

## **Neighbourhood Development Plan Report – 17.5.17**

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst are underway with our Neighbourhood Plan!

The importance of NPs cannot be underestimated in the current climate. TWBC are currently being asked to identify where at least 13,000 homes can be built within the borough in the next 20 years. As part of the development of their new Local Plan, they are currently inviting responses to their Issues & Options document. I would encourage all residents to make themselves aware of these options and respond before the deadline 12<sup>th</sup> June. As a Parish Council, with an emerging Neighbourhood Plan, we must also come together over the next few weeks to agree a consensual response.

The Neighbourhood Plan process takes about 18 months to complete. Through the consultation with the community we have the opportunity to develop planning policy which is specific to our parish, that will complement the strategic policy of TWBC's Local Plan and will carry weight in law.

Whichever of the options TWBC decides upon, we will be asked to take our share of new housing. Through the Neighbourhood Plan we can have a say about where it goes, the design and quality of it and who it is for. We can also, through the Neighbourhood Plan, endorse others plans within the parish and we can invoke a Neighbourhood Development Order for a community development of our choosing, thereby by-passing the need for planning permission through TWBC.

As a Parish Council, we recognise the importance of Neighbourhood Plans for shaping the development in the parish and we have endorsed and procured the services of a consultant to help us deliver our plan.

Under the capable guidance of Richard Eastham, from Fera Urbanism, we have undertaken the first stages of the public engagement process with Visioning Events and a three-day Design Forum.

Residents and representatives from community and interest groups came together to share their views and begin to identify which policy areas are most important to us.

The report from the Visioning Events will shortly be available online at our website:

<http://cranbrookandsissinghurstndp.co.uk>

The 3-Day Design Forum started with the morning of Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May being given over to fifteen presentations from a range of representatives being heard by the assembled: children from Cranbrook Primary School shared the views of their classmates including imaginative ideas for a zip line in the Ball Field, as well as a need for more youth provision outside school. They didn't hold back in their criticisms of the town, with the Co-op coming under fire for its pricing strategy and the loutish behaviour of some residents to be dealt with by boot camp!

David Summers, from Age Concern, shared the concerns of our elderly residents (that they do not think much about the future!), the problems that our historic pavements & buildings can cause those with limited mobility, and their desires for more places to go in the evenings which both safe to get to and welcoming.

Gordon Young, from HMY Architects, showed us the innovative plans for the new clubhouse at the Rugby Club, which include a flexible space for community use written into their business model.

Jeremy Boxall described his aspirations for a network of footpaths & cycleways through and between the settlements and beyond to link Sissinghurst to Bedgebury Forest, as a means by which has the potential to improve our own personal well-being and also increase the economic prosperity of the parish.

Sally Marsh, from the High Weald AONB Unit, urged us to think more closely and deeply about the place around us: “for the mark we leave to be at least as good as all that has come before us”. She encouraged us to let the beauty of our landscape be the inspiration in the creation of a legacy of which we can be proud. Future development should be small scale, sensitive and dispersed.

Presentations were also given by Bridget Veitch who updated us on the Community Centre project, and by Amanda Goodchild from Sissinghurst Primary School, who highlighted the importance of effective consultation and honesty by developers.

Mark Bewsey & Max Mossman from Countryside Properties talked about their position with regards to Corn Hall Farm. Mark Shearman from Invicta Self-Build described his ambitions for offering high-end self-build plots on a site in Sissinghurst. Barry Sancto from Pickhill Developments told us about his plans for a small housing cul-de-sac at Hartley.

Joy Temple shared the vision of the Cranbrook Windmill Association for greater community use and sense of ownership of one of our most iconic historic buildings. John Bancroft described the work of Speedwatch & offered short- and longer-term solutions for dealing with traffic volumes and speed. Peter Mellor from Sissinghurst Conservation Area Advisory Committee expressed their desires to manage development so that it is appropriate for the needs of the village and does not destroy its distinctive rural identity. He also highlighted some significant green spaces & rural lanes within the village which should be conserved.

