

Report on Stapleford and Great Shelford Neighbourhood Plan for Great Shelford Annual Parish Meeting, 3rd March 2022

By Jenny Flynn (Vice-Chair, Stapleford Parish Council and Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group)

Over the past few months, a steering group of Stapleford and Great Shelford parish councillors and residents has been meeting to reinvigorate the villages' work on a combined neighbourhood plan. The initial months of this time were spent familiarising ourselves with the general issues, process and support available, prior to moving forward in a more focused manner from early 2022.

What is a neighbourhood plan?

Neighbourhood planning is a legal right granted to communities in England, contained in the Localism Act 2011. It sits alongside other planning legislation (e.g. Local Plans and the National Planning Policy Framework) and allows communities to shape their development by creating their own planning policies. A neighbourhood plan can, for example:

- point to where new homes, shops and offices should be built
- influence what they should look like
- identify and protect important local green spaces
- grant planning permission for specific buildings to meet a community's needs.

Note, then, that neighbourhood plans are about saying what you *do* want, not vocalising what you don't want to happen.

Why make one?

Neighbourhood plans are optional: we could let our existing and emerging Local Plans and Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Officers direct our future. However, whilst still required to align with the strategic priorities of the wider local area, neighbourhood plans allow communities to add another level of granularity and local knowledge that can really make a difference to planning decisions. This is an opportunity for Stapleford and Great Shelford to set out a positive, shared vision for how we want our area to develop over the next 10, 15, 20 years, in ways that meet our identified local needs and make sense for local people.

Ultimately, policies in our neighbourhood plan will have equal weight in planning decisions to those in the Local Plan.

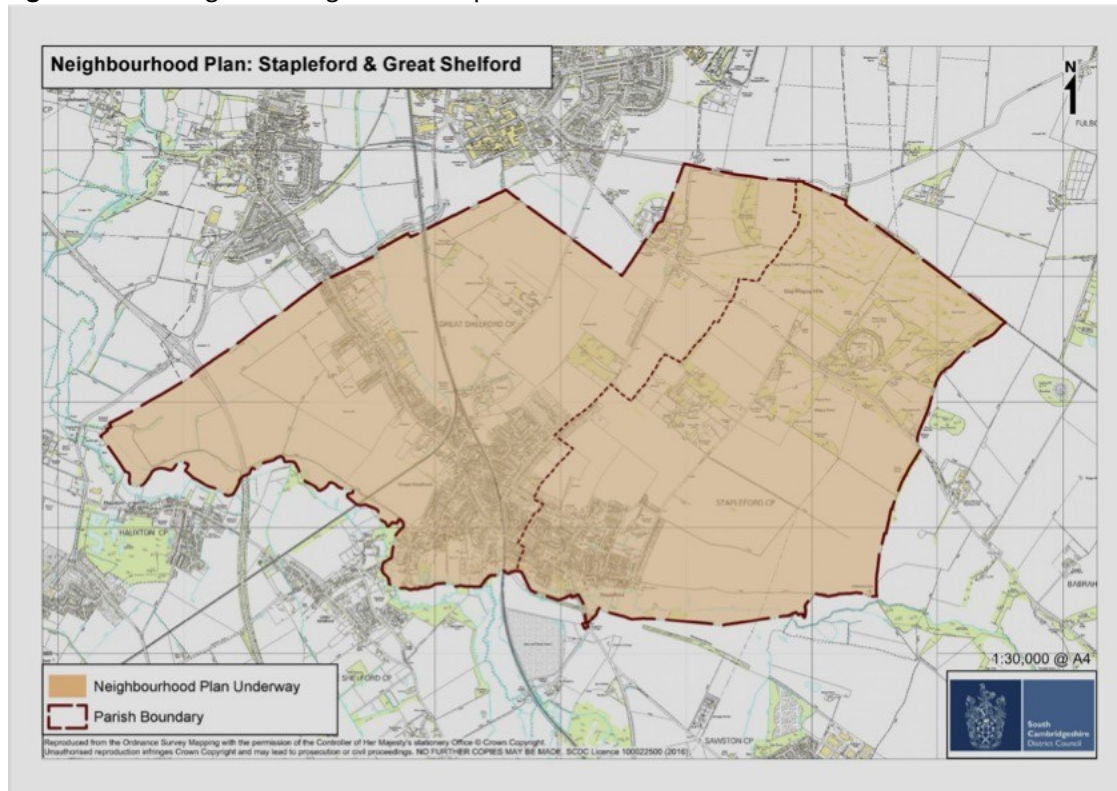
The neighbourhood planning process

The process is generally led by parish/town councils and supported by a working group which includes parish councillors, local residents and businesses. It involves a significant amount of community engagement and the creation and analysis of a strong evidence base. Together, these ensure that the resulting plan is based on a proper understanding of the area and of the views, aspirations, wants and needs of local people.

Where are we in the process?

Stapleford and Great Shelford were designated a single neighbourhood area (see Figure 1) by South Cambridgeshire District Council in November 2016. The respective parish councils decided on a combined approach for several reasons: for example, creating a neighbourhood plan is a very time- and resource-intensive process, and synergies between the two villages and overlaps in the development challenges we face mean there are considerable benefits in working together.

