

## **Steering Group Consideration of Long Responses from residents within feedback on Draft NP**

### **Long response 1**

#### **Resident's Comment**

Where is the evidence (from the Parish, the residents of Stonesfield) to support the inclusion of "wind turbines" in the draft plan? On what basis should Stonesfield PC "strongly support" wind turbines?

The 3rd objective within Aim 7 says: "Aim 7: To address climate change at the local level: "When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms (such as solar panels, heat pumps, wind turbines, high specification insulation), Stonesfield PC will strongly support the planning authority to do so."

Section 3.3.6 of the draft NP says "3.3.6 The Survey showed low interest in adding sustainable energy sources to homes – 85% of respondents said that their homes do not use solar energy, ground source or air source heat pumps, and 65-85% are not considering doing so. The reasons for this were not given but may include cost, unwillingness to change, uncertainty of potential benefit, the inappropriateness of solar panels and external heat pumps for very old, small and conservation-area properties. However, some residents expressed a hope that alternative energy supplies, e.g. wind turbine, solar energy, should be explored on a community-owned basis."

Yet, none of the questions in the village survey (2023), either in the Household survey or the Individual survey, asked the village residents about wind power or wind turbines.

Additionally, none of the questions in the village survey, either in the Household survey or the Individual survey, asked about community ownership for wind turbines or solar energy. Two questions in the Household survey (Q9 and Q10) asked about sources of green energy but none of the multiple-choice answer options to Qs 9 and 10 pertained to wind or community ownership, therefore no data on wind power / wind turbines / community ownership was captured from the parish and its residents.

There were no, zero, questions in the Individual survey pertaining to energy efficient mechanisms, sources of green energy, wind turbines, solar energy, community ownership of alternative energy supplies.

There is, therefore, ZERO QUANTITATIVE DATA from Stonesfield residents to support the text in the draft Neighbourhood Plan regarding wind turbines and community energy projects.

Yet, the draft NP says Stonesfield PC will "strongly support" wind power / wind turbines?

Why has this been included in the draft NP?

Looking at the free text answers to Questions 4 and the "Is there anything else you would like to say..." in the Individual Survey, "wind" or "wind turbines" were mentioned 5 times (out of 612 responses). That is less than 1% (0.81%) of the number of responses to the Individual Survey which mentioned "wind" or "wind turbine" in their free text comments. These 5 responses could be from the same person and/or persons from the same household, not 5 different respondents.

And, yet, the draft NP says "When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms (such as solar panels, heat pumps, wind

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turbines, high specification insulation), Stonesfield PC will strongly support the planning authority to do so." And: In the "Key issues identified by Stonesfield residents", under "Energy", the following has been listed:

"Energy:

- Village should consider community-owned, renewable energy schemes including wind, solar and geothermal.
- Consider a village wind turbine as an energy source which would not adversely affect the natural environment, as outlined in the Cotswolds National Landscape strategy." Why? Where is the evidence for this? Why has this been included despite there being no quantitative, and very little qualitative evidence, to support it? How have 5 qualitative responses (all, potentially, from the same 1-2 respondents) informed the draft plan - and therefore what the PC should be strongly supporting - to such an extent?

I do not agree with "...a village wind turbine as an energy source which would not adversely affect the natural environment." A village wind turbine could seriously adversely impact upon both the natural environment and the health of Stonesfield residents. Wind turbines generate subaudible turbine emissions (acoustic pollution) which can have serious implications on health. The vestibular system can be impacted (the sensory system in the inner ear which is responsible for balance and spatial orientation) and neural pathways can be disrupted including auditory processing and autonomic nervous system control.

For further reading on this, please see:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935120312573?via%3Dihub> And: <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/04/04/impacted-by-turbine-acoustic-pollution/>

In summary, there is insufficient quantitative and qualitative evidence from the NP survey to support the suggestions/statements within the draft NP regarding wind and wind turbines. The PC should examine and discuss why this has been included and should remove it from the draft NP by the PC prior to submission to WODC.

I believe it would be extremely irresponsible (and potentially harmful to the village, its residents and the natural environment) for the PC to leave this content/statement regarding wind / wind turbines and "strongly support it" in the draft plan. Further evidence is required from the whole village (not just 5 qualitative comments which could be from 1-2 individuals) before wind / wind turbines are considered and included in the neighbourhood plan.

#### SG Response

1. The respondent misleads by suggesting "wind power proposals" were amongst "elements that were not requested by residents." The Village Survey includes a response, "What about a village wind turbine? Probably more efficient than a field of solar panels etc." Another comment in the Survey bemoaned "perhaps a missed opportunity? e.g. opportunity for local community renewable energy solutions." However, the lack of evidence, within the Neighbourhood Plan Survey responses, of substantial support for wind power or wind turbines which the respondent asserts, is accepted. The question as to whether there would be such support was simply not asked. Therefore, there may or may not be support.
2. The reference in bullet point 3 of Aim 7 within the draft NP will therefore be removed.

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3. However, this is not to be taken as an acceptance or rejection of the adverse assertions as to the desirability of wind turbines made by the respondent. It will be open to the PC or indeed any other action group within the community to investigate and, if appropriate, advocate the implementation of green power deriving from wind turbines.

#### Long response 2

##### Resident's comment

I feel the plan focusses too much on what it wants to prohibit, and not enough on what it wants to promote. It appears intended to preserve the village in aspic, restricting any expansion beyond its current footprint and deterring people from outside the area from moving here. It does little of substance to address the need for facilities for teenagers and other young people to make the village as welcoming to them as it is for older people. While there is a stated intention to support the building of affordable housing, in practice this is severely undermined for three reasons:

##### SG Response

As a result of the consultation the Steering Group is making a significant addition to the Community health and education section, specifically addressing the needs of teenagers and other young people in the village.

##### Resident's comment

1. The designation of Local Green Spaces entirely surrounding the village. The survey asked whether a number of sites should individually be protected in a way that is "consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services." Since each area was individually supported, the plan has concluded that ALL of the areas should be protected, which is not the question that was asked. Furthermore, the plan says that in these areas "development will not be permitted ... except in very exceptional circumstances", which is contrary to the goal of "complementing investment in sufficient homes".

