

**ALTON TOWN COUNCIL**  
**NEIGHBOURHOOD**  
**PLAN MONITORING**  
**REPORT**  
**MARCH 2017**



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## APPENDIX 1: DETAILED ACTION PLAN



On behalf of Alton Town Council we would like to express our thanks to Mike Heelis, David Allen, Simon Jenkins (EHDC) and Hannah Collier (EHDC) for their contribution to the monitoring of this plan.

# Introduction

## An overview of Neighbourhood Planning

East Hampshire District Council as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) is responsible for the delivery of the Development Plan which contains the standards by which applications are judged. However, in April 2012, local communities were given legal powers under the Localism Act 2011 to develop Neighbourhood Plans which hold as much weight as a material consideration in planning terms as the LPA's own development plan. To date, over 280 Neighbourhood Plans have come into force since 2012.

During 2014 and 2015 Alton Town Council worked together with the Alton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to produce the first ever statutory planning document for the town of Alton. The Alton Neighbourhood Plan means that the community are now able to directly influence planning decisions as East Hampshire District Council and Hampshire County Council are required to take the policies contained within the plan as material considerations when determining whether to grant or refuse planning permission for new development.

The Alton Neighbourhood Plan was passed by the Inspector in September 2015 and was subsequently approved by the residents of Alton in a referendum held on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016 with 93% of voters in favour of the plan.

Neighbourhood Plans can:-

- Shape and influence where development will go in the local area
- Decide what development should look like
- Include detailed planning policies for the local area

Neighbourhood Plans cannot:-

- Conflict with the policies within the Local Plan or Core Strategy
- Block development
- Provide less development than the adopted Local Plan

Neighbourhood Plans must be:-

- In general conformity with the strategic policies of adopted Local Plans
- In general conformity with national planning policy e.g. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- In line with the other laws and EU Directives/legislation and Human Rights obligations

Once approved ( or “made”), the Alton Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) became part of the development plan for the area; this means the policies and proposals contained within the ANP are now used to determine planning applications, including appeals. The Alton Neighbourhood Plan was formally adopted as a part of the Local Development Plan by East Hampshire District Council in May 2016.

## How and why is monitoring undertaken?

Following the “making” of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan by the people of Alton in the referendum of the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016, the decision was made to create a Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group and construct its initial Terms of Reference.

The focus of the group is to keep watch over the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan action points as they are delivered by the Town Council and other bodies and to monitor compliance with the policies contained within the plan by the Local Planning Authority when they determine planning applications.

East Hampshire District Council also undertakes their own monitoring of plan but this only relates to their statutory obligation to record the number of developments commenced and completed within the calendar year.

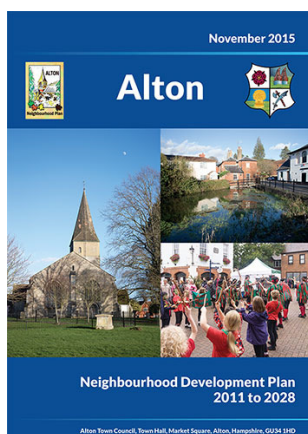
The Monitoring Group formally met for the first time on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2016 with its Terms of Reference agreed on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016 and detailed on the next page. The group consists of Mr. Mike Heelis ( resident), Mr. David Allan (resident), Councillor Peter Hicks (Alton Town Council) , Councillor Graham Hill ( East Hampshire District Council / Alton Town Council), Mr. Simon Jenkins, ( Head of Planning, East Hampshire District Council,) Hannah Collier (Policy Planning, East Hampshire District Council) and Mrs Leah Coney ( Town Clerk, Alton Town Council)

The group looks at any issues of compliance with the plan arising in its application of the policies contained within it and is provided with regular updates on the considerable work undertaken by officers and Councillors either directly or through a facilitation role in progressing the actions within the plan.

Members of the group have also lent their expertise in a variety of fields to assist with progression of a number of action plan points.

The group also looks at areas where the plan may becoming outdated or consider any omissions in the plan which should be addressed in any review of the documentation.

In view of the content of the proposed Neighbourhood Planning Bill, the group in future will make recommendations back to the Town Council as the qualifying body and EHDC as the Local Planning Authority if any modifications are required to address specific areas. The proposed process for this will enable minor modifications which do not materially affect policies in a Neighbourhood Plan to be made at any time without consultation with more significant changes made through a streamlined “paper based” independent examination procedure and major changes requiring the making a new Neighbourhood plan (including consultation, examination and referendum as before)



In order to remain a high value document for both the Council and the people of Alton, regular monitoring of the Alton Neighbourhood Plan ensures the plan is not “placed on a shelf” but provides a continuing source of robust scrutiny and dialogue in order to drive forward and progress the policies and action points created, promoted and endorsed by Altonians.

