





Slide 1: Welcome

Good evening and thank you all for coming.  Especially so to the chair of our Parish Council who should really be out celebrating

Before I start could I ask you all to put mobile phones on silent please?

If you don't already know me I'm Chris Blow, the leader of the neighbourhood plan work group, and with me tonight are my colleagues  - pause - Andrew Walmsley, Brian Mitchell and Chris Darge. 

 Though it may not have seemed so from outside, a lot has been going on, so I've got plenty to tell you about this evening.


The presentation is in two parts and in all will last for about 70 minutes plus time for your questions.


Between parts 1 and 2 there'll be a short message from our MP George Freeman.





As we go along, I'll pause between each main topic so you can ask any questions while they're fresh in your mind.



The slideshow and notes will be on our website by the end of the week or if you'd like a paper copy just let us have your name and address before you go.

Slide 2: What I'm Going To Tell You About **Pause**


 In part 1 I'll tell you what we've been doing since the consultation finished in April.


Just before I do, there was one amusing irony about that 6 week consultation. The only people who couldn't plan their work to finish on time....were.... the Breckland planners 


    I'll start by summarising the consultation responses for you. Actually we thought after the consultation we'd just assess all the comments, incorporate the ones we agreed with, have some meetings with Breckland planners about ones we didn't agree with them, and that would be that, then on to the next and final stage.


But two pieces of work we commissioned in parallel with the consultation showed us it wasn't going to be that straightforward. Those were a health check of the Plan  and a consultant's review of the communal views the plan protects  I'll explain them both in a minute, but in short, the results of each brought home to us that there were still things we could introduce to improve the plan.


Having realised that, a lot of the time since has been spent researching those new topics, deciding our strategies for doing the work and getting ourselves ready to explain them to you before we get on with them.


But that wasn't all –  the Breckland Local Plan is a key document that our plan must conform to. We've always had misgivings about some of its policies and so decided we needed to be involved when public examination hearings on that plan were held, and I'll tell you about those.




 Soon after the consultation finished we had a useful meeting with our MP George Freeman.


 Another key document for us is the National Planning Policy Framework or NPPF – which is basically a set of overall rules for planning and development. I'll tell you about recent changes to that.


 You've heard from me on several occasions in the past about our poor relations with Breckland planners. It became clear that if we continued in the same way nothing good would come of it, so instead we've gone to them with a new approach which I'll speak about briefly.

 Finally one of our ongoing tasks is to review planning applications for new houses in the village and we continue to do that with our focus very much on whether a proposal complies with our plan and with the Breckland one.


 In part two I'll go on to tell you about what's coming next and I'll spend more time on that than on what's happened already.


   You'll hear how we're funding the remaining work.


 When and why new hearings about the Local Plan are going to happen


 And what we'll be doing to improve our wildlife maps


Then I'll explain the two important new pieces of work we're going to undertake, which will dominate our work probably for the rest of the year


 First we'll commission a professional to assess village character


 Work on that will lead on to the production of a village design guide

 In parallel and closely related to the character study we're biting the bullet and are going to allocate sites in the plan, and I'll explain what that means and how we'll go about it

 This work will result in some major changes to the plan, so we'll repeat the formal public consultation to let you have your say on those changes

 As new planning applications come up we'll continue to review those



 We'll have as many meetings as necessary with the Breckland planners to address their consultation comments, and to engage them in the new work so they're not surprised by it later

 And in all of this we'll be making sure what we do complies with the amended national planning rules I mentioned




 **-Pause** After all that there will still be more to do to reach the finish line


 Finally I'll briefly touch on what's still to be done after all the new work 


Slide 3: Consultation Responses - 1


  Responses to the public consultation fell into three groups – from Breckland Council; from villagers and from other organisations we contacted.


Here I've summarised the key points of the Council's comments


   The start date for the new housing allocation is important, because without it being a set date, it's possible anything approved before then will be additional to our target. We have asked Breckland's planners to clarify this and wait their answer

 The Local Plan itself says in return for the right to develop houses in smaller villages, there should be some community benefit in return. We've defined that basically as, housing for locals, homes of a size the village actually needs and more consultation with the village before applications are submitted. None of those ideas have yet been accepted.






 The Council hasn't agreed our policy on the size of sites although it's in line with what their own plan says. Of course we think it's wrong to ask us to accept things the Local Plan doesn't require



 Apart from the areas along Richmond Road and Cley Lane they say we need better evidence to justify the gap to Watton

 They think the Mere is too large to qualify as a protected local green space



 And they want a much less restrictive approach to protecting our communal views



We've deliberately put off meeting the planners to discuss their comments while we go through all the things I'm explaining this evening, but are in regular contact with them all the same.



Meanwhile as we gradually address the comments we keep a traffic light score  and you can see where that stands at present.     At first there was a lot more red and blue so that shows the benefit of holding off from discussions with the planners for now


 That's just the highlights of the Council's comments. The full responses are available from our website should you be interested 


Slide 4: Consultation Responses - 2


  As we've said before the importance of your input to our consultations can't be stressed enough.




 **Pause**  In a perfect world perhaps every villager would have something to say, but, since that's unrealistic we're grateful to everyone who takes the time to give us their opinion, be that positive or not so positive.