##### SG Response

The draft Plan proposed fifteen sites around the village for potential designation as a Local Green Space. While the Parish Council has proposed these sites, they are not responsible in any way for the final decision: that will be up to the District Council and the Independent Examiner. It is possible that a number of sites will not be accepted.

The Parish Council put forward a range of sites, asking residents which they regarded as important to preserve. All of the sites received a significant majority of support in the Village Survey. It should be noted, that whilst it covered tranches of land around the village, it did not entirely surround it.

Following the consultation period, both with land owners and residents, the Plan will be reviewed, with a likely reduction and removal of a number of sites that were in the draft Plan. Five of the landowners have agreed with the Parish Council's wish to designate their sites as Local Green Spaces so they will definitely go forward.

**Resident's comment**

2. The plan states that any new houses must have one off-street parking space for each bedroom. However, the survey results show that the average number of cars/vans per household is less than two, so this requirement seems excessive and will push up the price of any new house.

**SG Response**

The Plan will conform with whatever domestic car parking spaces are required as specified in the WODC Local Plan 2041. The survey results showed that of the 447 households who responded 232 households had two-plus cars (52%). We cannot determine from the survey results how many households had one petrol car plus one hybrid and a van. On this basis more than half of all households have two or more cars so it's most likely that the policy should require at least two parking spaces to prevent on-street parking. As the Plan shows, unfortunately, other forms of transport are limited for residents to be able to access employment, retail, education etc., therefore reliance on cars will be essential for some time to come.

**Resident's comment**

3. The plan is very prescriptive in the style of new buildings and the materials used, enforcing the use of premium materials which will again work against the goal of supporting affordable homes.

**SG Response**

The Plan has a duty to protect the conservation area at the historic centre of the village. It clearly identifies building materials that are best suited to maintaining and enhancing the conservation area. However, there are a number of ways good design can achieve acceptable results without using the most expensive materials as claimed by this respondent. The Stonesfield Community Trust's Rose and Crown development is cited as a good example of using modern materials at reasonable cost.

Outside of the conservation area the Plan isn't 'prescriptive', but does propose using materials that enhance the character of the village, especially from views outside the village. Plain grey concrete roof tiles cost the same as red ones, but the grey are most similar in colour (wet or dry) to Stonesfield slates, so most able to maintain the roof-scape of the village. Welsh slate is more expensive. On the basis of the feedback received, Section 11 is being reworked to clarify the requirements for heritage assets and other buildings.

**Resident's comment**

I also have some concerns about the "key issues" identified in section 3.4 from individual comments made in the survey. Reading the published list of comments, some big conclusions have been drawn from a very small numbers of comments. For example, in the road safety and parking section alone, the plan says:

1. "Safety is top priority: calls for pavement on at least one side of the main road through Stonesfield, i.e. Laughton Hill, The Ridings, The Green and (especially on the narrow part of) Pond Hill." This is only mentioned by two respondents in the survey, so I don't think this justifies classifying this as a "top priority".

2. "Greater effort is needed to reduce speed of motorists through village; despite the 20mph speed limit, 10-15 mph is more appropriate for many narrow village roads, especially High Street and Boot Street." In the comments, three people show concern for high speed in the village, while two support increasing the speed limit back to 30mph limit.
3. "Consider a one-way traffic system in the village." This is only mentioned by a single respondent.

#### **SG Response**

A village survey was conducted in February 2023. The results of the questions asked form the basis of much of the Plan. In addition, the individual comments section at the end of the Individual survey gave residents the '*opportunity to raise any particular concerns or hopes for the future*'.

Section 3.4 of the draft Plan lists the issues raised by residents sorted into subject areas. Reproducing these issues shows the depth of concerns and ideas raised by residents. These may or may not be represented as Policies in the Plan.

Q26 of the survey asked: How important are the following, reducing/slowing traffic through the village? 423 people responded (72%) that this was very important/important. Only 54 respondents (9.2%) said it was less important/not important. 107 respondents (9.2%) were neutral. This shows that overall, residents are concerned about traffic in the village.

Recent concern raised to the Parish Council by parents of children at the Primary School make it clear that the locations noted are a top priority for pavements to improve road safety for pedestrians.

As stated, a *one-way traffic system* was mentioned by one person and isn't being considered to be included in any policy.

#### **Resident's comment**

As mentioned above, I am also concerned that the sheer size of the plan and supporting material means that many people who are interested in it will not have the chance to read it and respond. It also runs the risk of skewing responses to those of retired people who have the time to devote to reading it thoroughly, while working people or parents of young children will simply not have the capacity to engage fully. It therefore seems there is danger that the views of one portion of the community will be heard more loudly than of others. I support the idea of developing a neighbourhood plan and appreciate the time and effort that has gone into it, but feel it is missing an opportunity to paint an optimistic and aspirational future for the village as a thriving broad community that recognises the nationwide and local need for more housing. Instead it appears to want to pull up the drawbridge and discourage any growth at all.

#### **SG Response**

The form and content of the NP was modelled upon the earlier NP of Charlbury, which was held up by the local planning authority as a model to follow. The draft Stonesfield NP is not as long as the Charlbury NP. As a statutory document, a neighbourhood plan has to comply with many statutory requirements. If it is adopted, it will be a material consideration which must be taken into account by the local planning authority in determining applications for planning permission. It must therefore comply with rigorous standards and must be comprehensive. Every attempt was made to

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use plain English, to avoid jargon and to express the content as simply as possible. The plan already includes an Overview, which is an extremely concise summary of the plan and its conclusions. The overwhelming majority of residents who responded to the Feedback request have done their best to familiarise themselves with the draft NP, to comment in some detail and to indicate their approval.

The draft Plan was available for everybody to read online over a period of seven weeks. There are 11 sections in the Plan, five of them less than six pages long. We think it perfectly reasonable for anybody who is interested of any age to have read a section or two per week (the equivalent of a couple of pages per day). We therefore reject the suggestion that the Plan had a *risk of skewing responses to those of retired people*.