## Alton Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group – Terms of Reference

The Alton Neighbourhood Plan was made following a public referendum on Wednesday 24th February 2016. It contains both Planning Policies for the town, and Action Points which will be delivered and implemented by the respective Planning Authority or the Town Council in partnership with a variety of different stakeholders and public and commercial bodies.

In order to scrutinise the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan a Monitoring Group has been formed with the following terms of reference.

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of the Monitoring Group is two-fold:

- to ensure that the Action Point items contained within the Neighbourhood Plan are being delivered by the Town Council, working alongside a variety of partners, in a coordinated, cohesive manner and in a timely fashion; and
- To review the application of the policies by the Planning Authority in their determination of planning applications.

### 2. Role and activities

- a) To monitor progress on the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan Action Points by each of the Council's committees, making recommendations to the Council in respect of the timely delivery of the Action Plan as appropriate.
- b) To monitor the application of the Neighbourhood Plan Policies by Alton Town Council and the Planning Authority in relation to planning applications.
- c) To review the production of materials, both printed and electronic, used to communicate the annual review of the delivery of the Plan to residents, businesses and the wider community
- d) To assist in the production of a detailed annual report for each Annual Electors Meeting.
- e) To identify any required information for submission to the Local Planning Authority (EHDC) for inclusion in their Annual Monitoring Report.
- f) To recommend any additions, amendments or updates to Policies or Action Points for consideration in any future review of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- g) To monitor the overall effectiveness of the Plan in the previous 12 months and the likely implications and impact of the Plan for the forthcoming year.

### 3. Membership

The Delivery and Monitoring Group will consist of the Leader of the Council, the Town Council's lead Member for delivery of the Action Points within the Neighbourhood Plan, The Head of Planning at East Hampshire District Council (EHDC), the Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Officer (EHDC), the Town Clerk and two members of the public with an understanding of the content of the Neighbourhood Plan.

### 4. Meetings

The Monitoring Group will meet on a suitably frequent basis to progress matters in a timely manner. This is expected to be quarterly.

## Effectiveness of the Plan

The Monitoring group initially identified that the plan was only going to be effective if it was kept in the forefront of Alton Town Council's overall agenda and had a clear Action Plan which effectively works as a delivery strategy for the Action points contained within the plan.

To that end, they group recommended that Councillors undertake in-house training on the Alton Neighbourhood Plan policies to ensure they are able to apply them consistently when considering applications before the Planning and Transportation Committee as well as when the relevant Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring agenda item is tabled at the other appropriate Alton Town Council Committee Meetings. The training session for Councillors was carried out in August 2016. Refresher training will be offered in due course as appropriate.

### Residential Development.

The Alton Neighbourhood Plan stated that the Town Council would wish to track whether the Plan has had a positive impact on planning decisions and whether its objectives are being realized.

Initially members of the monitoring group identified that it was clear that a number of statutory consultees in the planning process were responding to the LPA without reference to the Alton Neighbourhood Plan and remained unaware of its existence as a statutory planning document; this was particularly notifiable in comments received from Highways in relation to parking provision.

This has largely been overcome as awareness has increased but still requires monitoring by both officers and the Planning and Transportation Committee who are informed when the case officers decision is contrary to the recommendation of the committee and whether this is wholly or in part due to non-application or reduced weight being given to the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Planning and Transportation Committee has consistently applied the policies within the Alton Neighbourhood Plan when considering their responses to planning applications. As a result Members are learning how and when the plan has been applied by the LPA and on the occasions when it has not been applied, the rationale for the case officer's decision.

The Planning and Transportation Committee has been frustrated to a degree at the weight given to the plan at reserved matters applications. During the drafting of the plan a number of major sites secured outline consent, and whilst the ANP was emerging, although applicants were given supplementary notes advising them of the draft plan, the principles applied at the outline stage are still valid at the subsequent reserved matters submission even though the plan is now in place. In some cases this comes down to the wording of the consent notice, even when it conditions certain elements to be considered at detailed stage.

The Town Council took the decision after the approval of the reserved matters application at the Alton Sports and Social Club site in Anstey Lane, to refer this to legal counsel to understand the position in respect of the remaining reserved matter applications at Will Hall Farm and South Alton, wishing to see clarification on how the Town Council should proceed going forward as to whether the Neighbourhood Plan policies are likely to continue to be set aside. The subsequent report from Landmark Chambers has given a measure of comfort to Members that the position in respect of these two applications is that the plan should be given full weight at reserved matters as indeed it should on all new development applications.



