

NAILSEA ACTION GROUP 2020 AGM

Chair's Report

Matthew Thomas, Chair of Nailsea Action Group

Since the last N.A.G. AGM on 7th February 2019 we have continued to work, much like last year often in the background, and apologies we have not always managed to send out updates as often we might have intended.

The committee has continued to meet regularly during the year as well as there being several ad-hoc meetings between the Chair and Vice-chair to discuss other matters arising. Antony and Dave attended several (most) days of the JSP hearings in Bath. Antony also attended and spoke at the Youngwood Lane Inspection hearing. We have also, where possible, had representation (mainly in the form of Antony) at several Planning committee and Town Council meetings.

We have written to the Town Council and continued to monitor the progress on Engine Lane, as well as attending the public meeting held by the National Grid on the current cabling work underway.

Outside of these activities we have also been working to expand our engagement with the wider community, with Antony and Dave attending an A-level Geography lesson at Nailsea School.

With the demise of the JSP, the future of the plans and policies for Nailsea are a little unclear at this stage. N.A.G. will continue to monitor the ongoing plans for the Town and keep you apprised of activities as best we can. Whilst our costs are moderate, we still do face a challenge with both funding and people to contribute to ongoing activity.

Area Reports

Engine Lane

Since the last AGM in early 2019, during the year the contractor Murphy has surveyed the ground proposed for development with a number of drilling points not least to identify the route and condition of the land in which the high voltage cable will be buried. In several locations badger setts have been identified, and the residents carefully monitored and evacuated by a system that allows the animals out of their homes, but not back in, thereby encouraging them to look elsewhere.

On the southern edge of the site, and nearby, some lower voltage cables on wooden electricity poles that currently pass below the high voltage cables on pylons, have been undergrounded by National Grid so that the high voltage cables can be safely lowered when the new cable that will run parallel to Engine Lane has been undergrounded. This process will not be completed until 2021, meaning that, allowing for ground settlement, there can be no housebuilding until late Summer/early Autumn of that year. Even then no houses may be built directly over the undergrounded cable nor some eight metres either side of it

One of the conditions of the original planning permission also specifies that building may not start until the ground has similarly settled on the replacement sports pitches for the Rugby Club. These are alongside Engine Lane near Blackfriars Road under which the new cables will run. Work on the undergrounding project, scheduled to start on 7th January 2020, began on that date with the erection of one-way traffic lights between nos. 26 and 16 Engine Lane, and workers preparing to make an entrance to the site opposite the junction of Engine Lane and Allington Gardens.

Youngwood Lane

In September 2019 a four day hearing was held at Weston-super-Mare Town Hall to resolve an appeal by Rocke Associates acting for McTaggart Mickel who wish to develop the site for housebuilding, against the inaction of North Somerset Council to hear a request for planning permission.

Both sides were legally represented by QCs. N.A.G. was in attendance and spoke at length on the first day against the proposal that this land should be built on. The inspector's judgement was in favour of Rocke Associates' request to build 450 house on the site, not just the 175 that were already included in the Sites Allocation Plan. It is widely assumed that McTaggart Mickel will now be able sell on the land at a higher price with the prospect of planning permission.

The Uplands

Firstly to clarify a point made in N.A.G. News, the Tree Preservation Order includes the woodland to east of fields plus trees & hedges to south & Oak trees to west.

We have been advised that the Joint Venture arrangement between North Somerset Council (NSC) and Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES) has now been nullified and NSC will develop the site themselves via a management company.

A meeting of Uplands residents was held on 12th November 2019 to ensure all up to speed. Some 45 people attended (from a population of 50 properties). Matters are now coming to a head after 4 years. Despite a collection of Uplands residents, supported by N.A.G., investigating history and lobbying both officers and Councillors, NSC is now proceeding apace. Site investigations - topography of road, fields & services have been studied by contractors with geological & archaeological installations and measurements made. Last week drainage studies made with about 5 pits dug using heavy machinery and a large water bowser. Pouring rain for 3 days devastated the fields particularly the lower one.

A complaint has been received this week from Jenny Ford at NSC to the effect that vandalism had occurred to equipment within the field & a Contractor's vehicle had been 'assaulted' by residents.

NSC continues to deny that this area is Public Open Space despite the audit trail to the contrary and are now planning to use the narrow entrance road which the Council initially said would need to be widened. Members are reminded that the original private planning application in 1976 was refused because of the safety and loss of amenity issues associated with using such a narrow road.

NSC's first major consultation occasion is to take place on Monday 27th January 2020 (2:00 - 3:30 and 5:00 - 7:00), with their "Design & Planning Team", to "gain an understanding of the community's views about the site and potential options for development". There is then to be at least one more event prior to the planning app before planning app made in May. NSC have stated that they intend "a high quality development shaped by the landscape".

North and North West Nailsea

Work has started on under-grounding one of the lines of pylons and National Grid estimate that that work will take 18 months. The other set of pylons will have to be removed before development will be permitted behind Causeway view so any prospect of that is still several years away.

Trendlewood Way

In January 2019, the owners of the land off Trendlewood Way applied for Outline Planning for 24 dwellings. Although residents were given just 3 weeks, many responded to the application during April 2019. Whilst most residents accepted that the site had to be developed, there are many reservations around the number of dwellings, drainage, flooding and other matters. Numerous statutory bodies have commented on the application, many requiring additional work to be done prior to acceptance. Due to the location of the site, there are many issues around drainage, woodland management etc which need to be addressed. To date, NSC have not made a decision on the Outline Plan.

