



Join or Renew Your Membership

Contact our membership
secretary Bill Miller
on 01954 252101
or at membership@cvdg.org

Still just £4 for the year!



A Few Words from the New Chair

Those present at the AGM in February will know that there have been some small changes to officer positions this year; Bill Miller has taken on the role of Membership Secretary, Henry Le Brecht has stepped forward to cover the Secretary role (in addition to his Treasurer role), John Williams has kindly agreed to be our new Vice Chair and finally I have taken on the position of Chair. The full list of officers is now:

- **Chair:** Steven Poole (2012)
- **Vice Chair:** John Williams (2012)
- **Secretary:** Henry Le Brecht (2012)
- **Treasurer:** Henry Le Brecht (2011)
- **Membership Secretary:** Bill Miller (2012)
- **Planning Comments Coordinator:** Alex Darby (2011)
- **Information Officer:** Alexander Thoukydides (2011)

I would like to wish everyone well in these roles. I would also like to thank Mike Smith for the exceptional job he has done as Chair for the last three years (and for at least one additional period prior to this). Mike will be a hard act to follow...

I do not propose any significant changes to the way the group is run although will try to standardise on 5 meetings per year – 4 committee meetings (nominally in April, June, September and November plus the AGM in February). Of course the committee will meet beyond this should there be any requirement, perhaps if/when any major development proposals are made. I would also like to focus on re-growing the membership – this has waned in recent years, perhaps because we have not focussed on this enough or perhaps simply because there have been few development proposals to stimulate people's interest in planning and development matters. We made a good

start at the AGM with 14 members joining or re-joining. If you have not renewed your membership yet, please do get in touch with Bill (membership@cvdg.org) who will be pleased to take your money – annual membership remains just £4.

In terms of change, we do have the recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which will lead to a potentially significant update to South Cambridgeshire's Local Plan over the coming months. This may bring more development to Cottenham as several potential sites have been put forward through the on-going Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). We will get to comment on these as part of the Issues & Options consultation, which is anticipated by South Cambridgeshire District Council to take place during the Summer – although I would expect this to be delayed into the Autumn.

The NPPF also brings the opportunity of having a Neighbourhood Plan for Cottenham. This concept is very new and in theory allows local people such as ourselves, normally working with our accountable councils, to produce our own distinctive neighbourhood plan that would set out our positive vision for the future of our area. Cottenham Parish Council has already started to look at this and there is likely to be an opportunity for the Design Group to work with the Parish Council to produce such a plan.

All of this though does bring some uncertainty to our Design Statement as we move forward; a disappointing change for many committee and other members who have put so much time into preparing and establishing this document. However, we do need to keep looking forward. Exciting times...

*Steven Poole
Chair*



How Local is Localism?

At the Design Group's AGM on 23rd February 2012, Andy Thompson of Beacon Planning provided an (at times cynical) perspective on the Localism Act. Andy has been an urban designer for thirty years, including twenty years at Cambridge City Council before becoming a consultant.

The Localism Act 2011 had its roots in the Conservative Party election green paper Open Source Planning. It makes major changes to the planning system including removal of regional housing targets, requiring councils to cooperate with their neighbours, and allowing financial considerations to be taken into account when assessing planning applications. However, the



The planning system is vital for a strong economy, for an attractive and sustainable environment, and for a successful democracy. At present, the planning system in England achieves none of these goals. It is broken.

Open Source Planning Policy Green Paper, Conservative Party



- Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) – sets general planning policy for development and use of land.
- Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) – permits development without needing planning permission.
- Community Right to Build Order – similar to an NDO this allows community organisations to develop a specific site without needing planning permission.

the regulations. If approved, the LPA will then organise a referendum. A simple majority in favour results in the NDP becoming part of the Local Plan for five years. To kick-start the process the government has allocated grants of £20,000 to 126 selected communities, and has committed to providing up to £50 million until March 2015. It has appointed the Princes Foundation, Locality, CPRE and RTPI as facilitators.

However, even with this backing there are concerns about the ability of local communities to take advantage of Localism. The process of preparing an NDP and getting it adopted is estimated to take 18 months, cost between £20,000 and £200,000, and requires the support of the Local Planning Authority. There is also a lack of clarity about what should be included, especially since it is required to be in compliance with local and national planning policy, EU directives and human rights legislation. However, once adopted

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... we need a planning system that enables local people to shape their surroundings in a way that, while heeding global and national environmental constraints – carbon, biodiversity, landscape, heritage – is also sensitive to the history and character of a given location.

Open Source Planning Policy Green Paper, Conservative Party



most important aspect is that it gives communities more power to influence development within their local area.