 In all we had 137 villager responses. Most agreed with what the plan said -  as you can see from these overall results for:

 93% agreed with the policies


 95% agreed with the communal views

 And 93% agreed with the action points

 Of course it was great to get so much support for various aspects of the plan, but just as useful were objections that made concrete points about things we didn't get right.  

 Again all of the comments are on the website together with some preliminary responses – although we will be reviewing the latter in due course in line with new things we've been doing 

Slide 5: Policy Rating Chart

As an example I'll show you one chart of the level of villager agreement we received; if you want to see the others please visit our website 


This chart illustrates the villager responses we had to the various policies in the plan


The only policies getting less than 90% agreement were those on community facilities and non-residential development, but as you can see this was not due to more disagreement, but just that more people had no opinion



on them. Overall, while we can all argue with statistics it's clear that – of those who responded – the vast majority support what we're doing.


Based on 137 responses I don't make any claims about the whole village's opinion one way or the other – but I'd also dispute the claim one villager made that it indicates the rest of the village are against the plan!


Slide 6: Consultation Responses - 3


 We invited many organisations and landowners who live outside the parish to comment on the plan.


Few did so.  The main ones are shown here.


  Of those that did, responses concentrated on wildlife and ecology, village heritage and drainage issues


 Anglian Water are supportive of our policy on drainage and flooding


 Historic England gave us some useful comments on our heritage policy that will help make sure it matches planning rules


 The Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust were generally in favour of our wildlife policies and suggested some improvements

 Norfolk County Council specialists commented on our policies for heritage, the environment and drainage and generally gave us good advice

 The Ramblers pointed out it may be possible to designate an official footpath from Coburg Lane to Ashill, but we learned the Parish Council has previously looked into that and rejected it

 We were advised to incorporate features of "Secured by Design" in our design policy


 Sport England sent their standard information, which while interesting, is not actually applicable to our plan

 The Bowes Estate suggested an area for development which we will discuss with them during the site allocations process

In the main their comments were supportive or gave good advice to improve wording, or both, and we will be incorporating them in the plan.


 Once more please visit our website if you want to read them in detail 

Slide 7: Consultation Responses Q&A

 Okay, I'll pause for breath there and let you ask any questions you have about the consultation results

Slide 8: The Health Check



 You could liken a plan's health check to a mock GCSE or driving test. You try to get everything right and feel confident you've done that, but all the same it's useful to put that to the test without running the risk of failing the real thing

 **Pause**

🔊 Eventually our plan will be reviewed by an independent examiner and to know what we might expect from that, we commissioned one such examiner to do a health check for us. After researching different people we chose Ann Skippers, 🔊 as she's one who tends to be quite severe on neighbourhood plans. We did that on the basis it was better to find out the worst about our plan now, and also because having done the health check Ann will then not be able to do the real thing – i.e. we might get someone easier for that!

We agreed with Ann she would do much more than she normally does for a health check by reviewing not just the plan, but the 15 supporting documents and also the Breckland Council comments

🔊🔊 She gave us two comprehensive reports which opened our eyes to a number of points. In many cases her comments largely matched those of Breckland Council, but the big difference was she explained why she had made each comment and what we could do to overcome it. That shed a lot of light on issues we'd been grappling with for months, as did her answers to the 40 or so follow-up questions we then fired off to her.

Ann had asked us not to publish her reports online so I'll go through her main points.

🔊🔊 On the plus side:

🔊 Using villagers' questionnaire responses we've made clear what the main issues affecting development of the village are

🔊 The plan's vision and objectives make good sense

🔊🔊 Our approaches to developers consulting with the Parish Council and getting community benefit from development are good

🔊 In general our proposals on how planners are to implement our policies are sound

🔊🔊 Our housing needs assessment is well presented and our novel approach to justifying our rules for the density of new developments works well

🔊🔊 Our policies for heritage assets and local green spaces are well justified

🔊 And Ann liked the way we've presented information on the communal views

🔊 On the other hand, things we can improve include:

🔊🔊 We could make the plan easier to read by breaking up text with more photos and illustrations

🔊 In some cases our policy words should actually be part of our evidence and vice versa

🔊 While it's okay to have "thou shall not" type policies, they need really strong evidence and in some cases we need to improve ours

🔊 We need to ensure we don't contravene strategic points of the Local Plan


🔊 We need more justification for areas of the strategic gap away from Richmond Road and Cley Lane

🔊 In order to be accepted, much better evidence will be needed for any protected views




🔊 Ann found some confused wording in our drainage policy



🔊 And our overall map illustrating policy restrictions didn't come across well


Slide 9: Health Check Q&A


 I'll pause again here for you to ask questions or make comments about the health check



Slide 10: Local Plan Hearings - 1


  Now I'll say a little about the Local Plan hearings 

  Before it's approved the Breckland Local Plan has to be independently examined to confirm it is what they call "sound". Being a more complex document than a neighbourhood plan the review process is also more complex.


 The Local Plan was submitted for examination at the end of November last year.





 Following submission of the plan and its numerous accompanying documents, and after the government appointed Inspector had reviewed all of those, and hundreds of comments made to the Council, including our own, he had numerous questions. To go through those, and those of anyone else, he called a series of public hearings over a period from late April through to early June.


  The Council first made some preliminary written responses which were published online for all to see and to comment on if they wished.