The proposition that the Plan '*pulls up the drawbridge and discourages any growth at all*' is not an argument that bears due analysis. The Parish is in the Cotswold AONB and therefore we have a duty to protect the countryside for the benefit of everybody. That necessarily means protecting the surrounding countryside from development, in line with the NPPF, the WOLDC Local Plan 2031, and the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan.

### Long response 3

#### Resident's comment

Neighbourhood Plans are meant to provide local, detailed guidance on how to shape development in a community, and to do so in response to residents' concerns. They are not purely strategic documents but must reflect the priorities, needs, and aspirations of the local population. Nor are they intended to ignore the economic benefits of development through simple measures to block most of it. This draft fails on these measures and should be rethought.

#### SG Response

The draft NP has been designed to reflect the priorities, needs and aspirations of the local community. The Village Survey achieved an exceptional response rate. Every effort was made to use the data from the Survey to design the Plan. There is a map showing how every question was used to design the policies in the Plan. Every policy has a detailed evidence base behind it and shows the survey data; the Plan would be completely unwieldy if we included this in the document.

It is a misrepresentation of the Plan to suggest the Plan has simple measures to block economic development. The Plan was written recognising that there are constraints on what could be done, in particular, the NPPF has very specific requirements for AONBs, which are reflected in WODC's LP, see, for example, the section on the Burford-Charlbury Sub-Area and the draft NP also reflects this. The draft Plan also considers some of the wider context of development, for example, the need to travel to service centres for employment or secondary/further education and the impact of development on residents' changing needs in response to climate change.

The Neighbourhood Plan, which if adopted becomes part of the District Plan, carries out the function of regulating development. Its statutory function does not include stimulating, initiating or indeed "blocking" the economic benefits of development.

**Commented [VK1]:** Wording to be resolved for consistency with SG response to a similar comment elsewhere

There is nothing in the proposed NP which is designed to “block” development or its economic benefits where such development would be consistent with superior planning documents, e.g. the District Plan, the NPPF or the Management Plan of the Cotswolds National Landscape, and consistent with the wishes of the residents as shown by the broad evidence base, including but not restricted to the Village Survey, upon which the NP draws. Anyone who wished to initiate development consistent with the overall body of Town & Country planning policy with a view to economic benefit would be free to do so.

#### **Resident's comment**

##### **1) Housing Needs and Distribution**

Under the Localism Act 2011, Neighbourhood Plans give communities the power to influence local development, including where and how new housing will be located. The plan should address both the needs and preferences of residents, including housing types and allocations, within the scope of the strategic policies in the Local Plan. Though the Local Plan sets overall housing numbers, a Neighbourhood Plan can shape the specifics of where those houses are placed and what kind of development is acceptable. According to Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), Neighbourhood Plans should reflect the housing needs of the local area. This includes policies on the location and type of housing, as well as design principles that reflect local preferences. If residents raised concerns about the scale or location of housing, as they did in the village survey, it is reasonable for the Neighbourhood Plan to consider those concerns in the final policies. Neighbourhood Plans are intended to shape development locally (PPG, Neighbourhood Planning, para 002). If a significant proportion of residents expressed concerns about housing, the plan should demonstrate how it has responded to those concerns. Our village survey indicated desire for affordable housing, but the plan's approach to new housing is based primarily on the Housing Needs Assessment which was written by a member of the Steering Group and does not reflect preferences from the survey. The author of the HNA is also a declared member of susto, a group with a declared aim to protect Stonesfield from housing developments.

#### **SG Response**

It was essential that the contents of the Draft NP are fully evidence-based and therefore the draft was carefully constructed using a range of inputs, particularly, but not exclusively, the Village Survey, the NPPF, the WODC Local Plan, OCC Plans, Cotswold National Landscape Management Board Plans, a detailed Housing Needs Assessment, Landscape Assessment and Character Assessment. The result was the draft NP being particularly supportive of development of affordable housing (See policies SH3 to 8, 10 & 11.) The Village Survey was an essential source of data for the HNA, which is evident when read, so we are unable to identify where any preferences in the Survey were not reflected in the HNA. Residents were asked to express their housing intentions for the next 5 years. All of this data was used to develop the HNA and it was extrapolated to include those who were unable to state what they might wish to do.

The author of the HNA has worked at Board level in the Housing Sector for the last 17 years and has appropriate professional skills to undertake the analysis. It is entirely inaccurate to say that Susto has a declared aim to protect Stonesfield from housing developments. Susto's activities have been many and varied in support of a

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sustainable village including the designation of Stockey Woods as a village green, responding to the climate crisis which initiated the food group and the free social suppers, as well as responding to inappropriate development in support of the Parish Council opposition where an exceptional need, as required by the NPPF was not evidenced. Where Susto has opposed proposed development, i.e. in the Cala case, its submissions were consistent with those of the District Council and were accepted by the Secretary of State's planning inspector, who rejected Cala's appeal. It cannot therefore be validly suggested that the position in that case adopted by Susto was unreasonable or per se anti-development.

Many developments that have taken place in Stonesfield were not responded to by Susto. The implication is that a small number of people have unduly influenced the NP, but it is worth noting that 165 residents signed up to helping make Stonesfield sustainable. Following the Cala appeal, the Parish Council and others involved in that planning dispute were moved to determine what was required to meet the NPPF test of exceptional need. To that end an HNA was commissioned. This was reviewed by Community First Oxfordshire, which said the HNA was excellent and the content very useful as part of the baseline evidence for the NP, supporting the housing mix etc. policies, and adding local detail to relevant Local Plan policies.

The HNA document was adopted by the PC at its public meeting in August 2024.

#### **Resident's comment**

##### **2) Infrastructure and Services**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) makes it clear that planning policies should promote sustainable development and infrastructure that meets the needs of the community. It is the role of the local planning authority (LPA), and by extension, a Neighbourhood Plan, to ensure that infrastructure needs are considered when new development is proposed. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) places the responsibility on planning authorities to ensure that development plans (including Neighbourhood Plans) take infrastructure needs into account. The NPPF (para 20) states that plans should make provision for infrastructure needs, including transport, community services, and utilities, and should engage local communities in the process of identifying and addressing these needs. The PPG further clarifies that Neighbourhood Plans should contribute to meeting infrastructure needs. Since residents raised concerns about issues like road safety, parking, or community facilities in the village survey, the Plan should address these concerns. The NPPF (para 30) supports the inclusion of local infrastructure needs in Neighbourhood Plans.

