

Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan – Annual Report 2017-8.

The Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan has been effectively complete for the last 12 months and has been stalled in the formal consultation and examination process for almost the entire period.

EFSG – the team of local residents who collected the evidence and prepared the ENP - met for the last time in April 2017. The Parish owes a huge debt to all those who worked so hard over the preceding two years and this is an opportunity to register the Parish's thanks to them all once more. Not long after that, the ENP was subjected to a 'dry run' examination which identified a few minor points that needed amending before the formal adoption process began.

The first delay was caused by WODC deciding that a Sustainability Assessment (SA) was required – previously they had advised us that it would not be needed. There was a delay of about four months while this work was done and a consultation organised – if we had been told it was needed at the right time there would have been no delay. We had to write one completely new document and update one of the supporting documents but there was no material change to the Plan itself.

The Plan then went through its formal 6 week consultation and was sent to an Independent Examiner qualified to advise WODC on the Plan's suitability, as the formal process requires.

The Examiner held a public meeting in Eynsham at the start of December when she told us that significant features of the plan were not acceptable to her, despite the previous 'dry-run' examination and the fact that many things she did not like are present in Plans already adopted. We were advised to re-write and re-submit the plan but we were only informed of some of the problems and we were given no detailed reasoning for her decisions.

Our immediate thought was to do as the Examiner suggested but then we realised that if there are other things she doesn't accept, we did not want to go through a re-write and then another three months of 'consultation' before she starts her examination again, if we could end up in the same place again.

We therefore asked for the examination to be fully completed as soon as possible but she had taken on other work and was unable to restart examination of our Plan until February. Since then events beyond anyone's control have prevented any further work being done, with April 16th being the earliest restart date.

Overall, it has been a very frustrating year. At the start it did appear that WODC were deliberately stalling us as we do not agree with every detail of their Local Plan and were arguing against it at its examination. Relations are now better, partly because the Local Plan looks likely to be accepted and partly because WODC recognise that the ENP and its evidence base will be useful when they come to the detail work on the developments west and north of the village.

When the ENP is adopted, assuming residents vote for it at a local referendum, its policies will be enforceable on the new developments rather than just useful local advice. At this point we do not know if this will be the case or not, given that initial design work on the major Eynsham developments will be starting in the next month or two.