

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

from Tony Clare, chairman of the Pitstone NDP Steering Group

Dear Resident

Evolving Pitstone in the hands of its community

Aylesbury Vale District Council is forecasting that it is unlikely to have a local housing plan in place to answer the dilemma of how it will play its part in meeting the housing shortage in the UK, until Spring 2016. This delay has enabled some very aggressive housing development applications that, without a local plan in place, make it hard if not impossible to argue against. However, within our power is the opportunity to create a community owned Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP).

What is an NDP?

An NDP does not equal "no development". An NDP instead means that a community can take charge of creating its own vision of how it would like to develop over the next 15 years. We as a community will then become able to manage random and aggressive applications for development that Pitstone does not need or want. Once in place all future planning applications are decided in accordance with the NDP, which carries the same legal weight as the District Council's local plan.

So what is an NDP?

An NDP takes an objective view on all plots of land within an agreed area. It looks at their potential development and use. It looks at the infrastructure and amenities required to support existing and future development. It considers education requirements, as well as health needs and sports and leisure facilities available. It also considers, amongst many other things, the heritage and identity of a community and looks at the employment requirements to support it.

Ultimately it creates a vision of how the community as a whole would like to see itself develop over the next 15 or so years. It is a requirement that the majority of that community support it in a referendum, in order for it to be formally adopted.

Where are we now?

A group made up of local volunteers, appointed by and acting on behalf of the Parish Council, has been looking at the questions and challenges that arise out of the development of an NDP. It is a huge undertaking and we would ask for your help and support as they go through this process.

We would like to be clear that no decisions have yet been taken. Indeed, this would be impossible without support and input from the local community, followed by a formal consultation process about what our proposed NDP might look like.

To start this intensive process we have been investigating a number of development options for Pitstone between now and 2030. Some of them would undoubtedly be less popular than others. Some of them would involve a trade-off; a downside in return for an upside. But above all else, we cannot form a clear vision for our community without first investigating all possible alternatives, even if a number of them are then firmly discounted.

Speculation about these circumstances is bound to occur, particularly whilst our initial background work is being undertaken. However, we have now reached the stage where input from and engagement with the community is a vital next step in further developing the vision for Pitstone that is slowly beginning to emerge from our work. We now want to hear your questions, listen to your points of view, and with full transparency tackle together the issues we have identified that Pitstone will face over the forthcoming 15 years.

What's next?

The NDP team will be hosting two “**Community Engagement Days**” at Pitstone Memorial Hall, which are taking place between 11am and 3pm on **Sunday 22 March** and **Saturday 28 March**. We would ask that as many of you as possible call in and meet the team on either or both of these days, for as long or as little time as you can spare, to hear about the challenges we're facing, to share your views and opinions, and to allow us to ensure that everyone's voice is heard. Posters are going up, leaflets are being delivered to every house in the village, and there is now both a website page and a Facebook page to allow you to read more and to share views online. And if all that's not enough, the bar in the Social Club will be open as well!

To streamline our work and to enable us to focus more clearly on the issues at hand, the NDP team has been divided into four focus groups. Set out below are just some of the issues on which they, and we, would appreciate your feedback.

Housing & Land Assets

How much new housing should the village have? (Sadly “none” is not an option.) Which sites are suitable for development? What should it look like? What sort of housing is our village short of?

Education, Sports & Leisure

Where do we want our children to go to school? Do we have enough education capacity to support our growing village? What sports and leisure facilities are we lacking and which ones could be improved? Would you like a pub, for example, and how often would you use it? What about facilities for the elderly, or the under 18s?

Employment, Facilities, Health, Infrastructure & Transport

How can we manage the flow of traffic better through our village? Do we have enough local facilities to support our existing village and what would be required to meet future growth? What new facilities would you like to see in the village? Is our infrastructure sufficient for future needs?

Heritage & Environment

What is the identity of Pitstone? Do we make the most of the heritage and the history of our village? If not, how could we do so more effectively? In what ways should we look at protecting what we have for future generations?

We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at one of our Community Engagement Days. Your feedback is always appreciated.

Best wishes

Tony

Tony Clare

Chairman, Pitstone NDP Steering Group