



DISS & DISTRICT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Meeting of the Steering Group

Thursday 18th April 2024

at 7:00 pm

The Ceremony Room, Diss Town Council Offices

AGENDA and BRIEFING NOTES

Introduction

This will be the first ‘proper’ meeting of the Steering Group since the Plan was made in October last year. Some issues have arisen since then that have been managed on an ad hoc basis by the parish most affected and in most cases this has been Diss itself. Arguably though, for some of those issues I could justifiably have called a meeting of the SG, at least to canvass views, because many of the planning matters that crop up in Diss affect the communities in the other parishes, although perhaps to a lesser extent in some cases.

Following the tremendous effort that we all put into making the Plan a reality, being able to put our feet up after our success has been welcomed by all of us, I think. But although the work for which the Steering Group was initially set up is now over, I feel it would be a mistake to think that the Plan is now completely self-sustaining. It has become clear that its performance needs careful and constant monitoring to measure the levels to which it is being observed – or ignored. Also, it will need revising at some point, the trigger for which might be chosen by us or it might be thrust upon us by future district, county or national initiatives. Whichever, we need to be prepared.

I believe we now need to look carefully at the way in which we have been accustomed to working and decide if it is still appropriate for the ongoing management of the Plan now that it has been operating as part of SNC’s Development Plan for the past six months.

This agenda is unusual in that I have included in it this introduction and what might be called a briefing note for each item in order to avoid my characteristic waffling opener on the day. These are not intended to be a sub-agenda for the item itself but hopefully they will serve to stimulate the discussion. It remains to be seen, but because we are in post-adoption territory, this may well be more a meeting discussion rather than decision.

Item 1 – A new chairman

I have mentioned to several of the Group’s members that I will not be able to continue contributing to the DDNP in any capacity for much longer. My long-standing commitment to MSDC and my almost as long-standing commitment to the DDNP have meant that my home

and family responsibilities have been sorely neglected over all that time. I must now try to redress that imbalance. Also, I am now 83 and not only am I inevitably slowing down, I am also very conscious of the fact that the time I have in which to put matters right is getting ever shorter. I have enjoyed the challenge of the DDNP and I very much believe in community-led planning. I have enjoyed working with you all and I know you appreciate that my contribution to the Plan over the years has been substantial in one way or another. Taxing though it has been for a lot of the time, I have found it very fulfilling and I am delighted that we finally got this very complex neighbourhood plan over the line. But now I must draw a line under my involvement.

So, this will be my last meeting in any capacity but I will make myself available for a further month to answer any questions that might come up and give advice if needed. As Palgrave may not be represented at this meeting, I have told the clerk that will attend their next PC meeting to give them the gist of our discussion this evening and urge them to appoint DDNP reps asap.

Whether you wish to agree a new chair at this meeting is up to you. But I ask you to reflect on the fact that one of the qualifications I had going for me was that I don't live in any of the member parishes. Being independent in this way has been a big advantage.

Item 2 – The future role of the Steering Group

The biggest decision now to be taken as soon as possible should answer the question:

Is there a continuing need for a group of representatives from the seven DDNP parishes to take full responsibility for decision-making about the monitoring, maintenance, management and promotion of the Plan?

If the answer to that is 'yes', my view is that completely new 'Terms of Reference' will need to be agreed. Amongst the many items that will need consideration are:

- a) The name of the group. It could be argued to be more hands-on than before and for that reason might be considered to be more of a Management Group.
- b) Who will do what? – bearing in mind that our clerical, organisational and financial work has been largely carried out by Stephanie until well after the Plan was submitted.
- c) What continuous jobs might there be, as opposed to what might be called one-offs dictated by events? For example:
 - i monitoring all planning applications and other initiatives that have elements connected with policies in the Plan
 - ii deciding whether the DDNP Group should reinforce the public consultation on a planning application with a representation of its own
 - iii monitoring whether the district's planning decisions are compliant with DDNP policy – and, more importantly, what to do about it if they're not
 - iv gathering evidence and data to support revision(s) of the Plan
- d) Frequency of meetings; should they be regular or occasional in response to particular circumstances?

Item 3 – A role for Collective Community Planning?

The part played in the writing of the Plan by CCP's owner, Louise Cornell and her colleague Mark Thompson, has been immense and invaluable.

I have talked to Louise on several occasions since the Plan was submitted and casually asked if she would like to remain involved in some way. When I mentioned it, she took a few seconds

to think and then enthusiastically rattled off a list of tasks relevant to the maintenance of the Plan that she could help with. Because of her close involvement in the writing of the Plan over four years, her knowledge of its complexity, her extensive training in planning, her experience of SNC and how its Members and staff operate, she is almost uniquely qualified to help out with anything in the future. I believe it would be well worth your while to talk to her. She knows I intend to mention this to you and I suggested that she gives some thought to how she might pitch a proposal on what she could do for you and the basis on which she could charge for it.

Item 4 – Future funding

Now the Plan is adopted there are no sources of outside funding available until we embark on a review. Until then we must rely on what we have called ‘the parish pot’, made up of contributions from the individual parish councils. When funding is needed, the SG requests a sum and the parishes achieve it by making contributions proportionate to the relative size of their populations. At any time, if agreed by the SG, the existing balance can be returned to the parishes in the same proportion. Expenditure can be specific to a parish and is not related to population size. The accounts are maintained by DTC’s Finance Officer, Sue Hurst. The present balance stands at approximately £3,700. Whether to budget for more than this will depend on your decisions on some of the other items in this agenda.

Item 5 – Maintenance of the DDNP’s website

The DDNP website, hosted by wix.com, was created in March 2020 by Stephanie and Ali, with the assistance of consultant Steve Jackman. It was managed solely by Stephanie with almost no input or direction from anyone else. Since she left us, DTC’s Marketing and Events Administrator, Kimberley Jaynes, has been looking after it – again with little direction from the SG. For reasons I will explain if required, presently the website has no functional email contact address for members of the public to use. Decisions need to be taken on:

- a) Do we need a separate website? Could we simply provide standard content to each parish website and periodically update it – perhaps creating a section within it for parish-specific additions and updates?
- b) If the answer is a separate website, who should maintain it and under whose direction with regard to structure and content?
- c) In the short term there is a pressing need to correct and update the present one. (It’s still showing Ursula and Roger G as DDNP members.)
- d) In the longer term, Would a continuing website benefit from a complete overhaul of content and presentation?
- e) Who should pay for the hosting of it?
- f) Does it need its own ‘contact us’ email address?

Item 6 – Updating the individual parish websites

Please check that your parish council websites have been updated to show details of the Plan being adopted in late October last year. Read through for any errors and links that don’t work.

David Burn
Chairman
15-Apr-24