Figure 1: our designated neighbourhood plan area



Given the length of time that it takes to produce a neighbourhood plan, the fact that work is done by volunteers, and that parish council priorities and personnel are prone to change, sustaining momentum through to completion is undeniably difficult. Work from 2016-18 on our neighbourhood plan focused on building an evidence base and early stage consultation to identify the issues that are important to local people, before grinding to a bit of a halt. This work won't be wasted but it now needs updating. Importantly, we also anticipate that people's thoughts on some issues will have changed given climate and ecological changes and Covid-19, plus other pressures on our area such as water table stress, the emerging draft Local Plan, economic growth targets, East-West Rail and Cambridge South East Transport scheme.

What to expect next

The steering group has drafted a project plan and report outline, drafted a logo to make our work more readily identifiable (Figure 2), started designing a new neighbourhood plan website, and has produced a draft questionnaire in preparation for early stage consultation in Spring 2022. There will be multiple opportunities for community engagement as we go through the process and we are keen to incorporate the views of as many people as

possible; we must ensure that our neighbourhood plan represents the entire community, not just those who are easiest to engage with.

Figure 2: draft neighbourhood plan logo



Initial engagement will start by asking basic questions about planning-related matters across seven main categories, such as:

Category	Questions
Housing	What's good and needs conserving?
Local design and character	
Heritage	
Natural environment and green spaces	What needs fixing?
Amenities and infrastructure	What's missing?
Transport and travel	
Economy and employment	

Answers to these questions will shape more detailed surveys, focus groups and other meetings with residents, businesses, workers, service providers and landowners. It is our aim that everyone will have opportunities to participate, whether face-to-face, by phone, online or via social media.

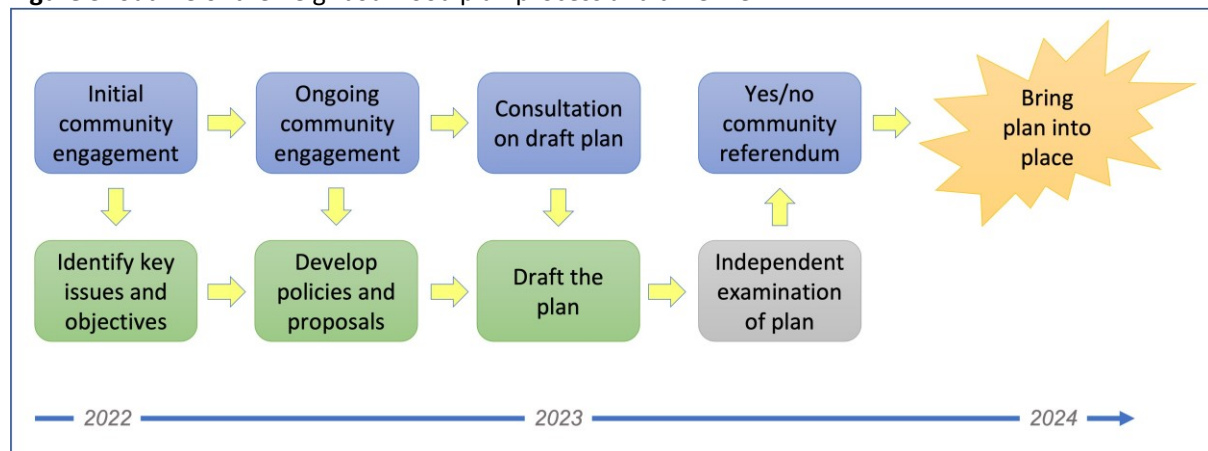
[Turning engagement into evidence...and evidence into policies](#)

The outcomes of community engagement will be combined with other information (such as housing needs analysis, local character assessment and local plan data) to create a large evidence base. From this, the steering group will distil a vision for what Stapleford and Great Shelford aspire to look like at the end of the neighbourhood plan period, roughly 20 years from now. A set of more specific objectives will describe what needs to be done to deliver this vision (e.g. 'promote a range of housing sizes and types which are integrated into the community'; 'protect, enhance and expand our green spaces and access to the surrounding countryside, linking them for the benefit of wildlife and non-motorised users'). The vision and objectives will be the subjects of further community input.

Following this, a set of planning policies will be created to turn the objectives into action. These are the most important outcomes of any neighbourhood plan because they form part of the statutory development plan against which planning applications are assessed.

In the final stages, the draft neighbourhood plan will be put out for consultation to the people who live, work or run businesses in Stapleford and Great Shelford, plus various bodies whose interests may be affected by the plan, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England. A revised plan is then submitted for independent examination. The examiner will consider whether the proposed neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other legal requirements set out by law. If found satisfactory, the neighbourhood plan will return to Stapleford and Great Shelford for a referendum – a yes/no poll in which you will be asked ‘Do you want South Cambridgeshire District Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Stapleford and Great Shelford to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?’ If more than 50% of those voting say ‘yes’, then our plan will come into force (Figure 3).

Figure 3: outline of the neighbourhood plan process and timeline



Final thoughts

Producing a neighbourhood plan is very definitely a lengthy and intricate process with many different parts! But, by the end of it we – the people who know and love Stapleford and Great Shelford most of all – will have written new planning laws and achieved greater control over development in our area. And that really is a vision worth aspiring to.

If you’d like to know more, look out for regular updates via Stapleford Messenger, Great Shelford Village News, local Facebook pages and e-newsletters, Parish Council websites and meeting minutes and school Parentmail, plus our new neighbourhood plan website (www.greatshelfordparishcouncil.gov.uk/staplefordandgreatshelfordneighbourhood-plan), with direct links from both Parish Councils’ homepages.