## Housing Numbers.

The group has raised concern with East Hampshire District Council regarding the actual housing numbers as they stand for Alton in comparison with the Neighbourhood Policy HO3 requirement. The EHDC Joint Core Strategy (JCS) (Appendix 2 page 113) required Alton to be allocated 1731 dwellings 2011 - 2028 (made up of pre allocated [including 236 windfall] 1031 and 700 Greenfield).

The Alton Neighbourhood Plan requires 1027 Greenfield plus the pre allocated 1031 making a total of 2058. This constitutes an additional 19% over original JCS figures.

As of January 2016 some 134 of the 236 windfall allowance has already been taken up leaving 102 to be allocated of this type out to 2028.<sup>1</sup> Assuming the rate of windfall is 13 per year for the 19 years of the JCS ( $236/19 = 13$  [rounded up]) the actual rate seems excessive at 27 per year ( $134/5 = 27$  [rounded up]). If the experienced rate is maintained then there could be another 378 under the windfall category. None of this takes into account numbers for the former Brewery site, which is likely to see an additional number of 150 – 180 residential properties.

Therefore it could be that by 2028 Alton could end up with a housing which will be 45% in excess of the JCS requirement and therefore in a position to greatly exceed the numbers contained within HO3 over the plan period. This policy will require further review and consideration by the Monitoring Group during 2017.

## Economy

The appointment of Julie McLatch as Business Development Manager (BDM) for Alton, jointly funded by East Hampshire District Council and Alton Town Council, on a three year project, has enabled dedicated officer focus on delivery of the Economic (ESAP) Action Plan points as well as consolidating collaborative working between the Town Council and other stakeholders.

With involvement in recent events including an Apprenticeship Breakfast, Small Business Saturday, a business Seminar on LEADER funding, an Open Council Business Forum, New Directions event for the over 50's, a tourism awareness event and participation in careers events in local school and colleges, there is a real drive to ensure there is informed and detailed dialogue facilitating a greater understanding of the needs of the business community in Alton.

The BDM also provides floating support services through outreach work with small businesses and community groups signposting locally available opportunities for business promotion and directing queries to relevant officers in planning and economic development at EHDC and HCC.

The latter part of 2016 and continuing throughout 2017, is a detailed focus on the delivery of objective 5a ANP enhancing the role of the Town Centre as a retail, tourism and hospitality hub, ensuring that Alton is able to capitalize on the opportunities for increased footfall resulting from the extensive promotion of the local area to a nationwide audience through the JA200 celebrations and the resulting publicity of Jane Austen as a key tourism attraction.

## Community

The Alton 2020 document identified a desire of residents to replace the Community Centre and the Sports Centre to modern purpose build facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure was correct in January 2016 and will be updated once the figures to December 2016 are known.

Plans continue to progress with the appointment of a supplier for the new sports centre; whilst there has been a delay in the delivery of this project, it is now aimed to be completed during 2019. The new facility at Alton will be built on the current site, next to the existing centre which will continue to be used while the new facility is under construction. It will include a six lane 25m pool, a six court sports hall, two fitness studios, squash courts and a gym. It will also provide significant investment in a destination spa, a climbing wall and a soft play area.

In respect of a new Community Centre, an appropriate site has now been identified within the curtilage of the former Molson Coors Brewery Site in the Town Centre and has been included within the Development Brief for the site. Once the site has been sold the Town Council will engage with the new owners to see how this can be realized and the form it may take.

North Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), working with its partners Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, North Hampshire Alliance and Hampshire County Council, as well as members of the public drawn from the Alton Stakeholder's Reference Group are carrying out a review of health and health-related care services in the Alton area and this work is ongoing. The Alton Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group has representation in this review through Mr. Mike Heelis.

## Action Plan Overview

It is clear that the initial momentum given by the Town Council in progressing a number of the Action points contained within the plan has consistently continued over the last 12 months.

Enclosed in Appendix 1 is a table which contains details on progress with the Action Plan points contained within the plan as well as the current position in respect of the Policies themselves. The plan is broken down according to the Committee remit that the item falls under. Unlike the Alton Town Council Corporate Strategy, the majority of the policies are incumbent upon other tiers of local government to enact in accordance with their statutory functions. A number of Action Points are also delivered by other stakeholders such as the Clinical Commissioning Group, Stagecoach and Network Rail; Alton Town Council is predominately a facilitator but the progress to date reflects the pressure the Council can apply and the contribution it can give ensuring these objectives are delivered for the people of Alton.