#### **SG Response**

There is extensive coverage of this in the draft NP in response to the concerns of residents in the Village Survey. All of the examples quoted are covered, in the text and in the following policies:

- road safety: Policy ST 2
- parking: Policy SH 9 & ST 4
- community facilities: Policy SEA1.

#### **Resident's comment**

##### **3) Implementation and Clarity**

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One of the core requirements of a Neighbourhood Plan is that it should include clear policies and mechanisms to ensure its aims and objectives are achievable. If the Plan outlines aspirations (e.g., improving sustainability, creating more green spaces), it should also provide specific policies or actions for their implementation.

The Localism Act 2011 outlines the expectation that Neighbourhood Plans should have clear, enforceable policies. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 further ensures that any planning document, including Neighbourhood Plans, must contain policies that are consistent with strategic policies and provide clear guidance for development. The PPG highlights that Neighbourhood Plans should provide clear and deliverable policies for the issues they address. The NPPF (para 29) requires that policies in a Plan are sufficiently detailed to provide clarity for decision-makers and developers. This means that a Plan must not only identify issues but also outline how these will be addressed.

#### **SG Response**

The draft NP aims to do exactly this. An extensive evidence base sits behind every policy in particular ensuring it is consistent with strategic policies whether it is the NPPF, Local Plan, OCC Strategies etc. Where there are aspirations in the Plan, we did not, in all cases, consider it appropriate to specify the exact solution to a problem where this is not in the gift of the PC; for example, addressing safety concerns on Pond Hill will have many potential solutions and these will need review and discussion with OCC. It is the intention of the PC to take these forward once the work in adopting the NP has concluded, and perhaps before then.

#### **Resident's comment**

If the Plan includes objectives or aspirations without providing the means for implementation, it would undermine its purpose. The NPPF (para 17) emphasizes that Neighbourhood Plans should deliver local solutions, not just broad aspirations. Large parts of the Stonesfield plan fails on this basis. Many aims and objectives are overstated and are unimplementable.

#### **SG Response**

While it is not accepted that 'many aims and objectives are overstated and are unimplementable', a review of the aims and objectives is being undertaken following the feedback. The following changes are being recommended,

From spreadsheet of changes: Change to Aim 7 Objective 3 to: When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms on individual houses such as solar panels, heat pumps, high specification insulation, Stonesfield Parish Council will strongly support the planning authority to do so.

From WODC:

- i) Added clear statement of status and intention of Aspirations within the NP; Policies were already clearly defined
- ii) removal of Objective 3 of Aim 1 (facilitating all members of the community as far as desired to take a full and active part in the community)
- iii) correction of all mentions of Cotswolds AONB to Cotswolds National Landscape

iv) Aim 3 Objective 1: amendment to: ensure that the supply of housing meets the specific needs of the existing and projected future demographic of the village  
v) Aim 4 Objective 4: amendment to: enable residents, especially those who are elderly or disabled, to access key services safely by walking, cycling or public transport  
vi) Aim 5 Objective 1: amendment to: respect, conserve, enhance and protect Stonesfield's valuable landscape setting within the Cotswolds National Landscape  
vii) Aim 6 Objective 1: amendment to: preserve, conserve and where possible to enhance, the historic character and appearance of the village and particularly the conservation area and its surroundings  
viii) Aim 7 Objective 3: amendment to: When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms on individual houses such as solar panels, heat pumps, high specification insulation, Stonesfield Parish Council will strongly support the planning authority to do so.

#### **Resident's comment**

All its aspirations lack means of implementation, and a majority of the policies are only viable in that they block action being taken.

#### **SG Response**

The point about aspirations is covered above. The policies are about providing clarity: in many instances as to what will be supported and in some instances what will not. All of this is fully evidence-based, using the framework of higher policies such as the NPPF or LP and the responses arising from the village survey, to ensure future development of the village meets local needs.

#### **Resident's comment**

##### 5. Responding to Feedback

A core requirement for all Neighbourhood Plans is that they should be responsive to feedback and engage with the community throughout the process. This is integral to ensuring that the plan is representative of the community's wishes. Section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that Neighbourhood Plans must be subject to consultation at several stages of the process, including at Regulation 14 and Regulation 16 stages, to ensure community input.

The NPPF (para 39) clearly states that local communities must be given the opportunity to participate in planning processes, and that their concerns must be addressed. PPG para 040 specifically reinforces the requirement for consultation to be meaningful and for feedback to be taken into account.

#### **SG Response**

The PC and SG have taken this requirement very seriously throughout the process. There have been three events held in the village hall, stands at the village fete [(wo years in succession), an opportunity to talk to SG members outside the shop and at the Community Café in the Village Hall, monthly reports in the Slate and regular discussions at the monthly PC meetings. An example of wider public involvement in the planning process was the design of the village survey. An open meeting was held in the village hall to get ideas and seek volunteers to help design the process. Seventy-seven people came and 34 volunteered their services and were involved in

three main areas (housing, the green environment and all aspects of infrastructure) to propose questions to go in the survey. A printed copy of the survey was distributed to all households in the village. Once the survey was completed, initial feedback on the results was played back at an open meeting, attended by 44 people with an opportunity for discussion on the findings. The results are publicly available as Appendix E of the Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **Resident's comment**

Since significant survey feedback was not incorporated and concerns raised by the community were ignored, this calls into question the integrity of the plan. The PPG emphasizes that the final Neighbourhood Plan should demonstrate how feedback has been considered and why decisions have been made.

#### **SG Response**

It is hard to respond to this when there are no examples given. There is a map of how every question in the survey is mapped to the draft NP. There was an opportunity for free text comments and this was fully analysed, however, the NP cannot be a shopping list and, for example, when one person (out of 612 respondents) asked for a skate park: unsurprisingly, this didn't make the Plan. Other comments such as the many comments that related to the need to deal with potholes, did not make it into the draft NP as items such as this are the responsibility of OCC. The NP is not a mechanism by which the PC can influence the resources available to OCC for filling in potholes, or the priority given by OCC to doing so. The PC was grateful for all comments and hasn't lost sight of minority interests e.g. the skatepark or the need to pressure other bodies to improve facilities by liaison with our County Council representative (potholes).