 The hearings were a forum chaired by the Inspector where he and any other participant could ask the Council questions

 There were 17 hearings in total covering every aspect of the Local Plan





 They took the form of a round table discussion with the overall aim of helping the Inspector reach his conclusions


   Participating in any given hearing gave the chance to give opinions, make comments and raise questions, so I took part in the 8 sessions most relevant to our plan. By doing so the aim was to be able to influence the review, and also to get an early idea of what changes it may lead to, as that will help us make progress, since the examiner's formal report will not be published till the end of the year. 


 It was a fascinating and informative process and the inspector was very even-handed in giving all participants chance to make their points and getting the Council to answer our questions. At the end of the hearings he then takes away everything he has heard and uses it to help him reach his conclusions about various aspects of the Local Plan. But during a hearing he doesn't give anything away about what he might recommend later so what follows are just our educated guesses about what might change that would affect our plan


 Another benefit of attending the hearings was the chance to meet people from Dereham, Yaxham and Swanton Morley and hear some useful lessons they have learned when preparing their neighbourhood plans


Slide 11: Local Plan Hearing - 2


   **pause**  The Inspector hasn't finished the examination yet - for reasons I'll come to - and even when he does his report is not expected until December. Until then I can just give you our educated guesses as to what may change in the Local Plan before it's finalised


 I won't go into all the why's and wherefore's of what leads us to these conclusions, though please do ask in a minute if you want more detail.


 The overall number of new homes in Breckland will increase from the present 15,298 – actually we already know we guessed this correctly as a new target about 900 higher has been proposed by Breckland Council since the hearings


 The target will not be increased to account for affordability - that increase would be about 26% for Breckland. As an aside we still think it will be wise to apply that factor in our plan


 During the hearings the Council put forward a specific housing target for all villages like ours. In our case that was 32 at the time of the hearings. It's since been updated to 33, and may still change a little before it's finalised. Incidentally 33 times the affordability factor is 42 new houses, 6 less than in our Plan at present, so we do have scope to reduce our target if we choose

 The inspector challenged the 5 house site size limit quite strongly and put forward some good reasons for doing so. If he decides it must be deleted from the Local Plan our plan will have to follow suit, regardless of villagers' earlier wishes, but actually that won't necessarily be a bad thing


 I specifically asked if we must consider site allocations Breckland Council made in 2014 and 2015 when we were still a service centre. Both the Council and the Inspector answered "no"

 Although the overall Central Norfolk housing strategy requires larger sites to include 40% affordable homes, the Council made a case for this to be reduced to 20-25% and we think that will be accepted.


 A number of improvements to heritage and environmental policies were suggested by speakers, including myself, and since no-one objected to them, seem likely to be accepted

 The Council agreed to ensure neighbourhood plans carry full weight in the Local Plan


 There will be a small modification to our settlement boundary


 And as I mentioned we got some useful tips from others writing neighbourhood plans. Swanton Morley are trying to overcome the same Council resistance to housing for locals as we are and anything they achieve will help us. And it was interesting to hear how Dereham Town Council are increasing the amount of green space for residents


Slide 12: Local Plan Hearings Q&A


 Again, here's your chance to speak up



Slide 13: Consultant's Review of Views


 As part of the pre-consultation review of the plan our main consultant recommended we get a specialist to verify if we had chosen the right views to protect, and if we had justified our choices well enough.


 On her recommendation we hired Lucy Batchelor-Wylam to do that work


 Lucy spent a day in the village in early April. First I took her round to show her the various views, but deliberately did not try to influence her opinion of them, then she went round the whole village alone to get an overall picture.


 Her report was initially a bit of a shock to us, as by and large she couldn't see a great deal of justification for many of the views we chose, even though villagers supported them.


 Her report gave us guidelines  and recommendations to address that, and take things forward


 Her report pointed out that since we hadn't defined what we meant by a communal view, it was hard to understand on what basis we'd chosen them.

 She also pointed out that our "tick box" approach was too simplistic for something as complex as landscape, and hence we lacked good justification for protecting the views - in this she was mirroring comments of both Breckland Council and the health check report


 She questioned why the views we chose were exclusively of open countryside as opposed to having some including village buildings

 She explained that it's wrong to try to protect all aspects of a view for all time. Change is not always a bad thing and can sometimes improve a view rather than detract from it

 She went on to say it's the sensitivity of a landscape to change that really matters, and that the converse of that is how much development any one area may or may not be able to support

 She also made a brief review of our gap to Watton and actually thought it should be wider in places, by following natural boundaries rather than just being an arbitrary distance from a road.

 And she pointed out how assessing the landscape's sensitivity would help us justify the gap


 Regarding landscape sensitivity, during her visit Lucy said a few things that planted the seed of an idea in my mind about village landscape, and over time, as we read and discussed her detailed report and talked more with Lucy, that seed grew into the realisation that protecting a few views is just the tip of the iceberg of what the plan could deal with.

It's a complex thing to explain – indeed it's taken us a couple of months of research and debate to fully understand it ourselves – but in a nutshell we need to know how sensitive any area in the parish would be to development and how the effects of change might be mitigated.


For me this was the biggest light bulb moment in the 15 months or so I've been working on the plan, and it has led to the two major pieces of new work I'll describe in part 2.