Under the Localism Act parish councils (as 'qualifying bodies') are able to initiate:

In order to get an NDP adopted the parish council would submit a proposal to the LPA, who would put it out for consultation for at least six weeks. An independent examiner would then check the NDP to ensure that it complies with



Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work.

They will be able to:

- *choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built*
- *have their say on what those new buildings should look like*
- *grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.*

An Introduction to Neighbourhood Planning, Communities and Local Government



the NDP takes precedence over the Local Plan.

Even if an NDP is successfully produced potential issues remain. Development is usually driven by commercial considerations and is dependent on the presence of willing landowners; it is not sufficient for a community to state a desire for development. There is also nothing to prevent planning applications bypassing the NDP and being submitted via the traditional route.

Legal challenges are also possible, especially by disgruntled landowners excluded from the NDP. For example, will the referendum result be perceived as representative of the community if only a few people turn out? The Secretary of State also has powers of revocation if there is less development than proposed in the Local Plan since the NDP can increase but not reduce proposed housing levels.

Last year South Cambridgeshire District Council issued a call for

sites that might be suitable for housing development as part of its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). A total of fourteen sites covering 68 hectares were submitted around Cottenham, potentially allowing constructing of up to 2,000 houses. These sites can be viewed on the council's website, and a public consultation is expected this summer. If an NDP is subsequently produced then it will need to be in conformity with the selected sites, so the parish council may want to start lobbying for its preferred sites.

South Cambridgeshire District Council are holding a workshop about Localism, with two invitations sent to each parish council. They are especially keen to hear from parishes whose development needs are not being met by the Local Plan. No formal requests to produce NDPs have been received to date, and due to resource limitations the hope is that they will not be needed while the Local Plan is being

produced.

Concerns had been expressed that the Cottenham Village Design Statement might lose its influence under the new planning framework. However, Andy located a frequently asked question (*quoted below*) clarifying that it will remain a Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Development Framework unless and until unadopted by South Cambridgeshire District Council. This was confirmed by councillor Tim Wotherspoon, though he cautioned that the Design Statement is now five years old and so may be showing its age, making it vulnerable to legal challenges.

The talk was well attended, with several parish, district and county councillors asking questions to clarify how their local communities could take advantage of the opportunities that the changes to the planning system brings.

*Alexander Thoukydides
Information Officer*

“ How do local planning authorities progress their existing supplementary planning document (SPDs) or area action plans (AAPs)? Can these be merged into neighbourhood plans? These processes already work well, and although they are led by the local authority, the community is very involved. What will neighbourhood planning add?

Supplementary planning documents and area action plans are still valid tools in the toolbox for planners and communities alike, and may be more appropriate for some communities to use with their local authority than a neighbourhood development plan or order. Neighbourhood development plans or orders are another option for communities, who perhaps do not want to rely as heavily on the local authority throughout the process of producing a document, or who want the guarantee that their document will become part of the statutory development plan for the local area, if it successfully meets the right conditions.

Any work that has gone towards a SPD or AAP can certainly be used in producing a neighbourhood development plan – if that is what the community wants. The procedural steps of neighbourhood planning will need to be completed to ensure that the document meets the requirements for a neighbourhood development plan.

Neighbourhood Planning: Frequently Asked Questions, Department for Communities and Local Government

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Returning to Poundbury

On the outskirts of Dorchester there is an experimental urban extension built according to the principles that Prince Charles outlined in his book *'A Vision of Britain'*. The masterplan for the 160 hectare site was drawn up in 1988 by architect and urban planner Leon Krier, and the first phase of construction commenced in October 1993. At the beginning of 2006 there were approximately 1,450 residents. Continuing construction is expected to increase the population to 6,000 over the next twenty years.