Joint Spatial Plan

In a six day hearing in Bath City Guildhall in June, the Joint Spatial Plan was placed before two government inspectors for approval. Lawyers and many building interests were present and contributed to the debate and discussions as did your Nailsea Action Group representative. Many weeks later the inspectors gave their judgement which was that the plan was unfit for purpose and should not be pursued in its present form. North Somerset Council is now likely to withdraw from any attempted revival of such a plan and proceed with its own local plan in collaboration with neighbouring authorities. This leaves a great deal unresolved not least in the matter of infrastructure.

Treasurer's Report

No fundraising has been undertaken during 2019.

The Group's bank balance stands at £154.00, however members of the group have made contributions through funding the website, venue hire for meetings etc.

Climate Change Emergency

Background

This is a very brief summary of the Council's Strategy and Action Plan:

- North Somerset will aim to be a carbon neutral council and a carbon neutral area by 2030
- The strategy outlines Seven key principles:
 - Become a net zero carbon council
 - An energy efficient built environment
 - Renewable energy generation
 - Repair, reuse, reduce and recycle
 - Replenish our carbon stores
 - Reduce emissions from transport

- Adapting to climate change
- The action plan outlines several different actions that the council proposes to:
 - Avoid Carbon Production e.g. Low Carbon Homes
 - Reduce Carbon Production - use renewable energy
 - Mitigate against Carbon Production - e.g. through public transport
 - Help Store - tree planting

Proposed Response

It's great that the council has a strategy and an action plan and on initial reading it's hard to disagree with the actions listed.

N.A.G. obviously welcomes actions like the "Aim to focus new mixed-use development on brownfield land, in town centres with public transport and proximity to major employment hubs" and this is indeed consistent with many of the Council's policies. Now the question is how do they aim to make this a reality? Whilst recognising that Climate change is global, if the council is genuinely committed to achieving this it needs to urgently review many of it's existing plans. Most, if not all, of the plans for housing in Nailsea either directly contradict this or other elements of the action plan. So only time will tell how this translates into reality.

Our challenge to the council should therefore be?

- If they continue to develop the Uplands, how will they make this Zero Carbon or net Carbon Plus?
- Nearly all the proposed development sites in Nailsea are greenfield.
- Nearly all are "out of town".
- There's no clear strategy for the required employment growth in the Town to match the proposed number of houses.
- Out of town housing sites will inevitably increase Car usage in the Town, as there are no adequate public transport alternatives.

There are no concrete or funded proposals to increase public transport provision into major employment hubs or indeed maintain/reverse the recent reductions in train capacity.

North Somerset Local Plan

For several years a Joint Spatial Plan was being prepared by the four local councils of Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES), Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. There had been several rounds of public consultation and in June an Examination in Public was held in Bath at which two Government Inspectors held round table discussions to test its soundness.

Underlying the plan was the need for lots more houses and the plan identified 12 new strategic development locations on green field sites. 2,500 homes were planned for the Strategic Development Location in Nailsea, which ran from Engine Lane to the Blue Flame.

N.A.G. responded to all of the consultations and in July Antony went to the Examination for several days to represent us.

Subsequently the Inspectors decided that the plan was unsound and recommended the Councils withdraw the plan. One of the main reasons that the inspectors found the plan to be unsound was that the selection of the 12 Strategic Development Locations was not based on identifiable common criteria and consequently it could not be shown that the most sustainable sites had been selected.

For the plan to be withdrawn, each of the four councils have to formally withdraw from the JSP process and, at North Somerset's full council meeting on 7th January, Councillor Tonkin presented a paper recommending that NSC withdraws. The report also looks to the future saying:

"The four authorities in the West of England are committed to joint working to deliver strategic spatial planning. North Somerset will prepare its own local plan, ensuring strategic matters with cross-boundary issues with other local planning authorities, including those within the West of England Combined Authority, are addressed through the duty to co-operate.

The scope and timetable for the North Somerset Local Plan will be revisited in the light of the decision to withdraw the JSP and a revised Local Development Scheme published in due course. The plan will need to assess the current challenges particularly in relation to housing delivery and cross-boundary implications and how to deliver sustainable development in the context of the climate change emergency. It will set out the spatial strategy and contain both strategic and non-strategic policies to guide future development. The spatial strategy and strategic policies will be developed alongside those being prepared by the WECA authorities to ensure they are aligned and consistent. Work needs to be progressed to minimise uncertainty and with effective engagement with local communities and other stakeholders."

The minutes of that Full Council Meeting are unlikely to be available in time for our AGM but efforts will be made to hear from councillors what happened to supplement this report at NAG's AGM.

N.A.G.'s committee find it worrying that the four Councils appear to be embarking on a course that will result in less integration between them whereas we interpret the thrust of the Inspectors' letters to be that better integration is required.

The reference to climate change is perhaps the most important aspect in the quotation above. The four district councils have all declared climate emergencies as have Nailsea Town Council and the Westminster Parliament. Climate change could have devastating effects on our children and grandchildren. We owe it to them to underline in no uncertain terms to the planning authorities the radical nature of the contribution that planning needs to make to avoid the worst effects emissions business as usual.

The foreword to the 2015 JSP Issues and Options report stated *"In 2014 the four Councils agreed a formal Memorandum of Understanding, pledging to work together to understand and plan strategically for the future development needs of the sub-region"*. I can't find that memorandum of understanding but we need to hold the Councils to its spirit expressed in this quote.

The Perrings Consultation

For many years house building companies have held options on the land south of The Perrings that slopes down to Backwell Lake. Some twenty years ago local residents fought a successful campaign for the land not to be built on. Mindful that in the current housebuilding climate/crisis interest might be expressed in this land again, Nailsea Town Council have initiated a campaign to have the area given town green status, and there is a questionnaire on the Council's website to this end. Nailsea Action group support this move while wishing the same could apply to the equally meritorious land south of The Uplands.