 That new work will place landscape considerations firmly at the heart of the plan

Slide 14: Proposed Definition of a Key View

 I mentioned Lucy's advice for us to define what we mean by a communal view - or as we are now calling them, a key view


 **Pause**

 We've followed that advice by coming up with this definition. I'll just read it out, then you can let me know what you think in a minute



A Key View is one with a publicly accessible viewpoint, that reflects the most distinct and unique characteristics of the Neighbourhood Area. It is memorable and appreciated, and evokes positive emotions. It encompasses an important feature of the village's settlement history, and the way its landscape has been shaped by those who have lived and worked in it, and by nature. It may be said to be



worthy of being illustrated in a photo, postcard or painting, and as such would best represent a special element of the village's identity.


Slide 15: Review of Communal Views Q&A


 I'll get onto the new landscape work in part 2 but if you have any questions about Lucy's review, or our proposed definition of a key view, now's your chance




Slide 16: Other Work and Events

  To bring part 1 to a close this is just a list of other general things we've been doing:


  We had a good meeting with our MP George Freeman; he is very supportive of neighbourhood planning so it was good to have a chance to tell him about problems we've experienced, to hear that he has similar frustrations with the whole planning system, and that he's campaigning in Westminster to improve things. There's a video of an interesting parliamentary debate about neighbourhood plans he organised on our website.

 We continue to review planning applications and make comments on them; and in line with the plan we encourage consultation with ourselves or the Parish Council before an application is made, and we are in fact in discussion with one such landowner as we speak.




 A new version of the national planning rules was published in draft form in the spring and we sent in our comments. Last month the final version was published and we'll be taking into account the changes from the 2012 version as we update our plan. When time permits we'll go on to analyse it in detail, though a quick scan tells us there's no big surprises to bother us

  A situation where we continued to be at loggerheads with the Breckland planners was to no-one's benefit. Realising that's what we'd slipped into, we decided to avoid it in future by proposing to them we both adopt a much more positive approach.  We persuaded them it's in our mutual interest to really co-operate to get our plan to its final stage. Our target is for them to have no comments on the final version of our plan by making sure we have agreed everything earlier. So far this new approach with the planners seems to be paying dividends in terms of information and cooperation we are getting from them.


Slide 17: Work Since Consultation Q&A

 Do you have any more questions on what we've been doing since the consultation?

Slide 18: Message From George Freeman MP




 At this point we had planned to play a short video message our MP, George Freeman had promised to send. Unfortunately - and here's my chance for a cheap jibe about politician's promises!  - he's been too busy to record one. But to be fair to him, we're grateful that instead he's sent a written message. To give you a brief rest from the sound of my voice, our new County Councillor, Ed Connolly (my colleague Andrew) is going to read that out.  So over to Ed / Andrew for George's message

Slide 19: What's Coming Next



 Okay then, I'll get on with part 2


Slide 20: Further Grant Application



   **Pause**

   As I've stressed elsewhere all my group's work comes at no cost, but we can't get specialist help on a shoestring

I should also explain that the Breckland grant does not come out of your council tax, but from a larger grant of around £25,000 they receive from the government for each neighbourhood plan that goes through in the area

  If we were to simply complete the plan as it stands the £5500 we have left would be sufficient, but it's not enough to cover the new work we'll be commissioning, which will cost at least £7000

 So we'll be applying for an additional grant which can be for a maximum of £8,000, plus some technical support that comes in the form of a piece of work Locality's consultants do for us without money changing hands



 Put simply the cost equation is as shown here. 


The grant will come from a Government body known as Locality.


Given what we're spending on consultants, I must admit at times the 4 of us in the work group wonder about setting up our own neighbourhood plan consultancy when this is all over 😊 But seriously, to date we've had good value from the consultants we've used



Slide 21: More Local Plan Hearings

   In short they're needed to review new information.

  I told you earlier about the hearings on the Local Plan. During those there were a number of points Breckland Council could not answer to the inspector's satisfaction. As a result he instructed their planners to do more work.

 That work could not be done overnight nor during the period when the original hearings were taking place.

 It was actually submitted to him about a month ago and the inspector has given all interested parties 6 weeks to comment on the resulting new proposals and information.

 Following that in September there will be several more hearing sessions on the same lines as before  and I will take part in the 4 that are relevant to our plan.


After that the inspector will weigh all the evidence he has read and heard and write a report with a conclusion as to whether the Local Plan is sound or unsound.

If it is deemed sound the Council will make the recommended changes and should then be in a position to finalise their plan, giving us certainty about what exactly we must conform to

If it's not sound it's anybody guess what would happen next!


As an aside, should we see the timetable for the Local Plan slipping even more we will reconsider if it's still best for our plan to be finalised after theirs

Slide 22: Grants and The Local Plan Q&A


 Do you have any questions on the grant or local plan?


Slide 23: Biodiversity Mapping


Pause


 You might remember one policy in the plan includes a map of wildlife routes – or corridors – established by sightings by a number of villagers over a period of time.


 A few villagers disputed some of the corridors shown, without really giving alternate details.

 We don't want this to become a point of contention – being designated a corridor doesn't automatically prevent development of a particular piece of land, but simply ensures measures are taken to mitigate the impact on wildlife. But we do want the plan to be accurate. So although we have continued to collect data and will do so in future, we decided it was time to get the experts in

 The Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service, or NBIS, is part of Norfolk County Council and collects data about wildlife all over the county.

