

## **Armthorpe Neighbourhood Plan**

### **Briefing Note**

**To:** Members of Armthorpe Parish Council and Graham Shephard

**From:** Simon Smales, Consultant

### **Introduction**

This note will draw together the key issues surrounding the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Armthorpe and deal with:

- The Plan's purpose
- The relationship with the Local Development Framework
- Resources
- Programme of activities
- Key dates and timetable
- Steering Group and reporting arrangements
- Key Issues
- Next steps

Doncaster Council's Planning Committee is being recommended to accept the Parish Council's formal request to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan at its meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2012. This will start the next stage of formal proceedings.

### **The Plan's purpose**

The Plan will enable the Parish Council to deliver a series of land use policies and proposals on behalf of the residents, businesses and organisations of Armthorpe.

These will be incorporated into The Local Development Framework and guide development in the Parish in the short, medium and long term.

### **Relationship with the Local Development Framework (LDF)**

Doncaster Council's LDF is the statutory plan which will adopt the Neighbourhood Plan and its constituent policies and proposals.

The LDF has an adopted Core Strategy and it is this which will provide the strategic context for the Plan. The Plan needs to be in conformity with the Core Strategy.

The Sites and Policies Development Plan Document (DPD) 2012 is currently out for consultation and the Parish Council received a presentation from the Council on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2012 on its contents and timetable.

The consultation engagement period ends on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and the Parish Council are one of the statutory consultees.

At the presentation on the 11<sup>th</sup> September Members raised serious concerns as to the legitimacy of a DPD document, which they felt would be premature and

effectively undermine their preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, which essentially would be covering the same issues, sites and policies. They argued that the democratic rights of the Parish were being compromised and that a key government initiative in Neighbourhood Planning was being flouted. The concern was that there would be little or no value in a Neighbourhood Plan being produced if sites and policies were already in the DPD which effectively moved away from what the Parish Council was itself consulting on and moving forward towards adoption in the LDF.

Since the meeting, telephone conversations with Doncaster Council officers have offered a number of ways forward to be discussed at a meeting with officers on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October. The first is to allow the Neighbourhood Plan to proceed through to adoption and be incorporated into the LDF DPD when it is ready. The second is for the LDF to be adopted without any proposals for Armthorpe, which is more problematic. And thirdly, to slow down the LDF DPD timetable to work entirely in parallel with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The first of these would seem best able to deal with the difficulties the Parish Council finds itself in being asked for a premature and inappropriate response to the LDF DPD. The government could be informed of this approach and it would then have to deal with Doncaster and Armthorpe Parish Councils in presenting both a united and considered front.

### **Resources**

Armthorpe Parish Council has employed Smales Planning and Regeneration Services Ltd to produce the Neighbourhood Plan and Simon Smales will be working with the Parish Council over the next 15 months or so in this respect.

Doncaster Council are able to offer a limited amount of officer time but importantly are able to make available the information of a technical nature which has led them to produce the LDF Core Strategy and the consultation draft of the Sites and Policies DPD. Information on housing, employment, retail and highways will be used and assessed in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan and will be especially relevant and will assist the Parish Council in coming to a view on the contents of its Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Programme of activities, key dates and draft timetable**

The programme for the Neighbourhood Plan is suggested as follows:

Agreement of the programme by the Parish Council - October 2012

Production of an Issues Report - end of October 2012

Consultation and engagement on the Issues Report - throughout November 2012

- Written consultation with key stakeholders
- Planning engagement day
- Meetings with key organisations

Reporting to the Parish Council on the outcome of the issues report consultation - early December 2012

Prepare a Draft Neighbourhood Plan - End of December 2012 to March 2013

Formal consultation on Draft Plan - April 2013

Redraft (as appropriate) and preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan - May 2013

Approval of the Plan by the Parish Council - June 2013

Examination - September 2013

Receipt of 'non-binding' assessors report - October 2013

Consideration of report by Armthorpe and Doncaster Councils - November 2013 onwards

Community Referendum on the Plan - March 2014

Adoption - April 2014

This programme and timetable can be subject to change after further consideration by the Parish Council. The regulations offer much guidance but as the processes surrounding these types of plans are in themselves new, there is scope for each one to be different and tailored to suit the individual requirements of the Parish Council.

### **Steering Group**

Invitations to the following are going out on Tuesday 18 September 2012 to become members of the Steering Group which will guide the preparation of the Plan:

Sandra Vizer, David Mitchell, F.A. Paling, Sharon Faulkner and a representative from the IKEA Distribution Centre.

They will join the Parish Councillors already nominated to be on the Steering Group and will meet every month.

The group will report into the Parish Council meetings held on the first Tuesday in each month who will remain the formal body for the decisions made in respect of the production of the Plan.

### **Key Issues**

A number of issues are particularly important in determining the scope, format and content of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Firstly, the emphasis to be placed on the **consultation and engagement programme** - this needs to be thorough, comprehensive and clearly audited. Having a series of engagement activities around the production of an early Issues Report in October and November 2012 will set this on a steady and good course.

The **ability of the Parish Council to continue to act effectively** in dealing with the full range of planning and other related decisions must be maintained. This has been highlighted by the recent planning appeals, the LDF DPD and the submission of a new planning application by Miller Homes at Grange Farm. The two processes, the Neighbourhood Plan and the LDF, can proceed in parallel to each other. The difficulty will come when the Parish Council is compromised in its own plans and ambitions for Armthorpe but the Neighbourhood Plan is a new initiative from the

Coalition government and it seems unlikely that it should be something that will hold parish councils back from exercising their democratic responsibilities. In fact, the underlying tone is that of locally accountable decision making. This is very much a case of pragmatism in dealing with the procedural issues as they arise most likely after discussions with Doncaster Council.

The **submission of individual planning applications by developers** might well be happening anyway. Looking at it positively the Neighbourhood Plan will become more of a material consideration being attributed more weight as it progresses. Inspectors are already aware of the place these plans will have in local planning policy and it will be important to monitor appeal decisions as they come forward with a Neighbourhood Plan in the area concerned, to better enable Armthorpe Parish Council to be informed of the status they are being afforded.

A strong and well briefed Doncaster Council Planning Committee will be made aware of and understand **the implications of prematurity in taking decisions on planning applications** in advance of the Neighbourhood Plan and the LDF. It is not in anybody's interest, other than the applicant of course, to have a series of ad hoc decisions on applications throughout the borough and this runs against the plan led system the Coalition is promoting. The key here is to continue to make strong and timely progress which both the Parish Council and Doncaster Council seem keen to do.

**Conformity with the LDF Core Strategy** is essential, as is a representation of national policies. The pro-growth aspects of these can be accommodated and the certainty a Neighbourhood Plan will provide especially around deliverability and the economic elements of the proposals should be welcomed.

It follows that a focus on **clear priorities** will be important and that these are set against a backdrop of an **assessment of the real needs of Armthorpe**. I am reminded of the discussion at the last Parish Council meeting around affordable/social housing and this is exactly where a Neighbourhood Plan can be effective in achieving the right kind of housing for residents.

The Plan should have an **Action Plan and Implementation Programme**. It would be interesting to check how many of the proposals in the Master Plan for Armthorpe have been realised. A plan that sits on a shelf gathering dust is a plan that hasn't worked. Working with local landowners, businesses and other organisations is key in this regard.

### **Next Steps**

1. Confirm the Steering Group membership and hold first meeting.
2. Produce the Issues Report for approval by the Parish Council.
3. Agree dates for the consultation programme on the Issues Report.
4. Provide more detail on the consultation events and activities.
5. Continue discussions with Doncaster Council.