

## **ANOTHER STEP CLOSER**

Preparations to consult the village on the draft Neighbourhood Plan are gathering pace, says Alison Crampin

Thanks to your help with numerous surveys and character assessment walks, your feedback at drop-in sessions, village events and focus group meetings, and months of diligent evidence-gathering, the first draft of the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan (DNP) is almost complete.

Once we've dotted the 'i's and crossed the 't's, we will be presenting the draft plan to Datchet Parish Council (DPC) and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) to ask whether they have any initial concerns about its compatibility with relevant legislation and existing planning policies. Once any concerns have been addressed, it's all systems go and we'll be able to share it with you.

### **First public consultation**

This stage, known in planning-speak as the 'Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation' (Reg14), is where we ask for your views and comments, good and bad, on the draft plan so that we can make any necessary changes before we submit it to RBWM for independent examination.

Although we can't give you exact dates yet, the Reg14 consultation will run for six to eight weeks. Our intention is to launch it with a publicity campaign so everyone who lives, works or runs a business in the neighbourhood plan area knows where they can see the draft DNP, and knows how to comment on it – comments must be in writing – and by what date. Certain statutory bodies, such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, must also be consulted.

Our aim, covid-permitting, is to organise drop-in sessions where you can come along to see the plan, ask questions and find out more, and we hope to arrange a Zoom Q&A for those who are unable to attend in person. The plan will be published online, with links on the DNP and DPC websites, and paper copies will be available at advertised venues in the village. As not everyone will want to read through the whole document, summaries of its content will be widely available, in leaflets, online, and on display boards, setting out the main aims and focus of the plan.

At the end of the consultation period, all your written responses, or 'representations', must each be considered and a decision made over whether or not to amend the plan accordingly. The DNP team will be taking advice from a professional planner at this stage and these decisions will be recorded in a formal Consultation Statement. It may not be possible to make some changes because they are beyond the scope of a neighbourhood plan or may contradict existing national or local planning policy; or different representations may take opposing views, in which case a planning judgement will need to be taken.

The resulting draft will then be presented again to DPC for ratification and submission to RBWM. It will be accompanied by the Consultation Statement and a raft of supplementary documents to demonstrate that there has been a rigorous programme of community and stakeholder engagement throughout the process, along with evidence to support the plan.

### **Second public consultation**

The responsibility for the next stage lies with RBWM. They must check that the proper process has been followed and decide if a 'Strategic Environmental Assessment' is necessary, although usually this only happens if a plan is promoting development which is likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment. They will then publicise the plan. This stage is known as Regulation 16 (Reg16) publicity and is another six- to eight-week public consultation, after which the plan and your representations will be submitted to an independent examiner.

## **Reg14 vs Reg16**

Reg14 and Reg16 are often confused. The Reg14 public consultation, carried out by the DNP team, allows for you to comment on any aspect of the plan and for modifications to be made, if necessary, before it is submitted to RBWM. If you would like to see changes to the content or scope of the plan, it is important that you comment at this stage.

At the Reg16 public consultation, you may again comment on the plan, and RBWM will pass on your comments to the independent examiner, but the examiner can only consider those comments which fall within his/her remit to determine whether the draft plan meets the 'basic conditions' with regard to legal requirements, national and local policy, sustainable development, etc.

## **Independent examination**

It is not unusual for examiners to recommend that modifications are made before a plan can proceed to referendum. If the examiner's recommendations are agreed by RBWM's Cabinet members, they will publish details of the modifications and where they can be inspected on their website. This is known as Regulation 18 publicity. These modifications must also be discussed with the neighbourhood plan team. At this stage, there is an option to withdraw the plan.

## **Village-wide referendum**

RBWM will then arrange for a referendum to take place. The date of the referendum will be publicised widely and, if you are on the electoral register, you will have the opportunity to cast your vote on whether or not you would like RBWM to use the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan to help it decide planning applications in our neighbourhood area.

During the run-up to the vote, the DNP team is allowed to encourage voting and distribute information on the proposed neighbourhood plan, within reasonable expense limits. Public money and parish councils can only produce factual material about the neighbourhood plan, not promote a 'yes' vote. However, members of the parish council and others may act independently, using independent funds, to campaign for votes.

If more than 50 per cent of those voting in the referendum vote 'yes', then the neighbourhood plan becomes part of the statutory Local Development Plan for the area and its policies must be used when making planning decisions.

**What next?**

We look forward to showing you the draft plan soon and to answering any questions. We hope that you will comment so that as many views as possible can be taken into account. Please keep an eye on our website [www.DatchetNeighbourhoodPlan.org](http://www.DatchetNeighbourhoodPlan.org) for details of our progress and look out for our publicity regarding the first Reg14 public consultation.