 They take data from many sources but particularly people who are known as county recorders who collect, check and collate information for just this purpose

 NBIS have previously mapped wildlife corridors for the Dereham neighbourhood plan and are currently finishing off a county wide report and maps.

 When that's complete they'll collate information on wildlife corridors and habitats in the parish for us, and provide us with several maps we will include in the plan to replace our own. We will benefit from the county wide study they're doing now.

 Their work should start at the end of this month

 NBIS always welcome more data and ask that anyone who provide it remembers the 4 W's

Who saw it – your name

What you saw - i.e. species;


Where you saw it – at least the address although they like grid references; and

When you saw it – at least the date, and the time if possible


You can send information directly to NBIS or pass it to us at our usual email and we'll forward it to them


And please remember – For NBIS things you see in your back garden are just as important to know about as those in the open countryside, be that animals, birds, insects, whatever





Slide 24: Biodiversity Mapping Q&A


 Does that all make sense? If not please ask


Slide 25: Village Character Assessment - 1

 In a nutshell village character is made up of the 3 elements you see here - landscape, townscape and village history.


 Our light bulb moment was realising that if we base our policies more on village character, that's most likely to result in the right type of houses being built in the right places - a slogan we're happy to steal from the Government

  I told you earlier how several of our policies had not been fully accepted by Breckland Council  and about the advice our landscape consultant gave us when she assessed our communal views 

 While "the right homes in the right places" is a nice slogan, how are we to decide which are the right places?

 That was where the idea our consultant had planted in my mind about the plan giving more attention to the landscape and its sensitivity to development started to make sense.


At first it was a pretty hazy idea which we could only make sense of by doing a lot of research. From that we found out that landscape isn't just the fields and woods around us but our buildings, the way the streets are laid out, and the historical features – in fact everything is interlinked, both man-made and natural, and just as important as what we see today is how that has been shaped by people and nature over many centuries. Eventually we realised what we were thinking about could be described in two words – village character.


 We realised that so far, our plan hasn't described or defined that. In fact we'd deliberately avoided doing so because we didn't really know how to do it. So our policies don't yet take real account of it

That set us on another path of research. We read many landscape and character assessments other villages have done. Some were impressive and helped increase our ambitions. But as far as the plan is concerned, we see things in black and white, and while many studies we read were interesting, other than passing references, we didn't see many tangible or effective policies resulting from them in neighbourhood plans. Mostly it was just "developers should take note of the village character assessment" which we think won't achieve much



We wrote a strategy for doing an assessment and when we were happy with that, a scope of work followed. You can see both on our site. We involved Lucy again and built her advice into our documents.



Part of the assessment will be to recommend criteria for our policies to ensure the village character is conserved and even improved if possible. I want to point out that won't mean frozen in time, never to change; after all the village is how it is today because of millennia of change.

 But it will mean that village character will be central to the whole plan and will be defined in a way that it can't be ignored when planning decisions are made

 So as I'll explain shortly these ideas about landscape sensitivity, capacity for development and understanding which features most warrant conservation will come together in a village character assessment


Slide 26: Village Character Assessment - 2


  While we need a specialist to do the assessment we'd guessed one aspect we could help on was the historical development of the village, and Lucy has welcomed that. So Brian and I have been putting together a fairly concise document about just that. It doesn't claim to be a full history of the village; but it tries to explain why the village is as it is today.


  When it's complete we'll publish it online but perhaps you'll be interested if I diverge for a moment to give you a few highlights you may or may not know about


 Neolithic farming remains have been found in the parish from 6000 years ago


 There were two Roman forts - one where Woodcock Hall is today and another to the east of Saham Wood


 Until the Fens were drained in the 16th century the coast was effectively much nearer – where the Fens start today – and Watton Brook was wide and deep enough for boats. Coupled with being at the crossroads of two important land routes that helped make Saham a trade centre


 With a little imaginative interpretation of the facts available, we can trace the pattern of our main roads today back to Roman times and earlier


 Up till about 700 years ago we had a weekly market and twice yearly fairs. Only when Watton had a Lord with influence over King John did that start to change. And as travel changed Saham's location counted against it. Access was poor and the village often inaccessible in winter due to marshy ground and floods

 We know there was a Saxon chapel from the 7th century and while we can't be sure it seems a good bet it was on the site of today's St George's


 The village has had a school for more than 400 years - longer than any other Norfolk village

 When we complain today about the state of our roads try to imagine just 70-80 years ago when they were even narrower and just gravel tracks.

 When people had to take their water from wells which were often contaminated because there was no mains drainage. Indeed the last death of a villager from typhoid was as recent as 1936. So the fact there were 8 village pubs stems from ale being safer to drink than water rather than villagers being more partial to a drink in those days

 Many tell us they want the plan to keep Saham as it is. In fact anyone who lived here before the mid-sixties might say Saham as it is today is nothing like it was then, as the following slide shows.

Slide 27: Village Growth: Number of Households 1831 - 2036



 Nearly 400 new homes were built here between 1965 and 1995, more than 200 of them on the various small estates that are a well established part of the village today. As you can see that development more than doubled the size of the village, which before that had been pretty stable for as long as records had been kept.

To put that growth in perspective we're now talking about 40 or 50 new houses in the next two decades, which is less than there has been in the last 6 years.