#### **Resident's comment**

It is entirely reasonable to expect that the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan should address the issues of housing, infrastructure and sustainable development in a comprehensive, and not a narrowly selective way. The Localism Act 2011, NPPF, and PPG all set clear expectations for what a Neighbourhood Plan should cover and how it should respond to community feedback. The plan should be clear, implementable, and responsive to community concerns.

#### **SG Response**

The Draft NP aims to do just this. WODC recommended early on that Stonesfield looked at Charlbury's adopted Plan as an exemplar. Having reviewed many NPs, we concurred that Charlbury's NP, whilst it should not be imitated in detail, would provide a useful model. On review of Stonesfield's draft NP, WODC concluded that it 'demonstrates a strong community focus and well documented evidence base', which was a helpful validation of the efforts to deliver a clear, implementable Plan responsive to community concerns.

#### **Long response 4**

#### **Resident's comment**

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## 1. Failure to Meet legally required “Basic Conditions” – Restriction on Housing Development Harms the Economy

The Plan’s restriction of all housing development to a single RES site is inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and could negatively impact housing availability and local economic sustainability:

- It limits housing supply, reducing affordability and preventing younger families or downsizing residents from remaining in the village.
- It hinders economic growth by restricting potential investment in housing that could support local services and businesses.
- While the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 does not allocate specific housing targets to Stonesfield, it encourages policies that support sustainable and proportionate growth across rural areas, which this restriction may undermine.

### SG Response

1.
  - i. The respondent fails to specify what he/she means by “legally required basic conditions” but it is assumed that this is a reference to one of the requirements of paragraph 7 of Schedule 4B of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. That requires a local planning authority, when satisfied various stipulated matters are met or complied with, to submit a proposed neighbourhood plan to an independent examiner who must in turn consider whether the basic conditions specified in subparagraph 8(2) are met by the draft NP.
  - ii. The respondent seems to indicate that the basic conditions are not met because “Restriction on Housing Development Harms the Economy.” However, whilst it is not for one moment accepted that the proposed NP housing policy would harm the economy, the absence of such harm to “the Economy” is not one of the basic conditions listed in subparagraph 8 (2) and required to be met.
  - iii. The respondent fails to indicate with any clarity which of the requirements for meeting the basic conditions listed in subparagraph (2) (a) to (g) he/she contends are not met by the draft NP.
  - iv. The respondent seems to contend that the basic conditions are not met by virtue of “restriction of all housing development to a single RES site, which restriction is “inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and could negatively impact housing availability and local economic sustainability.” It may be that the respondent is suggesting that this is a restriction imposed by the draft NP and that such a restriction would be inconsistent with the requirement of subparagraph (d) in that adoption of the draft NP would not “contribute to the achievement of sustainable development” and would be inconsistent with the requirement of subparagraph (e) that the adoption of the draft NP be “in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area (or any part of that area)”
  - v. If this is indeed the contention of the respondent, it is considered that he/she has not justified the assertion made. The proposed NP has been reconsidered in the light of the respondent’s representations and it has been concluded: –  
the draft NP does not contain “restriction of all housing development to a single RES site;”  
it does not preclude housing development other than development on a single RES site provided any proposed development complies with the policies of the draft NP and the relevant policies of the Local Plan;  
Policy SH1 of the draft NP makes it clear that: –  
within the built-up area, housing proposals on previously-developed land will be accepted where they would meet the

need identified in the Housing Needs Assessment prepared for the NP and are otherwise in accordance with the relevant policies and

on land adjoining the built-up area, housing proposals on previously developed land will be accepted where they would deliver the Plan's housing objectives and would otherwise be in accordance with relevant policies;

implementation of the draft NP will contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

vi. Paragraph 5.31 of the draft NP notes that the housing needs of Stonesfield were defined by the Housing Needs Assessment 2024 contained in Appendix A of the draft NP, which use a range of data sources including the Village Survey 2023, which had a higher than 60% response rate.

vii. The draft NP housing policy is consistent with the NPPF and will not negatively impact housing availability and local economic sustainability with consequences listed by the respondent. While the NP conforms with the NPPF in terms of development needing to be based on exceptional need, given the village is within the AONB, draft housing policies set out where development will be supported within this overall context, e.g. Policies originally numbered SH6 (Infill development), SH7 (Subdivision of dwellings to create smaller units), SH8 (Development in residential gardens) and SH10 (Lower cost housing).

#### Resident's comment

2. Insufficient Public Consultation – Limited Opportunities for Resident Input

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require meaningful and inclusive consultation, yet the engagement process in Stonesfield has been inadequate:

- While the Plan has been publicised through the village newsletter and public meetings, residents have had only two formal opportunities to provide input—the village survey and this Regulation 14 consultation.
- A handful of public meetings have been held over the past three years, but these were presentations with Q&A sessions, rather than opportunities for residents to review, discuss, and shape the emerging policies, and they were attended by small percentage of the village population
- Best practice in neighbourhood planning includes ongoing engagement through public workshops, focus groups, and iterative feedback mechanisms. Stonesfield residents have not had these opportunities, meaning the Plan has not benefited from meaningful public scrutiny.

