

Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan

As you might expect, we took a break from neighbourhood planning over the Christmas period, but are now making progress on what we hope will be the final stages of the work. Given that the Plan has been in preparation for nearly 3 years now, “Get the Plan done!” is a phrase we imagine going through villagers’ minds. To borrow another phrase, as soon as it’s “oven-ready” we’ll do that, but that process will take most of 2020, largely because of work by others that we can’t control the timing of.

We have just about finished our review of all the comments received during the autumn consultation, which has been a significant task, as shown by the fact that simply collating them has resulted in a document over 200 pages long.

At this stage I will just say that there will be some changes to the Plan as a result, which I think villagers will welcome, but I prefer to hold back the details as there are still various factors that may lead us to change some of our decisions, as described below:

In parallel with the consultation, a ‘screening study’ undertaken by Breckland Council determined that a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan are both required. There’s not enough space here to go into detail about what they entail, but suffice to say they are specialist evaluations to decide if the Plan’s policies would cause any harm to the environment and nature. They need to be done very formally and will require two more consultations with Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England. This work is beyond our capabilities, so in November we applied for a Government sponsored technical support package. That was finally approved at the start of the New Year, and AECOM, the consultants appointed to do the work, will have started by the time you read this. It is expected to take a minimum of 18 weeks, but we have been warned it could be longer. It could result in requirements to amend some policies.

Late last year we found out about another Government grant for Plans that include affordable housing. We hope to hear during January that our application for such a grant has been successful. If it is, it will allow us to commission some additional specialist studies to help us make final policy decisions and justify them. Those may include:

- A complete review of the updated Plan and its new supporting documents by our main consultant, that will tell us if we have satisfactorily addressed all the consultation comments;

- A transport study to allow us to better address comments made by the Local Highways Authority;
- A review of our Housing Needs Assessment, including advice on whether the Plan could do more regarding affordable housing.

Meanwhile, the Masterplanning studies for the sites around Pound Hill and the one at Richmond Hall are virtually finished, and have been reviewed by our landscape consultant. The key findings have been blended into the Plan as an indication of site layouts that will best meet the Plan's policies. We now just await two 3D artist's impressions of the Pound Hill sites. If we find those views helpful, we may commission more using the new grant noted above.

As a result of further Breckland Council comments on our design policy, we need to rewrite that and possibly the village design guide as well.

When the various specialist studies and reviews are complete, we will commission an independent 'health check' of the Plan, which will basically be a dummy-run of the formal examination the Plan must go through after its final submission.

As a result of the specialist studies noted, our best estimate today is that we may be able to make the final submission of the Plan around the end of September. Breckland Council then take control of events and arrange a final 6-week consultation before the Plan is examined by an approved inspector, a process that will take at least 2 months. If it passes that Breckland Council will then arrange a village referendum so you can all decide if you accept the Plan or not.

You may have heard that Breckland Council has approved its Local Plan. As a result, the village now has some protection against speculative development, which will be strengthened further when the Neighbourhood Plan is approved.

As usual, if you have any comments or questions on any of this, or anything else to do with the Neighbourhood Plan, or if you'd like to be added to our mailing list, please get in touch with me.

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**Neighbourhood Plan
Shaping the future of
Saham Toney!**