So be reassured with the help of the plan the village will not change its character dramatically but it will continue to evolve, just as it has done for at least 6,000 years


Slide 28: Village Character Assessment - 3


  **Pause** 

  We did consider other consultants besides Lucy, but once she confirmed she can undertake the work at a time that works well and at a competitive cost it was obvious we should continue with her.

She already knows something of the village from her previous work, she understands what we are trying to achieve and we've built up a good relationship with her



 I talked about grants earlier. We couldn't submit an application before getting Parish Council approval for the new work last week and past experience says the grant will take about 6 weeks to come through


 That should allow Lucy to start around the middle of September, so if you see a young lady looking inquisitive and taking photos then, it will probably be her


 Lucy won't actually be working on the study for 6 solid weeks but the work will spread out over that period, which includes chance for us to review and comment on her reports before they're finalised


Slide 29: Village Character Assessment - 4

  **Pause**


  I've told you about the historical study we'll pass onto Lucy to integrate with her work

 Lucy will assess the whole parish against some very detailed criteria allowing her to divide it into character areas – and remember here that landscape means everything


 Perhaps the most important aspect of her work is defining the sensitivity of each area to development.


 Incidentally, Breckland Council currently define most of the parish as high sensitivity but then seem to take little note of that. That's probably inevitable when virtually the whole village has one classification


Lucy's grading will be much more refined and so much easier to apply when decisions are made


 We have a policy for design which gives a basic set of requirements for developers to work to. Lucy will prepare a more comprehensive document which as well as "do's" will include the "don'ts" – i.e design features that won't be accepted.

Since her guide will be based on a detailed and specialist assessment it will be easier to justify it and get it accepted

 Lucy will assess key views with a fresh – and professional – pair of eyes and tell us which really meet our definition of a key view. She will take the existing views and additional ones suggested by villagers during the consultation into account, but we're happy to leave it to her expertise to decide which views most warrant conservation

 I told you most areas of the gap to Watton were not accepted by Breckland Council, so we've asked Lucy to provide stronger justification for what we're proposing. Armed with her specialist backing even if planners still don't accept our proposal we'll be even more prepared to stand by it


 Lucy will also give us recommendations for how to word policies to conserve our best landscape and village character features


 Making landscape and character a central feature of the plan and making sure developments are in places with least impact on the good features of those, leads to what we now feel is the logical next step – allocating sites in the plan – which I'll come onto next

Slide 30: Village Character Assessment Q&A



 But first any questions about the character assessment?

Slide 31 - Site Allocations - 1

 We've known for a long time that Neighbourhood plans can allocate sites, but we've shied away from doing it in our plan, because we thought it was too complex to do ourselves, and could open up all sorts of arguments in the village.

 As I said earlier we've struggled to know how to decide where are the right places for new houses


But many of the things that have happened over the last few months – planners not accepting our housing policies; the health check recommendations; the Local Plan hearings, the new planning rules; even the ongoing stream of new planning applications; and especially our research and decision about a village character assessment – point towards the same thing: that to really achieve what the plans sets out to do – to ensure the right homes in the right places at the right times, we need it to include sites allocated for development. And that we hope will be the final piece in the jigsaw 


  This really is the best way to retain control over what gets developed and where, and conversely what doesn't


Despite our earlier hesitation to take on such work, we can no longer ignore all the reasons for doing it as outlined here


 Even when our plan is approved, without site allocations we will not be in full control of the village's destiny


This is because


 The Local Plan is open to interpretation and challenge on where precisely houses may be built

 And the final interpretation is with the Breckland Planning Committee, who with all due respect, are not specialists, but still regularly overturn even their own planners' recommendations in a seemingly blind rush to permit almost any homes, almost anywhere



 Furthermore although their Local Plan purports to set a maximum number of homes, all our research and our consultants' advice suggests they will be unable to impose a fixed limit in practice, because they have not allocated sites


 Add to that for the three years I've lived here Breckland has never been able to successfully show it has a 5 year supply of land on which to build houses. The result of that is to dilute the strength of local and neighbourhood plan policies.


 All of this points to one thing: to steal another slogan we need to "take back control" and our research tells us the best way to do that is to allocate sites in our plan


 Parish councillors approved this approach last week and once we have made any final adjustments based on any valid points you raise this evening, we'll begin what will probably be a process running till the end of the year


Slide 32 - Site Allocations - 2


 Once we started to seriously consider this topic, the advantages it can bring reinforced our resolve to press ahead and deal with any problematic aspects as they come up 


 With specific sites allocated there will be no doubt about where and how many houses can - and cannot be developed in the village. This will help everyone - villagers, the parish council, landowners, developers, and planners alike


 Development of new houses can be a very emotive subject. The process of site allocations removes emotion from the equation and identifies and assesses possible sites on a purely objective basis


 Before any sites are assessed we will have the results of the village character assessment I talked about earlier and criteria that arise from that will be a key aspect of the assessments


 The process of site assessment will inevitably identify certain sites as unacceptable. Thereafter that fact will be out in the open and should make it highly unlikely that such a site would get planning permission later. This solves the problem we have at present where it is the landowners and developers who decide which sites to put forward and when, often based only on their personal wishes

 Conversely since all allocated sites will have clearly defined criteria in the Plan explaining on what basis they have been accepted, when they are submitted as formal planning applications, their approval should be a foregone conclusion, as long as they adhere strictly to the criteria


