

We're making headway

Work on Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan is progressing well even during the pandemic. Alison Crampin reports

Creating a neighbourhood plan takes time because it involves consulting widely and gathering supporting evidence but, with your help, work on Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan has been progressing during the pandemic as we've been able to keep in touch with Zoom, online surveys, and articles in *The Link*. We're pleased to report that a first draft of the plan is coming together well.

Community involvement

A neighbourhood plan has to be accompanied by a 'consultation statement' showing there has been an extensive engagement process with the local community. In Datchet, this has included: introductory leaflets delivered to every house; six parish-wide surveys and surveys at local schools; 15 Character Area Assessments with residents; a Drop-in Day at the Village Hall and Clean Air Day event on The Green; awareness-raising sessions at the Railway Station and Tesco; involvement of community groups; information stalls at village events and open days including the annual fetes, Christmas fairs and The Ellis Journey veteran car event on The Green; as well as community meetings on Zoom during the pandemic to discuss topics such as downsizing, and the Datchet Design Guide consultation at the village with supporting leaflets. In addition, we're indebted to the editors of *The Link* who have enabled us to keep you informed of our progress with quarterly updates.

We also publicise our work and findings online, on the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan website, www.datchetneighbourhoodplan.org, on social media including www.facebook.com/DatchetNeighbourhoodPlan and Datchet Eye, and we're hoping that it won't be too long before we can meet residents again, face to face.

Planning guidance

The purpose of Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan will be to provide guidance to anyone wishing to submit a planning application for development within the parish. The different

topic areas covered in the plan reflect the matters which you've told us are important to Datchet, its residents, businesses and community groups.

The plan will consider how Datchet can accommodate growth and change while maintaining and protecting its natural and historic environment in order to keep the village character and identity for future generations.

In our various consultations, you've told us what is most important to you. This includes:

- conserving and enhancing the Conservation Area, heritage assets and the historic riverside setting.
- protecting and enhancing the areas of significant biodiversity that exist within Datchet for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations - in particular the Local Wildlife Sites which are often overlooked - and ensuring that wildlife can move between these areas.
- preserving and improving green spaces of value to the community, ensuring local people have access to nature in their daily lives.
- ensuring that new housing responds to the needs of the community and that its design reflects the high-quality local vernacular in terms of building style, materials and density.
- promoting sustainable design which minimises flood risk, mitigates climate change, and reduces pollution and our carbon footprint.
- improving and expanding the range of provision of play and leisure infrastructure.
- enhancing key movement routes through the village to create a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

There are many issues facing Datchet but a Neighbourhood Plan must confine itself to those which are part of RBWM's planning process. It cannot contradict national planning policy or promote less development than the Borough Local Plan, and its scope is framed by the flood zones, Green Belt and Conservation Area. This means that it cannot do anything directly about planes, trains, pollution, traffic or flood schemes - topics which are frequently raised in public consultation - as these are Environment, Transport and Highways issues. But it can identify issues of a non-planning nature as separate projects or 'non-policy actions' for Datchet Parish Council to follow up with relevant partner organisations. Non-policy actions

might include, for example, working with RBWM and Network Rail to resolve the issue of trains overhanging the platform, and working with RBWM to reduce the high pollution levels which the DNP team discovered in the village

What happens next?

The Datchet Neighbourhood Plan team is working with a professional planner to bring together your feedback and supporting evidence in a draft plan. There are a few gaps to fill — we're finishing off work based on your responses to the most recent survey — but when it's ready, the plan will be publicised and you will be able to comment on it.

As with any new planning policy, there is a formal procedure to follow. The proposed Datchet Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted to RBWM to confirm it complies with relevant legislation. If it does, RBWM will publicise the proposal and invite representations/comments. An independent examiner will be appointed to review the plan and issue a report to RBWM, recommending whether or not the plan can proceed to referendum. RBWM must then reach its own view about whether to send Datchet's plan to referendum.

In the referendum, Datchet residents will be asked whether they would like RBWM to use the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan to decide planning applications in our area. If more than 50% of those voting in the referendum vote 'yes' then Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the statutory development plan. Its policies, which you have helped to formulate, will then be applied to subsequent decisions made by the planning authority.

BOX: Character Assessments

No-one knows an area better than the people who live there and your help in compiling Character Assessments has been invaluable. If you haven't done so already, you can read the Character Assessment for your area on the DNP website. We have been able to use these as 'evidence', extracting relevant information for topics in the Neighbourhood Plan. If you have any further comments about these, please get in touch. We welcome your feedback. See: www.datchetneighbourhoodplan.org/character-assessments.html

BOX: Datchet Design Guide Update

As well as working on Datchet’s Neighbourhood Plan, the DNP team has put together a Datchet Design Guide working alongside a professional town planner and RBWM’s planning officers. Its purpose is to help ensure that any new development in Datchet is visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and history, and maintains a strong sense of place. In the last issue, we reported that the Datchet Design Guide was due to go before RBWM’s full council. We’re delighted that the council has officially adopted the Datchet Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document. This means it will have to be considered when applications for development in Datchet are submitted. The Design Guide can be found on the RBWM website, on the DPC website under Community Life/Helpful Planning Information, and on the DNP website:

www.datchetneighbourhoodplan.org/datchet-design-guide.html

ENDS

Pic caption: Generous grass verges are a key characteristic of Datchet which residents enjoy but these are often degraded. The DNP can ask that new development maximises the provision of green verges designed to be less likely to be damaged by day-to-day activity.



