

Meeting with Tony Blackwood, Chair of Clifton Neighbourhood Planning Group.

A useful meeting covering issues of process; practical advice and a broad feel for the timing, complexity and challenges.

Tony had led the Clifton team for some 4 years and was pleased to be approaching the final inspection stage. He has led a team of 7 colleagues – 3 Parish Councillors and 4 members of the community. The village cannot be a straight comparator (780 dwellings and 1,900 inhabitants). Nevertheless, it was useful to hear his views across a number of fronts – and the learning that had taken place.

So, on their progress,

- **Now at the 'examiner' stage prior to the final referendum.** They had completed the regulation 14 consultation stage (hard copies of the draft plan throughout the community and other interested parties (police/electricity Board/local schools etc.)) in September/October 2015; now submitted to LCC (regulation 16 consultation) who treat the plan in a somewhat similar fashion to a planning application (formal announcing of the plan – newspapers, key statutory bodies etc. and inviting comments) before it progresses to the examiner for assessment. After the examiners contribution, the plan is agreed with LCC and offered for a final and full community referendum. Most of these stages allow six weeks. Reg 14 is delivered and paid for by the Parish Council, thereafter, processes are largely paid for and managed by LCC. At each stage, the plan is subject to amendment and discussion. So, Clifford have a completed plan and are now in the process of putting it through this consultation and approval process.
- **Why has it taken so long?** Largely down to two things – 1. Some learning on the way (in hindsight we might not have done certain things – particularly some of the early consultancy focus) and 2. Some tricky local issues which impeded progress on the plan, pending resolution. LCC would suggest that such is exemplifies the benefit of local plans – they tackle and produce solutions to such local challenges.
- **And what about consultants?** They used at least two people -who they judged invaluable. They 'spoke the language' of planning and they had a ready understanding of what should be included and what shouldn't. Suggested that offers of students did not really deliver great results. They tended to slow the pace down, with their clear and inevitable focus on their studies. One of their consultants was an experienced examiner – and was also doing some work with Thorp Arch.... a real benefit. The trick was to be clear on expectations of the consultant – they should support and advise on technical issues and the route to success but they must not take the place of a 'local feel' and flavour to the plan, its style and its authorship. On cost – generally the day rates were in the region of £400 – and their two particular consultants generally gave more than a day's work for that figure. Good value.

- **....and the money?** They applied for most of the available allowances/grant money (£12k) and the money was invariably provided quickly (3-4 weeks). Applications were in bite size (evidence based) chunks – and in anticipation of immediate pieces of work by consultants. It was never a problem and the accounting etc. was not arduous.
- **Anything else?** A couple of things.....1. There were during the process some other checks (screenings, i.e. are their newts in the Parish.....) and governance statements – consultation statement; conditions statement etc. Mostly wrapped up at LCC level. 2. LCC were good and Ian MacKay was singled out as helpful and knowledgeable. 3. The neighbourhood planning team saw some churn during the years. Fatigue set in and it tended to fall on the shoulders of one or two people. They tried hard to ‘refresh’ and saw that as important. The biggest demotivator was slow progress (invariably during periods when LCC were looking in to things). They also identified particular skills in their community – and encouraged their volunteering on certain specialist areas (they had a questionnaire writer...etc).

That’s it – very grateful to Tony for the advice and material he shared. It would be important to keep in touch. He showed me their final plan and it looked good.

Brodie Clark.

22/08/16