 Allocating sites will safeguard the village against the 5 year land supply loophole since, at least for the first 2 years of the plan's life, a 3 year rule would apply instead; something much easier for Breckland Council to consistently achieve

 Allocating sites also allows us to agree with landowners broadly when their sites will be developed, and so gives us a chance to phase developments over a number of years instead of all at once. That's something we've wanted from the outset, but have not been allowed to do. Only allocating sites gets round this problem


 We've asked all three of our consultants what they think of us doing this and they all support and encourage it


 In summary we think this is the only way to give that stolen slogan real meaning


Slide 33 - Site Allocations - 3


 Now while we see all the advantages I've just explained, we fully realise this also carries some risks


 **Pause** 


 Regardless of how fairly and transparently the process is undertaken, some villagers may still be against it, as may landowners and developers. Serious arguments about this may weaken support for the plan


 In other villages developers have sometimes challenged the process in court, usually on the basis of it being biased, incomplete or with unjustified criteria for acceptance of a site. In some cases plan policies have been invalidated by the court and in a few extreme cases a whole neighbourhood plan has been overturned

 That sort of challenge can also arise because a particular landowner or developer claims they were unaware of the process and therefore unable to participate

 So we are determined to ensure a fair and objective process. For example sites will be independently assessed as I'll come on to in a minute

 When Saham was a local service centre, in 2014 Breckland Council assessed 21 sites in the village, and in 2015 a further 5. Although the majority were rejected by their review, we are obliged to give the people who proposed those sites a chance to propose them again. However the criteria will be stricter this time than Breckland applied, by virtue of Saham no longer being a service centre and now having a lower housing target


 I've mentioned the time the process is likely to take and in part it must also wait for completion of the village character study. So that will of course add more time to our work. In theory that may delay finalisation of the plan, but in practice, since in any case we will wait till the Local Plan is approved, it is unlikely to mean any further delay

 Just as with making people aware they can propose sites we need to ensure very wide consultation on the results and must ensure we don't miss out any interested party, particularly landowners and developers who don't live in the village


There may be more potential pitfalls, so your feedback this evening will really help us ensure we've thought of everything that might go wrong



And knowing that we can deal with it so that in fact everything goes right!


Slide 34 - Site Allocations - 4

 So what do we actually have to do in order to allocate sites?


 Here in summarised form, is our plan


 In essence allocating sites in the plan is a 3 stage process


  First everyone has a chance to propose sites for development. This coming Friday we'll publish what's called a 'call for sites', with a standard form to be completed, giving details of each site put forward. At this stage there are no hard and fast rules about what can or cannot be proposed, though we will give some guidance on anything that's completely unlikely to be accepted later. This process will be open for 2 months.


 To ensure as many people as possible know about the call for sites we will publish it in a variety of ways, as listed here

 Then we must collate all we receive and where necessary clarify any facts with landowners

 While that's going on we'll apply for what's called a "technical support package" for carrying out site assessments.


 The second stage is to assess each site against a common list of criteria. We toyed with the idea of our group, perhaps with a few more villagers seconded to it, doing the assessment ourselves, but understood the risks that would bring in terms of possible accusations of bias, self-interest etc. And when asked, our consultants all emphatically advised **"Don't do it yourselves"**, telling us how other village plans have been successfully challenged by developers for just that reason and had their policies wiped out. so our assessments will be done independently.

 Having decided that our assessments will be done independently we established that although various companies can do that, the one that is most widely accepted is called AECOM. We get access to them through Locality, the government body I mentioned earlier. We know AECOM have a set of standard assessment criteria and are now waiting to talk to them about adding to those our own more local criteria, such as the character assessment results, local flood risk etc.

 We can't say how many sites will be put forward or for how many houses; and the AECOM assessment may conclude that many, or even all of them are acceptable.


But the important point here is that we do not have to allocate more homes than the plan already dictates

So the third stage will start by selecting the preferred sites. This won't happen for several months so we're still working out how and by who this will be done, but as with the whole process, it will have to be fair, objective and subject to consultation with all interested parties, including yourselves.


 Once the preferred sites have been selected each will have its own policy in the plan, which will set out the conditions that must be met in order for planning permission to be granted. Since villagers, planners, landowners, developers and others will all have the chance to consult on those policies, the final versions will mean certainty for everyone

Now - however fair and objective this process is and however much we consult you, we realise that emotions will still be stirred. If a site is allocated on my doorstep or yours, perhaps we're unlikely to be happy about it.

But for some people that will likely be the situation they find themselves in. It's pointless this evening to debate the ifs and buts of this, as nothing specific will be known for some time, but to hopefully reassure you, I will say this - it cannot be worse than the present situation, where applications can come along at any time in any place and then regardless of protection offered by our plan, are ultimately subject to the vagaries of the planning system

 Finally just to reiterate, we will be consulting as widely as possible throughout this process, so please do participate in those consultations

Slide 35: Site Allocations Q&A

 This evening is just the start of this process and there's a long way to go


We don't claim to know it all on this topic nor that we've thought of everything

So as well as your questions and comments, I'm happy to have an open debate on the why's and wherefore's of this topic, so please speak up, or call or write to us later if you'd prefer


And rest assured this will not be the last time we involve you in this process. As ever it's your plan and we want them to be your site allocations



In order for that to happen as many people as possible need to participate in some way – whether that's giving ideas and criticisms, proposing sites, telling others about it, taking part in consultations or anything else

Slide 36: Repeat of the Reg. 14 Consultation


 You've heard about the new work we're planning to do over the coming months as well as updating things to account for consultation comments.