#### SG Response

##### 2. Public consultation has included: –

- i. Monthly items in the Stonesfield Slate, which is delivered to every house in the parish, thoroughly and regularly updating residents upon preparation of the draft NP;
- ii. monthly updates on the village website;
- iii. regular posts on the Stonesfield Facebook page which has 979 followers, which posts were then shared with other relevant Stonesfield Facebook groups;
- iv. regular information posts on the NextDoor Stonesfield website (subscribed to by around 1000 "neighbours")

**Commented [VK2]:** These numbers (and wording) will need to be changed as these policies are now numbered (respectively): SH8 (Infill), SH9 (Sub-division), SH10 (Dev in res gdns), and SH6 (lower cost)

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- v. a well-publicised workshop, open to all residents, in the Village Hall in March 2022 with a preliminary survey directed to determining topics to be covered in a later more thorough survey;
- vi. a follow-up public meeting, also well-publicised, in the Village Hall in May 2022 at which three main working groups, comprising 34 volunteers, were established and each held a series of subsequent meetings to develop topics and draft questions for finalisation before being included in the Village Survey;
- vii. testing of the validity and readability of the Village Survey in December 2022 on a sample audience, following which there was scrutiny of the responses and some minor amendments;
- viii. a very thorough Village Survey in which the views of all the residents of the parish were sought and largely obtained: -
  - a. the participation rate was high in comparison with the norms for such surveys – 62% of village households completed the Survey and about 45% of the eligible population, compared with a typical response rate in such surveys of about 20%;
  - b. the paper Survey document was delivered in February 2023 to all households;
  - c. the Survey was also made available online;
  - d. it was open between 1 March and 7 April 2023, and two sets of postcard reminders were delivered to all houses in the parish;
- ix. a further public meeting in June 2023, well-publicised in advance and well attended, at which residents were informed of the progress of NP preparation, including preliminary results of the Village Survey and at which those attending were able to ask questions and participate in discussions so that the Steering Group was able to take views expressed into account;
- x. publication of the Survey results on the village website and making available a printed copy in the Village Library;
- xi. analysis of the results of the Survey, then used in the development of NP policies;
- xii. work by volunteers recording housing design, materials used, density and layout of existing buildings, streetscapes and views out from the village to the surrounding countryside, all used in the eventual professionally-commissioned and executed Village Character Assessment;
- xiii. a Housing Needs Assessment carried out under the supervision of a Steering Group member with 17 years' experience in housing provision and with professional expertise in such assessments;
- xiv. a third well-publicised public meeting in the Village Hall in June 2024 to update residents, at which those attending were able to ask questions and participate in discussions so that the steering group was able to take their further views expressed into account;
- xv. NP stands at two Community Cafés in the Village Hall at which preparatory steps were publicised and residents had the opportunity to ask questions of parish councillors and steering group members;
- xvi. a full day stand outside the village shop at which preparatory steps were publicised and residents had the opportunity to ask questions of parish councillors and steering group members;
- xvii. NP stands at two Village Fêtes at which preparatory steps were publicised and residents had the opportunity to ask questions of parish councillors and steering group members;
- xviii. two public exhibitions during the Regulation 14 public consultation period, at which the draft NP was publicised and residents had the opportunity to ask questions of parish councillors and steering group members and to comment upon the draft;
- xix. the continuous availability of the complete draft NP and Appendices by way of paper copy in the Village Library and digital copy on the PC website throughout the Regulation 14 consultation period and since;

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- xx. a detailed Feedback document delivered in paper form to every parish household (check this), available in paper form in the village shop, pub and other publicly attended locations and available online to all residents throughout the consultation period;
- xxi. specific consultation with Statutory Consultees;
- xxii. the detailed analysis of Feedback and other responses by the Steering Group and, where appropriate, amendment of the draft NP in the light of the Feedback taking into account all the above in the drafting of the NP and in particular its Policies and Aspirations;
- xxiii. Regular item on the Parish Council's monthly meeting agendas, throughout the development of the NP, to review progress and give residents the opportunity to attend and raise questions; also at the Annual Parish Meetings over three years;

In responding to the draft NP, the WODC summarized its conclusions by stating that the draft NP 'demonstrates a strong community focus and well-documented evidence base'.

Having considered the respondent's representations and reviewed all the above, the PC is of the view that there is no merit in the suggestion that "the engagement process in Stonesfield has been inadequate."

#### **Resident's comment**

3. Accessibility Issues – Complexity of the Plan and Limited Distribution

- The Plan is a highly detailed set of document of over 300 pages, making it difficult for many residents to engage with.
- While two exhibition days are being held to provide a summary and answer questions, this does not make up for the inaccessibility of the full document for most residents.
- The full document was only made available online and in the village library, limiting access for those who may not use digital platforms or visit the library regularly.
- The Regulation 14 consultation feedback form was also only available online, with printed copies in a few locations (village shop, pub, etc.), meaning it cannot be proven that all residents had the opportunity to view the Plan or provide feedback. The chances are very few people have read it.

#### **SG Response**

3. It is suggested that because the draft NP is a "highly detailed set of document (s/c) of over 300 pages," it is "difficult for many residents to engage with" and that two exhibition days within the Regulation 14 consultation period do "not make up for the inaccessibility of the full document for most residents." This suggestion takes no account of the lengthy and detailed process of public consultation set out in 2 above. Residents have been fully engaged over a period of years in providing views and information upon which the drafting of the proposed NP has been based. They had continuous access to the draft NP and Appendices from the start of the Regulation 14 consultation period and their detailed Feedback on the draft NP was obtained.

Feedback was obtained from 156 residents, and a small but significant proportion commented upon its length. Consequently, a summary of all feedback from residents is being prepared and will be made publicly available.

The form and content of the NP was modelled upon the earlier NP of Charlbury. That was held up by the local planning authority as a model to follow. The Stonesfield draft is not as

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long as the Charlbury NP. As a statutory document, a neighbourhood plan has to comply with many statutory requirements. If it is adopted, it will be a material consideration which must be taken into account by the local planning authority in determining applications for planning permission. It must therefore comply with rigorous standards and must be comprehensive. Every attempt was made to use plain English, to avoid jargon and to express the content as simply as possible. The plan already includes an Overview, which is an extremely concise summary of the plan and its conclusions. The overwhelming majority of residents who responded to the Feedback request have done their best to familiarise themselves with the draft NP, to comment in some detail and to indicate their approval.

### **Resident's comment**

#### 4. Failure to Respond to Resident Input – Misalignment with Village Survey

The Plan does not properly reflect the results of the village survey. Instead, it introduces elements that were not requested by residents, such as:

- A blue-green corridor
- Reopening footpaths
- Wind power proposals

Meanwhile, key concerns raised by residents—such as recreation, youth facilities, employment, safety, parking, more diversity in housing —are not meaningfully addressed. A Neighbourhood Plan should be based on clear evidence of local priorities, but this draft does not align with the survey data.

