

Clapham Parish Council

Neighbourhood Development Plan

Monitoring progress

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Introduction

Clapham Parish Council (CPC) is a statutory local authority responsible for the wellbeing of the Clapham community. It provides residents with a democratic voice and a structure for taking community action.

Clapham Parish Council prepared its Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), which outlines Clapham's policies and preferences for the use of land and buildings and proposals for new development in the area. This plan was developed through extensive consultation with the community and was formally adopted on July 4, 2022.

The purpose of this report is to set down how CPC has been using the plan and its policies to monitor planning discussions, primarily around the new site for 500 homes, and to shape its community engagement and responses to wider planning applications.

This report is the precursor to a review of the NDP to ensure it remains relevant and up to date while at a national level the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is still evolving.

The development of a new Bedford Borough Local Plan 2040 has been delayed. Last year the Examination process was paused. Therefore, the Local Plan 2030 is technically still in effect, but its most important policies for housing are considered “out of date” since the required review and submission deadline (January 2023) has passed.

The Local Plan Inspector has stated that the Borough Council need to re-engage on the 2040 Local Plan, due to the impact of the plans for Universal Studios Theme Park. The Inspector has stated that the current 2030 plan will remain in place for the time being.

Monitoring and review

CPC is informed of all planning applications within the parish. The council tracks and monitors all applications, and planning decisions. A dedicated planning committee of the council focusses on ensuring issues, concerns and general comments are passed to the parish council so they can be fed into Bedford Borough Council's (BBC) planning department.

CPC continuously monitors the implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan and planning applications to ensure they align with the community's needs and the strategic vision for Clapham. Since the NDP was formally adopted CPC has routinely submitted feedback on local planning applications. A Planning sub-committee provides structured approach to feedback.

The regeneration of the Riverside Gardens is in line with the NDP's policy to maximise the river access in the village.

A prime area of focus has been engagement with the promoters of the Milton Hill site, allocated in the NDP for 500 new homes.

This outline planning application has been submitted to BBC. CPC has engaged with BBC and the promoters to discuss highways concerns, S106/CIL levy proposals and proposed traffic proposals for Clapham High Street.

More recently CPC has referenced the NDP in its response to the speculative development to build behind the houses along Milton Road 20/00988/MAO 98 dwellings & 25/00973/MAO 75 dwellings.

Beyond housing development, a large focus over the past three years has been the potential that East West Rail will build a major railway which will come through Bedford town centre, directly impacting Clapham and its surroundings.

Progress and achievements

On the Milton Hill development the applications secured outline planning permission in June 2024. The initial requirement for a second school for the village has changed, but the site would still be needed for community facilities.

CPC had agreed in principle that CIL money would be put towards community facilities improvements. This is an alternative to the proposal to fund an entirely new Village Hall. There was also an option to support more work in the Allotments. All of this remains under discussion with the planning authority.

A key area of concern has been the impact on Highfield Road on young people going to and from school in Oakley, and the safety concerns around the road. CPC has had a number of meetings with representatives of the BBC and the promoters and detailed

conversations about what the community wants and what can be accommodated in line. They also engage with residents to gather feedback and address any concerns related to planning and development.

There has been little need for comment on detailed design as the application has been slowly moving through the process.

East West Rail, which did not feature in the original plan, has run a non-statutory public consultation, as part of its Development Consent Order process in 2023. CPC carried out a number of community engagement events, out a leaflet campaign, and encouraged the community to state their views in the consultation, and gave them opportunities to ask questions about the scheme and its potential impact.

CPC then submitted a formal response to the consultation. EWR will be releasing updated information about progress this year.

CPC also objected to the development of a large school in the 'gap' between Bedford and Clapham which sits outside the parish, and outside the remit of the NDP. Although the NDP aspires to protect the separation between Clapham and Bedford afforded by this gap, it has no direct influence over development outside its boundaries.

In line with the NDP, the parish council has supported improvements to the churchyard wall, the development of a further green space near Fetlock Close, and the redevelopment of Riverside Gardens.

Challenges

As progress on the allocated site has been slow through the approvals process, this has meant that time has passed and a further speculative planning application emerged for a site on the opposite side of Milton Hill, which had featured in the earlier call for sites. Most recently, despite representations by Clapham and reference to its NDP, the planning permissions for the 75 homes was approved. However, the existence of an adopted NDP means the village is in a good position to maximise community benefits from developers.

In the period in which the NDP was developed and after its adoption the 'gap' in the land between Bedford and Clapham has been further eroded by the development of the Greenacres school, which sits outside the parish boundary and beyond the remit of the NDP.

Although there were a number of concerns at both parish and borough level about the development, it was ultimately approved. CPC and its ward councillors have engaged closely with the school's leadership to represent concerns over increased traffic and minimising the impact on the route between Clapham and Bedford.

Conclusion

CPC remains committed to its NDP and the policies and design code information set out in it.

While progress on the main development site has been slow, there has been good engagement which will provide the best outcomes for Clapham.

The additional challenge of East West Rail does not significantly alter the content of the NDP but is important to document in the review of the Plan and update it in the wider context to ensure the policies remain relevant.

With changes to the most recent NPPF still in an unfinalised state nationally, CPC will continue to monitor its requirements and maintain its crucial role in monitoring and guiding the planning and development within the parish, ensuring that it meets the needs of the community and supports sustainable growth.