In addition, from past experience we also understand that as we tackle new topics and involve consultants there's always something new to find out about, often leading to other changes we haven't yet thought about


 But as we see things today, the main changes that will come about will be from the character assessment and site allocations, and those will be major alterations rather than simple edits.


 While there's no rule about it, we are in no doubt once the work's done we should repeat the public consultation to give everyone another chance to have their say and tell us what they think about the changes to the plan,  as noted here


 **pause**





 **1 pause** Whenever we update the plan we follow the same principle - that villager wishes must be at the heart of the plan


 **2 pause** Now we're about to undertake 2 major pieces of new work


 **3 pause** Neither will be just minor edits of the plan


 **4 pause** So it's right you should have your say on those changes


 **5 pause** As with previous consultations we know comments will help us strengthen the plan

 **pause**  As is usually the case it's difficult to be exact about timings – as I've said unexpected changes often arise as we go along –   but here I've outlined a schedule we think is realistic at present

 If we get the grant in time Lucy should finish her village character work around the end of October

 Until we can talk to AECOM we're unsure how long site assessments take, but for now we're allowing a month or so


 It may be optimistic, but we'd then hope to update the plan to include the site allocations by the end of the year


 Then once Christmas and New Year are out of the way, you'll have a repeat consultation to start 2019 with! Being 6 weeks again that will run till the end of February, following which - fingers crossed - we'll be able to finalise the plan


Now if you remember, I told you earlier the Local Plan is unlikely to be finalised before April and the final version of our plan will follow that, so this timetable is not as bad as it may seem at first glance, since we'd be waiting in any case


Slide 37: What Else Will We Be Doing?

 **pause**


 Well not resting, that's for sure :-)


 As well as two major pieces of new work to tackle, in parallel with those, other work on the plan also has to continue


 We still need to complete an update of the plan in accordance with the first consultation comments


 As we do that we will have a series of meetings with the planners, with the aim of gradually reaching agreement on all the issues they raised earlier

 We'll continue to review planning applications as they come up

 We want to make sure we keep you up to date and take your feedback into account - a little more on that in a moment

 Experience tells us we'll need to research all sorts of things as we go along, and such research often leads to more new ideas - though none as major as the two I've explained this evening are expected

 As I said earlier we have to get to grips with the detailed requirements of the new planning rules and make sure our plan complies with them

 And still awaiting our attention, towards the end we must describe all of our consultations in one new document


 And write another document describing how exactly the plan complies with all the applicable rules


Slide 38: Is The End In Site?

  So, you might be asking yourselves...are we ever going to finish?


 We sincerely hope so!!


 Here's our best estimate of when that might be


 **1** Regardless of our new work it's best that our plan is finalised after the Local Plan otherwise that can make changes to ours

 **2** Although no exact date has been given, the latest information we have is that the Local Plan could be approved by next April

 **3** As I mentioned a couple of slides ago we aim to complete a repeat public consultation by the end of February


 **4** We'd then hope to update the Plan in accordance with consultation comments by the end of April


 **5** Then, as long as the Local Plan is complete by then, we'll make any final edits that might be needed - something we wouldn't expect to take more than a month


 You can see from all of that with a fair following wind we might be able to submit the final version of the plan around the end of May.


After that timing is out of our hands so we've simply based it on what we know from other village's experiences

 **pause** First Breckland Council must organise a final 6 week consultation

 **pause** When that's complete they simply have to collate all the comments and send them to an independent examiner - and we get a say in who that is


 **pause** On average examinations seem to take about 2 months. Unlike the Local Plan, there's rarely a need for public hearings

 **pause** If villagers vote to support the Plan, Breckland Council has some red tape to go through before they declare our Plan approved - or made to give it the correct term - and it becomes a legal part of the Breckland planning rules. We wouldn't expect that to take more than a month at worst

 Approval not being till November 2019 may come as a shock and even that I'm not going to stand here and guarantee.

But we continue to think it's much better to have the best plan we can, one that will stand the test of time, rather than any very short term gain to be had by rushing it through


If you think differently I'm happy to discuss it.

 You can see we estimate we might be able to save 6 or 7 months if we don't do all the things I've told you about today

Personally for a plan that will run till 2036 I don't see it's worth gaining that time by sacrificing the benefits of the new work I've explained today, in other words

 **Quality comes first!**

Slide 39: Final Questions & Discussion

 So that's all I have to tell you, but if there's anything else you'd like to know please just ask

And while I have you all here, we'd really appreciate your feedback on how we can best keep you involved and informed over the coming months. We can come up with ideas about newsletters, questionnaires, meetings etc but if they're not things villagers will engage with, we're not sure if they're worthwhile. So if you tell us what would work best for you we'll be happy to work around that

Slide 40: Thanks for Coming

 Well I hope this has been useful

We'll keep you updated by all our usual means

If you don't mind as you leave could you please just put a tick on this form to let us know what you thought of the presentation?

And finally just to say we'll make another presentation after the character assessment and site assessments are complete. It's already scheduled for Friday 7th December at 7pm so please put that in your diaries. I'm pleased to say our MP George Freeman has already done that and will be joining us for an hour or so that evening.