Lee Hatcher, from the Cranbrook Operatic and Dramatic Society, an organisation approaching their centenary, expressed their need for more rehearsal and performance spaces, with good acoustics, such as the Providence Chapel. They would love to grow the society as a means of creating a better, and more diverse cultural offering for the town and surrounds.

Tim Kemp explained why the Crane Valley Land Trust has been set up: as a potential delivery vehicle for housing which is exemplary in design quality, which enhances, not destroys, our precious landscape and historic centres. Its primary purpose is to provide housing that our young people and key workers can afford to live in, through the reinvestment of profits directly back into the community.

Among the other submissions, which were not presented in person, included those from Cranbrook in Bloom, Cranbrook Conservation Area Committee, the Cranbrook Local History Society and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England. These will all be uploaded to the website soon.

Throughout the three days and evenings of the design forum we were invited to look at our place with a fresh set of eyes. We were told to be bold and imaginative, but not reckless. We were educated into the ways of the place-makers and the urban-designers; who observe and understand how our towns and villages have evolved in a response to the way people live.

From these principles, we see that considered place-making can encourage social cohesion, where shared open space in the heart of the community is equally important as the buildings surrounding it, and where pedestrian connections establish vital links within and between areas in both town & village.

Consideration of how an improved cultural, economic and retail offering could add vibrancy to Cranbrook was discussed. Protection and enhancement of our green spaces, landscape and rural lanes featured highly, as did the importance of setting design criteria for future developments based on our rich built heritage.

Taking these emerging themes, over the three days we split into groups and covered much of the parish on site visits, looking at a range of issues from traffic, pavements, potential housing sites, green spaces, potential cultural venues etc. We then came back and tried to translate our findings through map work, brain-storming of ideas, discussions and beginning to collate information towards a set of policy themes.

This was helped by those who just dropped in when they could to add their viewpoints and local knowledge.

The Design Forum culminated in a presentation evening on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> May where Richard reviewed the activities of the previous days, highlighted the emerging themes and described the next stages of the process. Richard declared that he was very pleased with our progress over the three days, that we have given him and his team a lot of material to work with, and that our Neighbourhood Plan is on course and progressing very well. He will be writing a report which will be published towards the end of June, and which will appear on our website in due course.

The next steps are a broadening and deepening of the community engagement. This will involve members of the NDP Steering Group coming out to the community, in the schools, churches, clubs, at the fairs, fetes and events throughout the summer. We will share the findings so far of the Visioning Events and the Design Forum. We will be inviting you to respond to these and to share your knowledge and information to help us fill in the gaps.

We look forward to meeting you!

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Cranbrook School, especially John Weeds, Brigitte Santer & John Hislop, for the free use of the Coach House. I would also like to thank Phil Mummery for opening the Church Tower and the Windmill for us on Wednesday, from which Richard & the participants were not only able to take some great photos but also get a bird's eye perspective of Cranbrook. I would like to thank all those who participated, whether only briefly or those who were able to come out on site visits and/or join in with discussions, mapwork and policy writing sheets.

I would like to thank all my (now expanding) Steering Group once again, but especially Jeremy Boxall for leading the Sissinghurst charge, and Lee Hatcher & Matt Warne for taking three days annual leave in order to support me during the Design Forum.

Nancy Warne

Chair

Cranbrook & Sissinghurst NDP Steering Group

Feedback from attendees:

Dear Nancy and the NDP Steering Committee,

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation of the work you all input to create and execute the 3 day NDP event last week.

Your commitment and enthusiasm was infectious. You went to great efforts to make attendees welcome, included and valued despite sometimes only a fleeting attendance.

Sourcing FERIA was a coup. Richard, Anna & Antonia lead the sessions with the same inclusive, approachable, optimistic charisma.

I am sure the work still to do is huge but take heart from the success of this event and be proud of making a difference.

I would like to volunteer my services around my visits North (heading there today).

Nancy you are to be congratulated, Richard is a great consultant and you have done extremely well to achieve as much as you have this week. I know it's only a first step but a strong foundation is crucial to long term success. Well done.

Hi Nancy

Many thanks for organising the NDP days etc.

Most worthwhile and interesting.

Sorry I could not attend them all owing to work commitments.

Let's hope something sensible comes of it all.

Best regards