

Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan update for the Annual Parish Meeting May 2019

The Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan, or Neighbourhood Plan, is an opportunity to influence future development in Ickleford.

The name is unfortunately far too easily confused with the North Herts 'Local' Plan. The Local Plan outlines where North Herts has allocated land to build the many new houses central Government demands of it.

Our Neighbourhood Plan cannot contradict the Local Plan, but can provide much more detail, giving us more say in any development that comes. It can also go beyond housing allocations to look at other aspects of village life.

The plan must be genuinely based on our community's views and wishes. If adopted, it has legal weight and must be considered by planners and developers. As Neighbourhood Plans are relatively new, we do not yet know how much power they hold. However, they are one of our most powerful tools in combatting inappropriate development. We were encouraged to learn that the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan had an important role in the rejection of an appeal by a developer wanting to build 99 homes in Pirton.

Progress so far

Communication

Community engagement is at the heart of Neighbourhood Planning. We have set up a Facebook page and a website, and have committee meetings most months on a Wednesday evening at the Village Hall. These are open to the public and we are always happy for people to join us.

Funding

We are grateful for the funding we have received from County Councillor David Barnard and Locality, the Government agency supporting Neighbourhood Planning. We plan to apply for further grants to cover the costs of professional planning support, and questionnaire design and analysis.

Early engagement

Our starting point was to identify the main issues that people care about. We asked:

- What do you like about Ickleford?
- What could we improve?
- What would you like to see in any new development that may come?

People gave us feedback via our stalls at local events and via a feedback form delivered to every household in the parish. Thank you to everyone for their valuable feedback. The main themes that emerged were:

- Roads/transport/safety/access (including buses and cycle paths)
- Housing (including affordability and building design)
- Infrastructure/services
- Amenities
- Maintaining the village identity
- Green spaces (including an appreciation of our countryside and its pathways, and the need for green space in any new developments)
- Commercial properties/creating business opportunities

Developing the plan

We are now gathering evidence to develop a plan based on these views. Our evidence will include local demographic data, a character assessment of Ickleford and an upcoming household questionnaire. We aim to obtain planning expertise to help with the actual wording of the policies (none of the current steering group members are planners).

We will concentrate on those areas the neighbourhood plan can most influence. Unfortunately, there are some issues that fall outside the remit of district and neighbourhood planning. For example, many aspects of the transport system are managed at the County Council level. The Neighbourhood Plan will therefore have little influence on issues such as overall traffic levels and traffic speed on existing roads. We can, however, hope to influence parking and traffic management in new developments, including smaller residential and commercial premises, and look at cycleways and footpaths.

We appreciate the frustration felt over general transport issues and understand the need for concerns to be represented. Feedback has been passed to the Parish Council who are actively seeking improvements through other means.

Character assessment

The Ickleford Character Assessment will describe our village and parish, highlighting what is so special about it. It will provide evidence to support policies that maintain its character and help it flourish. In addition to its role in guiding planning decisions, it is likely to be read by developers, giving an insight into the types of development that would suit the area.

The document will include a brief history of the Parish of Ickleford, its layout, housing styles, density and views. It will also describe the green spaces in and around the village, and beyond.

There is a lot to do and we would welcome any help. For example, we want to map the green spaces around Ickleford, so we can highlight areas of particular recreational and natural interest.

Other goals include considering what views in Ickleford people might like to protect, e.g. views of the church and Green, and perhaps those from certain walks around the Parish.

The plan can also designate unlisted buildings, or structures, as being of significant local interest. Such a designation may offer them protection in the future.

Other matters

We want to develop a wish list of specific amenity development projects on which community money could be spent if received.

Following the strong desire by residents to maintain the heart of the village, we may also consider identifying central sites for the potential development of village amenities.

Contact details

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