

Planning gone mad? Why we need a Neighbourhood Plan

Recent changes to planning laws have seen a rash of planning applications nationwide as landowners attempt to capitalise on potential development sites. There seems little doubt that we have a shortage of housing in the UK but what does this mean in Ewelme?

We have been assessed in the SODC Local Plan 2032 (currently still draft) as a 'small' village. We have been defined as 'small' based on our existing housing stock (census 2011) and local infrastructure. Smaller villages are likely to be required to grow their housing stock by 5%-10% (10-20 houses in Ewelme) between 2011 and 2032. It is envisaged that this growth will be met by small sites and may include infill and use of brown field sites. The 5-10% growth includes any planning permissions granted since 2011. The objective is to respect the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, heritage, the scale of existing settlements and to ensure that new developments are sustainable in terms of build and infrastructure.

Since 1 January 2017, there have already been four 'multiple-dwelling' applications for development of sites in Ewelme: - Ewelme Down Farm (6), land behind Cat Lane Cottages (1 (last October) + 3), Eyres Close (2) and on the Benson Road at Cottesmore (4). There are at least three other such applications in the pipeline. In addition, although not in the village of Ewelme, permission has been granted for 6 houses on the site of the Old Atlanta Garage on Beggarbush Hill. You will be aware of the large-scale development going on in Benson. In fact if all the current applications are successful, we are likely to exceed our target growth in housing in Ewelme before the end of 2017, with no additional infrastructure and before the Local Plan is even adopted.

In order to have any say and influence over the development that goes on in our village, we need a Neighbourhood Plan (NP), a new element in the planning process introduced under the Localism Act, which gives local people a say in the future of where they live. The Neighbourhood Plan will formalise local policies on future development in our village and cover issues such as land use for housing, businesses, public services/facilities, and open spaces. Any future planning applications will be considered against the NP to help ensure that development meets the needs of our small, rural community as well as conforming to SODC's more strategic Local Plan.

We will be distributing a Questionnaire to every household in August/September to ask you and your family what you consider our housing and development needs to be? Please take the time to respond as your comments will provide a valuable input into the policies we need to develop and consequent development of our village.

Sarah Maine, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Committee