

# Botus Fleming Parish Council Neighbourhood Planning Committee

**Meeting on Monday 18th March 2019, 7.00 pm at West Park, Villaton**

**Attendees:** Dave Willey, Malcolm Fletcher, John Robinson, Alex Smith, Trevor Aughey, Helena Vallis, Dave Edwards, Roger Burns, Chris Burns, Mervyn Ellis, Denis Morgan

## Minutes

1. **Apologies for absence** – Received from Scott Bligh and Jon Halls-Falconer
2. **Declaration of interests** – None Declared
3. **Minutes of last meeting** – Agreed as true and accurate
4. **Matters arising** – Trevor advised that this would be his last NDP meeting and he had prepared a statement which he would make at the end of the meeting.
5. **Update from date of last meeting** – Trevor took the meeting through his written report which explained developments since the last meeting, and the current status:

“Following the last meeting in May 2018 Denis and Trevor continued to work together to produce a final document that would be acceptable to CC. This turned into quite a major task as the planners kept moving the goalposts. Each submission was returned with approx. 60 suggestions, some of which reversed previously advised changes. By the end of the summer we had what we felt was the final iteration of the plan and a well-developed summary of evidence. Each submission was posted to Dropbox so all Steering Group members could keep an eye on progress. In summary, the main thrust of the Plan was to secure the future of the Recreation Fields with a Public Open Space designation with a view to developing community facilities on the site. The site of the service station could be developed to re-provide for existing services, new business use, and accommodation above. If the Church Hall became redundant then the site could be developed for housing. These aims would improve the sustainability of our communities and allow for modest population growth within the old development boundaries.

Unfortunately, at this point, CC decided that we needed to have a Strategic Environmental Assessment and would not comment further on the Plan until the SEA had been completed. Various locally based organisations were contacted but none was keen to become involved in small-scale work such as this. Round about this time we discovered a further setback to the Plan. The owner of the recreation fields declared that he objected to our proposals and would not grant a further lease if we persisted in designating the recreation fields as Public Open Spaces. Despite further discussions with PC members he then issued a statement through his solicitor that the lease would not be renewed.

At this stage, because of the uncertainty, all work on the plan ceased and the PC were informed. I have told the PC that nothing can be done without guidance from them and have submitted my ideas about how they might proceed. I have had no response from the PC.”

MF sought clarification of some information contained in an email submitted in January by Trevor – Trevor explained that the bulk of the NDP depended on the outcome of the field negotiations and the, in his view, the only other significant item was confirming the future development boundary of Hatt.

ME explained some verbal, informal dialogue had transpired between the PC and the owners of the field. The owners had agreed to attend a public meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019 to discuss the future of the fields. There were no notes made of meetings to date, but SM had given a comprehensive account of his discussions to councilors.

Trevor then read out his statement as follows:

**“Personal statement.**

**Trevor Aughey**

**Chairman BFNDP Steering Group.**

I first became aware of Neighbourhood Planning in 2015 and, in November of that year, began a correspondence with BFPC asking them to consider developing a plan for this parish. In March 2016 BFPC issued a circular to gauge the extent of local interest and, at a subsequent meeting in April 2016 it was agreed that the parish would take the idea forward. Since then I have been an enthusiastic member of the Steering Group and took over the role of Chair in 2017.

From the start it was obvious that the PC was not totally supportive of our work and there were some problems engaging with councilors, leading to a loss of confidence in the PC's determination to see the plan progress. It was felt that if members of the Steering Group were elected to the PC it would ensure that the Plan was supported. Following the 2017 election all but one councilor was a member of the NDP Steering Group.

Early in 2018 it became obvious that not all of the aspirations of the residents and the Steering Group could be met through the NDP. It was agreed that those issues that did not involve spatial planning would form the basis of a Parish Plan and the NDP would be an annex of this. The NDP Steering Group produced a draft Parish Plan and this was approved by the PC. The Parish Plan focused on improving the governance of the PC and working in partnership with the community to support sustainable change. An Engagement Strategy was produced to ensure that the community was involved, especially through the dissemination of information. Work on the NDP continued.

When the owner of the recreation fields stated his objection to the NDP and threatened to withhold further leases I encouraged the PC to investigate all possibilities and to seek legal advice. My initial suggestions were met with abusive comments from one councilor and there was no condemnation of this from the PC. Because of this I resigned from the PC. The Owner then told the PC, through his solicitor, that he would not be renewing any leases in 2020. I have continued to press for independent legal advice and submitted a written report to the PC in January but received no response. Prior to their February meeting I informed the PC that could not continue my involvement with the NDP if the PC did not seek legal counsel. I understand that the PC have done no more than to have informal discussions with the owner and a resolution to seek legal advice was not seconded.

Tonight's meeting of the Steering Group was called in order that I might update the members. Statutory notice was given and notice of the meeting was posted on the NDP website. The venue was as for previous meetings. Surprisingly this caused "disquiet" among some PC members who felt that the meeting should be held on "neutral ground". The language used suggests that the PC sees the Steering Group as some sort of enemy.

My experience of trying to engage with the PC over the past six months has been frustrating. Steering Group members have spent many hundreds of hours researching and developing the NDP but the PC are unwilling to spend the time resources to establish their position in law. Moreover, my observations of the work of the PC over the past months have led to a loss in confidence in the PC's ability to manage even its everyday functions, let alone a complex negotiation of a major asset. In short, I feel that the PC is even less able than it was prior to 2017 to manage this issue so I confirm that I am standing down as Chair and withdrawing from the Steering Group.

Finally, I would like to recognise the work done by individuals over the past 2 years. In particular Roger, Scott and Malcolm who contributed to the evidence base in the areas of landscape, heritage and environment. Initially Finlay, and then Mervyn, organised the finances and John Robinson was always happy to do the necessary leg work. Denis has been a stalwart in record keeping and compiling the evidence. Thank you to all of you.

6. **Next steps –**

TA –

Felt that communication of NDP progress and the issues surrounding the field was very important, and it seemed to him that it has stopped? Also, that covert meetings are potentially damaging and the PC should be more transparent, e.g. via minutes and newsletters.

ME –

Advised that the committee will obviously need to elect a new chair and suggested the way forward was to raise an item on the next PC meeting agenda scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019. This would be, “to determine the future of the NDP Committee”.

7. **AOB**

TA –

Thanked everyone involved for their considerable efforts and contributions to the plan.

MF –

On behalf of the PC and Committee, expressed thanks to Trevor for all of his work.

Next NDP meeting date to be determined at the next PC meeting.