### **SG Response**

4.

- i. It is suggested that the draft NP introduces elements that were not requested by residents such as, “a blue green corridor, reopening footpaths and wind power proposals.”
  - a. All of the Policies and Aspirations in the NP are supported by a weight of evidence from the Village Survey as well as the wider statutory and policy requirements. Each question in the Survey was designed to produce responses which were then used in the development of one or more specific policies.
  - b. Whilst the central government spin in its guidance on neighbourhood planning is that it “enables communities to play a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which they live and work and in supporting new development proposals” there is nothing in the statutory provisions governing the preparation of neighbourhood plans stipulating that this is amongst the purposes of neighbourhood planning. Nor is this purpose alluded to in the Introduction to the Localism Act 2011. It is clear however, by virtue of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012, that a neighbourhood plan must have the approval of “people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area.” It must be approved by a referendum majority and there are detailed requirements as to consultation with residents and businesses.
  - c. The relevant statutory provisions require that the content of neighbourhood plans may, and indeed must, include elements not specifically requested by residents, i.e. so that a neighbourhood plan will comply with superior planning policy documents, such as the

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West Oxfordshire District Plan, Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and the NPPF.

- d. It is therefore a misrepresentation, inadvertent or otherwise, of the statutory basis of a neighbourhood plan to suggest that it should not contain "elements that were not requested by residents."
- e. Notwithstanding this, the PC is satisfied, on the basis of the Village Survey and the Feedback, taken in the round, that provisions, such as those objected to in this response, do and would have the support of those who live, work or carry on business in the area.
- f. The objection is moreover, intentionally or otherwise, misleading:
  - It is suggested that the draft NP proposes "reopening footpaths." Throughout the document, the substantial character of which is an aspect of the respondent's objection, there is a single reference to the possibility of reopening a single footpath, i.e. no reference to "reopening footpaths." That single reference is in Aspiration A8, i.e. "to help meet the demand from residents for better provision to encourage walking, there is an opportunity to reinstate a public right of way between Woodstock Road opposite Farley Lane, and the Oxfordshire Way." This is not a policy, but an aspiration and is inspired by the irrefutably widespread support, evident from the Village Survey and other public consultation, for the network of footpaths within the neighbourhood plan area. It was also a recommendation from the independently commissioned Landscape Assessment.
  - It is suggested that the draft NP proposes "Wind power proposals." This is untrue. The draft NP identifies under the heading "Key issues identified by Stonesfield residents" and subheading "Energy," the suggestion made in a Village Survey response "Consider a village wind turbine as an energy source which would not adversely affect the natural environment, as outlined in the Cotswolds National Landscape Strategy." Another Village Survey response was: "There is potential for renewable energy generation without necessarily compromising the character of the village and surrounds." And another said "more about making Stonesfield a green energy village. What about a village wind turbine? What about solar panels on houses?" However, there is no Policy, or even Aspiration, proposal, desirable as that may or may not be, within the draft NP for "wind power." Aim 7 of the Draft NP, "To address climate change at the local level," includes an Objective "When government allows planning authorities to impose conditions requiring energy-efficient mechanisms (such as solar panels, heat pumps, wind turbines, high specification insulation), Stonesfield PC will strongly support the planning authority to do so." The inclusion of wind turbines in this list has been deleted. This is simply a commitment to support any future requirement imposed by the local planning authority for energy-efficient mechanisms including wind turbines. The context of such a future requirement is application to individual dwellings rather than any proposal for e.g. a community wind turbine. The text of the Plan will make this clearer.

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g. The respondent suggests that amongst “elements that were not requested by residents” is “a blue-green corridor.” It has already been explained above why it is a misrepresentation, inadvertent or otherwise, of the statutory basis of a neighbourhood plan to suggest that it should not contain “elements that were not requested by residents.” A neighbourhood plan must be consistent with superior Town & Country planning policy, e.g. that contained within the NPPF, the West Oxfordshire Local Plan and the Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan. These all contain policies emphasising a requirement to protect and enhance biodiversity and to achieve an overall net gain in biodiversity. Prominent amongst these policies is policy EH3 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan which stipulates that requirement and in particular requires: –

- promoting the conservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species populations, particularly within the CTA’s and NIA’s
- “taking all opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the.... locality, especially where this will help deliver networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.

The CTAs (Conservation Target Areas) to which policy EH3 refers are a component of Oxfordshire’s strategic approach to biodiversity as referenced in Oxfordshire’s State of Nature Report 2017. The three blue/green corridors specified in the draft NP policy SEL5 lie within the Wychwood and Lower Evenlode CTA. Policy SEL5 is therefore entirely consistent with policy EH3 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan and there can be no valid questioning of its appropriateness within the draft NP. It is relevant to note that a very similar policy is contained within the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan, to which the Stonesfield NP steering group was referred by West Oxfordshire District Council as a model to be followed.

ii. It is suggested by the respondent that concerns raised by residents such as “recreation, youth facilities, employment, safety, parking, more diversity in housing” are not meaningfully addressed. This is not accepted. Section 6.4, including SEA2, addresses sport, recreation and community facilities, while new section 8.2 and new policy SHW1 are concerned with wellbeing and protecting and enhancing sports facilities. New section 8.4 is concerned specifically with the needs of young people. Section 6.2, including policy SEA1, addresses the protection and enhancement of retail, employment and services. Whilst it is not the function of a Town & Country planning policy document to initiate road safety measures, parking and its road safety consequences are dealt with in some detail in Section 5.6 and Policy SH11, and in Section 7.4 and Policy ST4. It is made abundantly clear in Section 5.2 that the first Objective of this section of the NP is “to meet Stonesfield’s housing needs and 5.3 explained that the “housing needs” of Stonesfield were defined by the Housing Needs Assessment of 2024, which used a range of data sources, including the Village Survey 2023 which had a higher than 60% response rate. Policy SH1 addresses the fulfilment of those housing needs insofar as planning policy is able to facilitate this. Notwithstanding the respondent’s mischaracterisation of the NP in this respect, further sections of the

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draft NP have been prepared to put beyond doubt the adequacy of policies relevant to the issues raised by the respondent.