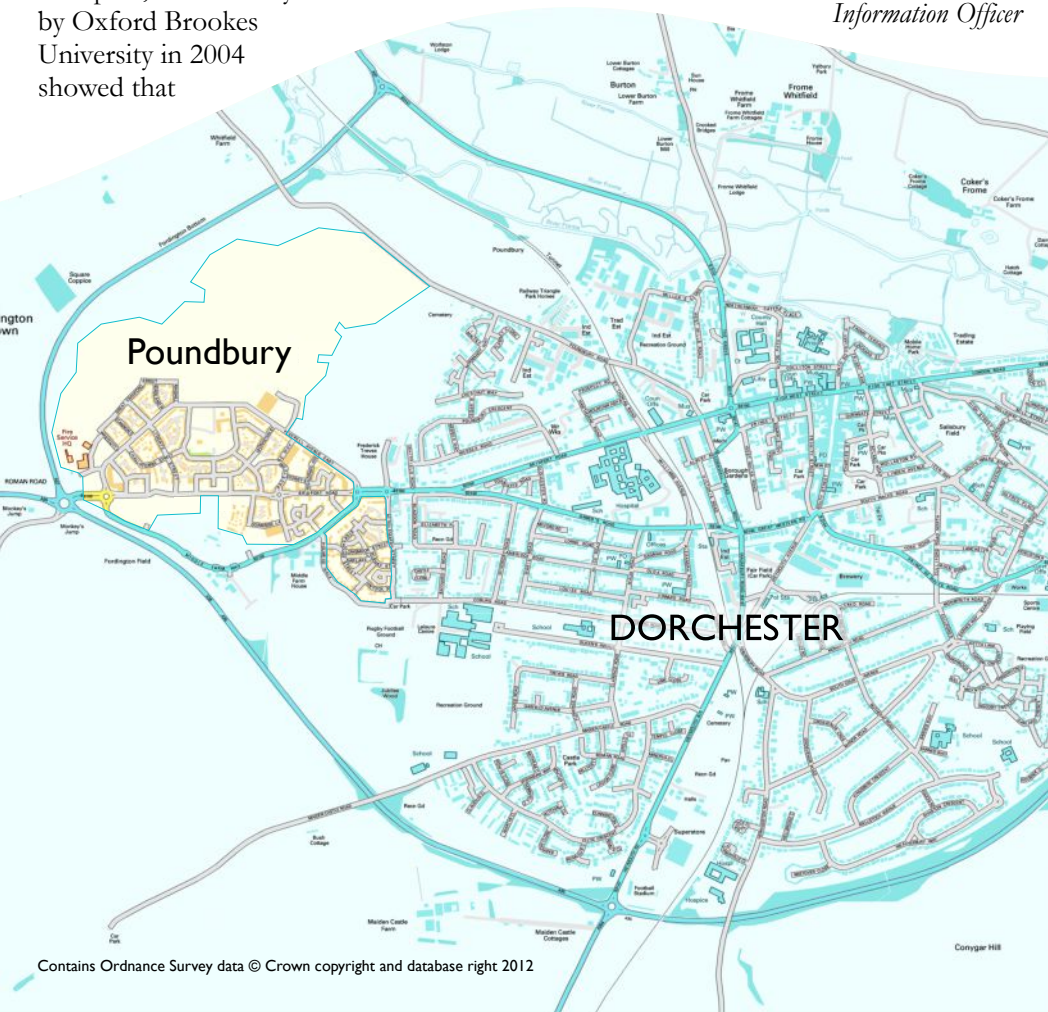
The settlement is based around a traditional high-density urban pattern, with businesses and housing intermixed. The design was intended to reduce car dependency and encourage walking and alternative means of transport, but a survey conducted by Oxford Brookes University in 2004 showed that

car use was actually higher in Poundbury than in the surrounding region of West Dorset.

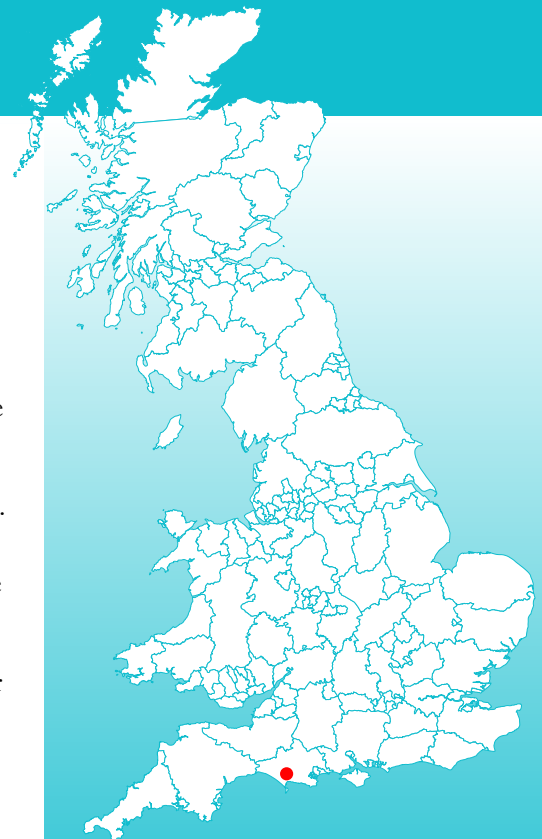
Eleven eco-homes have been built on the site, all of which are rated as BREEAM EcoHomes Excellent. These are intended to show that energy efficient sustainable homes can be commercially viable in the open market.

Members of the Design Group visited Poundbury during its early days, but are now planning a return visit to see how the development has matured. This is likely to take place during September or October, and will involve an overnight stay due to the travelling distance. There will also be an opportunity to visit other nearby sights such as the Iron Age hill fort at Poundbury Hill.

Alexander Thoukydides
Information Officer



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