

Text of Address to Annual Parish Meeting 20th May 2019 by Chair of Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

First of all, a big thank you to all who completed the Questionnaire last September. The results provided the Steering Group with valuable information for us to continue our work to prepare a draft Neighbourhood Plan.

The Steering Group are a group working on your behalf to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan. Current members in alphabetical order are Steve Arthurs, Elly Bunn, April Chapman, Judith Clacy, Irene Guidotti, Mandy Hessing, Stephen Holland, Martin Lister, Gilly Lutton, Mark Schofield and me. We are ably supported by our co-ordinator, Lesley Mitchelmore.

So, what have we been doing? In December we held an exhibition summarising the results of the Questionnaire and answering your questions. We have formed two teams: Sites Selection and Plan Writing.

Sites Selection: this team must evaluate each site to provide a direct comparison of the good and bad points. Over 30 criteria have been used in this assessment. A common methodology was developed to ensure:

- Each site is treated equally
- It will remove any personal preferences
- It will ensure consistency of method and results
- All group members are familiar with the sites and decisions so we can explain the results of our findings to residents in an understandable way
- Provide the necessary evidence to rebut any challenge of unfair assessment.

We have to consult with Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency, Essex Highways, Essex Minerals, the Council's Heritage and Conservation Officer and neighbouring parish and town councils to name just a few.

We have been very fortunate to receive free technical assistance from AECOM, a company appointed via Government to assist Neighbourhood Plan Groups where they must select sites for housing. This is an independent assessment of the sites intended to aid the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. We have seen a draft report and it is pleasing that the AECOM findings are in line with the Site Assessment we have undertaken above.

The next stage is to consider the views of the village from the Questionnaire. With these views and the information above we will develop a short-list of suitable sites and provisionally allocate housing to these selected sites with help

from the Parish Council and Chelmsford City Council where necessary; only then can we discuss our findings with the relevant Landowner/Developer.

There is a further piece of essential work to undertake – a Strategic Environmental Assessment which Chelmsford City Council have concluded will be required. It will determine the likely scale and significance of environmental impacts of the proposed policies and plans set out in the draft Plan.

This is often carried out once the Plan has been drafted, but we are commissioning AECOM to start it now (again it's free) as it will give us the benefit of their findings which will help with the site allocation.

Plan Writing: this team are drafting the Neighbourhood Plan, the Vision and Objectives and Policies for Danbury. They are working on a draft of the plan, pulling together results from the questionnaires and additional research to formulate and justify policies, and create an introduction to the plan that will provide the reader with a flavour of Danbury, its unique features and the background and context to the Neighbourhood Plan. We hope the draft Plan will be available to you all later in the year.

Next Steps: the process to complete the Plan is specified in legislation. Once the draft Plan is complete and we have agreed the content with the Parish Council, the following steps are required:

- Formal Consultation with residents on the draft Plan which lasts 6 weeks
- Analyse all consultation comments and revise the draft Plan in conjunction with the Parish Council
- As the Qualifying Body, the Parish Council will submit the draft Plan to Chelmsford City Council. Chelmsford will carry out a final check to ensure that the Plan complies with legal requirements
- CCC formally publishes the draft Plan – this is a minimum 25 working days
- Next is an Independent Examination to evaluate the Plan to ensure it meets all statutory obligations; if it does, a Referendum will take place where a simple majority in favour of the Plan is enough to take it through to adoption as Planning Policy by Chelmsford City Council.

As you can see, a tremendous amount of work has already been done but there is still much to do to complete the process which I said at the start – WE ARE DOING THIS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE RESIDENTS OF DANBURY.

Sue Dobson