It is testimony to the effectiveness of the engagement process that most Feedback was overwhelmingly favourable. 77% said they were satisfied or fairly satisfied that the draft NP represented what they had told the steering group in the Village Survey.

#### Resident's comment

##### 5. Lack of Impartiality – Plan Developed by a Campaign Group with a Pre-Determined Housing Stance

A neighbourhood plan should be developed through an objective and evidence-based process. However, the Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was composed of members of a local campaign group (susto) whose stated aim is to protect the village against housing development. This raises serious concerns about impartiality, including:

- A potential bias in the policy approach, particularly the decision to restrict all housing development to a single, small Rural Exception Site.
- A lack of balance in the Plan's content, which does not properly consider the needs of all residents—including those who support some level of sustainable development.
- A failure to adhere to best practice in neighbourhood planning, which requires an approach that reflects the interests of the whole community rather than a single agenda.

#### SG Response

- i. "A potential bias in the policy approach, particularly the decision to restrict all housing development to a single, small Rural Exception Site."

This is rebutted at 1 iv, v, vi and vii above, which will not be repeated unnecessarily here.

- ii. "A lack of balance in the Plan's content, which does not properly consider the needs of all residents – including those who support some level of sustainable development."

This is addressed in considerable detail in this Note above, and again it is not proposed to repeat unnecessarily that which appears earlier. It may however be worth repeating and emphasising: –

- a. the draft NP policies are substantially drafted taking into account the evidence of the Village Survey which had a response rate of more than 60%, an exceptionally high response rate for such surveys;
- b. the draft housing policies are based upon a professionally prepared Housing Needs Assessment, which draws upon the evidence of that Village Survey;
- c. the process of public consultation, as set out in 2 i to xxiii above has been comprehensive over several years and Feedback has been diligently considered and where appropriate amendment and supplements to the draft NP have been made;
- d. notwithstanding and before such amendments and supplements, 77% of those submitting Feedback indicated that they were satisfied or fairly satisfied that the draft NP represented what they had said in the Village Survey.

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- iii. "A failure to adhere to best practice in neighbourhood planning, which requires an approach that reflects the interests of the whole community rather than a single agenda." Again, that which appears above and which addresses this allegation in full, will not be repeated unnecessarily. Perhaps the allegation is most straightforwardly and economically rebutted by the 77% satisfied/fairly satisfied Feedback.
- iv. "The Stonesfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was composed of members of a local campaign group (susto) whose stated aim is to protect the village against housing development. This raises serious concerns about impartiality..."
  - a. It is quite simply untrue that the "Steering Group was composed of members of a local campaign group (susto). The Steering Group had 12 members. Of these only five have been members of SuSto. Five parish councillors have been members of the Steering Group, of whom only one was a member of SuSto.
  - b. It is equally untrue to say that the "stated aim" of SuSto is "to protect the village against housing development." The clue is in the name. Sustainable Stonesfield was formed to ensure, so far as possible, that the future of Stonesfield was "sustainable" defined by the 1983 UN General Assembly convened Brundtland Commission in its report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The housing policies of the draft NP are the best evidence that the members of the Steering Group have striven to promote the sustainability of Stonesfield. The policies speak for themselves and clearly are not 'designed to protect the village against housing development.'
- v. It is entirely inaccurate to say that Susto has a declared aim to protect Stonesfield from housing developments. Susto's activities in support of a sustainable village have been many and varied, including the designation of Stockey Woods as a village green, responding to the climate crisis which initiated the food group and the free social suppers, as well as responding to inappropriate development in support of the Parish Council opposition where an exceptional need, as required by the NPPF was not evidenced. Where Susto has opposed proposed development, i.e. in the Cala case, its submissions were consistent with those of the District Council and were accepted by the Secretary of State's planning inspector, who rejected Cala's appeal. It cannot therefore be validly suggested that the position in that case adopted by Susto was unreasonable or per se anti-development.
- vi. The suggestions that the Steering Group had "a Predetermined Housing Stance" and a "potential bias" and that its composition "raises serious concerns about impartiality" are untrue. They are an unsubstantiated criticism of the intensive study and work of volunteer members of the community to prepare a draft, fully evidence-based NP which represents the aspirations of the majority of those who live, work or carry on business in the area.

#### Resident's comment

- 6. Lack of Delivery Mechanisms – Unclear Implementation of Key Objectives  
Many of the Plan's aims and objectives lack detail on how they will be delivered, making them unenforceable. For example:
  - Road safety measures are mentioned without specifying funding sources, timescales, or responsible authorities.

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- Alternative energy proposals lack feasibility studies or evidence of demand, as well as no reference in the village survey questions, qualitative or quantitative responses
- The Plan sets aspirations without outlining how they will be achieved in practice.
- A Neighbourhood Plan should provide a clear and deliverable framework, not just a list of ambitions without supporting strategies.

#### Conclusion

For these reasons, I believe the draft Neighbourhood Plan, is not legally compliant, not based on proper consultation, and fails to meet its own stated objectives.

#### SG Response

The respondent complains "Many of the Plan's aims and objectives lack detail on how they will be delivered, making them unenforceable." This is exemplified by: –

- i. failure to specify "funding sources, timescales or responsible authorities;"
- ii. lack of "feasibility studies or evidence of demand;"
- iii. setting aspirations without outlining how they will be achieved in practice;
- iv. listing ambitions without supporting strategies.

The criticisms incorporate a fundamental misconception as to the nature of a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plans are planning documents, to which, when adopted, local planning authorities are required to have regard as material considerations when determining applications for planning permission. They are not plans for the initiation of development.

The draft NP aims to do exactly this. An extensive evidence base sits behind every policy, in particular ensuring it is consistent with strategic policies whether it is the NPPF, Local Plan, OCC Strategies etc. Where there are aspirations in the Plan, we did not, in all cases, consider it appropriate to specify the exact solution to a problem where this is not in the gift of the PC; for example, addressing safety concerns on Pond Hill will have many potential solutions and these will need review and discussion with OCC. It is the intention of the PC to take these forward once the work in adopting the NP has concluded, and perhaps before then.