications such as the Questionnaire and in due course the Neighbourhood Plan. No one on the Steering Group is paid for their time and very few claim any out of pocket expenses. So Mr Sparham’s inference is both inaccurate and offensive.

Mr Sparham also stated in his circular that:

“...the Steering Group has opened the way for MBC to ... propose another seven development sites.”

And

“... both our Parish Councillors and Ward Councillors have not represented the views of the majority of the residents and have failed to protect us.”

Members of the Steering Group and Bob Bayman (Parish Councillor) have been attending MBC Local Plan Reference Group meetings and have been making the
case for a limited development of Bottesford. The Steering Group responded strongly to the MBC consultation documents *Issues and Options* and *Emerging Options* giving reasons why Bottesford should not be overdeveloped. This stance was supported by the Parish Council who made a similar response.

Mr Sparham was present at the 21 September 2016 meeting when Councillor Wright explained to the SG that he was prevented from presenting Bottesford’s case to the Full Council due to his role as Mayor. The case was put by Councillor Wright to Senior Officers at MBC listing our queries, concerns and disagreement with the proposals but he was instructed that as Mayor and the Chair of the Full Council he must be unbiased.

Mr Sparham lives adjacent to Rectory Farm and this may account for the particular interest he has in the site. He has raised the matter of development at Rectory Farm several times at SG meetings.

We can only consider building on land made available and that is predominantly through the SHLAA list. When the number of houses allocated to Bottesford was 370 for the plan period he was asked how he would distribute them avoiding Rectory Farm to which he had no answer because there was none.

The only large site alternative was Belvoir Road and this has been dismissed by MBC for a number of valid reasons.

Rectory Farm has been chosen following sound advice and the work that has been carried out so far has indicated a development of which we can be proud.

The original number of houses on Rectory farm was cited as 259, this has been reduced to 150 in the Draft Melton Local Plan due to MBC reducing the site by excluding part of it following comments from Historic England and parts near the river that we would not wish to build on because of flood risk. The comments from Historic England are open to challenge.

The site was not reduced as Mr Sparham states “to allocating part of the site to Industrial Development”. A small area has been sold to a local firm but this would have a very small impact on the area available for houses, Mr Sparham’s comment is misleading. No allocation in either the Draft MLP or the NP has been made for industrial use. He also cites the need and cost of a new bridge over the river when he is aware that the intention would be to use the former railway bridge.

It could be argued that this is a large scale development that is against the wishes of the Parish but given that we cannot argue the numbers through the NP we must try to reach a compromise that will be the best result for the parish as a whole. Mr Sparham also says that we are moving against the parish’s wishes to have developments evenly spread over the remaining plan period. This would be an ideal situation but economics and practicality weighs against this in some instances. If we did proceed with Rectory Farm at say 200 houses that would
mean building 10 houses a year and those on and around the development suffering construction inconvenience for 20 years!

Where we can we will limit the impact on the village but without a Neighbourhood Plan and at present no current Melton Local Plan we have little defence against Developers given the Government’s stance on new house building.

Wherever there is building in Bottesford it will impact on the traffic and car parking problems and these are being considered in the NP. The same is true for issues around schools and GP surgeries. Both schools currently have vacancies.

When completed the draft NP will go out for consultation and every resident will be able to comment on it. Currently following the reduction of the number of homes we had hoped to provide on the Rectory Farm site (from over 250 to approximately 150) the writing of the plan is under review whilst we explore how we can best address this shortfall, and how to respond to the increased demand for housing numbers in the Parish from MBC (from 300 to 428).

Following advice from Independent Planning Consultants we cannot argue a reduction in house numbers through the Neighbourhood plan but we can make representations and objections to the Draft Melton Local Plan and try to get the numbers reduced in that way.

So if you wish to try to get the number of houses allocated to Bottesford changed please send your comments to Melton Borough Council in the next 5 weeks before the consultation period ends. The Steering Group and the Parish Council will be responding but please do so yourself.

A copy of the Pre submission Draft Melton Local Plan is in Bottesford Library along with ‘comments forms’ for your use.

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