**Meeting to consider whether FRPC should proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan Farnham Common Village Hall 22.05.18 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr Trevor Clapp ( Chairman of FRPC), Mr. Peter Edwards ( solicitor and planning consultant from Planning Progress), the Clerk and approximately 60 residents including parish councillors Rowley, Robinson, Rolfe, Tipping and Milne and District Cllr. Dhillon.

1 The Chairman opened by reading out the briefing note prepared and circulated to as many residents as we had emails for who had signed up to express an interest. A copy is attached to these notes.

2 Mr Edwards said the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) regime was introduced by the Localism Act 2011 and had been added to by further regulations every year. Central Government see it as a fundamental part of the planning system, supporting it with grants and requiring the local planning authority to assist although any assistance depends on capacity which might not be much. It becomes - when adopted/made - part of the statutory development plan (SDP) and any determination – be it at officer, committee or inspector level - must be made in accordance with the NP unless material considerations allow otherwise. The NP forms the second tier in the SDP and must follow the lead of the local planning authority’s (currently SBDC) Local Plan. It must conform to the strategic objectives set out in the Local Plan but it puts in the details for that particular area. So the local community has influence in what happens locally and can produce planning policies for that community.

3 The Parish Council is the qualifying body and plan making body. The NP will require extensive consultation, engagement and publicity working with the local planning authority and leading to an examination by an Independent inspector and then to a referendum. It is passed by a simple majority of those voting and becomes part of the SDP. Once made it should be regarded as a practical working document and kept under review.

4 He said that there is a threat to the Green Belt (GB) in this parish. He said the GB assessment report produced by ARUP has been held in abeyance since March 2016. It identifies two regional sub areas of GB land within a general area. It says the general areas ( 80b and 76) both perform GB functions but the two sub areas may not. The next step was for the GB assessment to be concluded in line with the development of the Local Plan but that too is in abeyance. It was inevitable that developers would latch on to those two sub areas and try and push the door open on them. He said where there was no up to date Local Plan ( last reviewed 2011) and no NP then in accordance with the Central Government’s NPPF there would be a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The NPPF is itself out to consultation and the latest draft NPPF will sharpen up the current NPPF with the intention that more planning approvals be made more quickly particularly when it came to housing. This meant that unless there were clear reasons within the NPPF not to do so then planning permission must be granted. This will be a big change to the planning system in favour of developers.

5 He said that there was no doubt that having a NP increased the credibility and influence that parish councils had in the planning process.

6 Mr. Banks asked how the new regulations to protect National Reserves will affect the village given there are two such reserves either side of the village. The Chairman said the 5km zones added further tests on development but wouldn’t preclude development.

7 Mr. Houdret encouraged those present to support the NP to give us a battle tool to talk with developers.

8 Mr. D’Arcy and then another resident asked if there were examples of NPs and could one be circulated. Mr Edwards said yes – some 500 had been adopted and can be viewed on the Government website. There was no one size fits all and the examples out there ranged from ones with just two or three policies to wide ranging ones, from good to bad and cost anywhere between £5K- £150K. They can also be viewed on any local planning authority website but he would not wish to recommend any particular one.

9 Mr. Norvill said most people locally were mainly concerned with housing need and stopping development in the GB and why ARUP identified the sub areas. He asked if a NP could be as specific as that. Mr. Edwards said yes. He emphasised that an NP could not undermine a Local Plan but could help in terms of the broader issues of development of that land.

10 Mr. Youel said that in the briefing note it was said that an NP must be positive. How does that fit in with protecting the GB when only GB land is left to be developed. Mr. Edwards said the threat to the GB is something the NP can deal with as to where those houses are built. Whether or not an NP is in place, housing targets will come from central Government and be passed down to every parish. Mr. Youel said what happens to NP when Local Plan is revised. Mr. Edwards said the new Local Plan should not ride roughshod over he NP but if it does the NP would need to be revised. Mr. Youel queried whether it was a waste of money in that case. Mr. Edwards said he didn’t think so.

11 A resident asked if there was no up to date Local Plan would a NP carry weight. Mr. Edwards confirmed it would.

12 Cllr. Dhillon noted that it was not clear what would happen if the Local Planning Authority changed as a result of the unitary debate. He would urge everyone to support a NP and noted Burnham PC had also decided to go this route.

13. Mr. Rowley asked if a NP would serve to attract housing development. Mr. Edwards said not at all. Developers were more likely to see an opportunity where there is an open door in an area without a NP which they would see as unprotected. Mr. Rowley asked if it would attract the Local Planning Authority to allocate housing targets to an area with a NP. Mr. Edwards said housing numbers and areas are decided by the local planning authority. He knows of another area where the LPA produced Supplementary Planning Guidance making those decisions. If there had been a NP they wouldn’t have been able to.

14 A resident asked about how the costs would be met. The Chairman said from the precept and grants.

15 Mr. Attree asked about timescales given the Local Plan was not finalised. Mr. Edwards said the Local Plan could be finalised any time in the next two years and it made sense to work on the NP though that process.

16 Mr. Minasion asked how much clout the NP has in terms of decisions. Mr. Edwards said if it contains planning policies then planning decision makers legally must pay attention to them. They become a statutory planning document. Mr. Minasion asked how could residents know what parishes want. Mr. Edwards said there would be a parish consultation process. The Chairman said there would need to be a working group at the core.

17 Mr. Norvill was concerned the NP would be a one trick pony and would an action group suffice. Mr. Edwards said an action group had no statutory standing.

18 Mr. Browning said the briefing document suggested the GB was under threat in the parish but the SBDC assessment and GB appraisal had concluded that only the 15 areas identified would be recommended for further consideration. He asked at what stage would the PC stop putting forward alarmist statements particularly as at the parish council meeting the previous meeting the Chairman had confirmed that the NPPF could be relied on to stop strategic development on GB. The Local Plan would not allow GB development until 2036. What would a NP add to that especially as SBDC had already met and exceeded its 15% housing target as over 300 dwellings had been built since 2011. The issue was what could be done to make the ARUP report move us from a Group 2 to a Group 1 and nothing else.

19 Mr. Edwards responded that he wasn’t being alarmist. He had been giving facts as he knew them. He hadn’t said the sub areas would be removed from the GB. Mr. Browning said Mr. Edwards had said he had read the ARUP report but he would not have said what he had if he had. Mr. Edwards said he didn’t have it in front of him. He had not said the GB would change but that there were two regional sub areas identified and the assessment process had not been completed. He agreed it was true that there had been a Preferred Options Consultation when the Parish had ‘escaped’ but that consultation was only one part of the Local Plan process. The NPPF deals with National policies for plan making which says GB boundaries can be removed and sets out the criteria to consider when making changes. The Preferred Option consultation is not the end of the matter. The Local Plan will be using the GB assessment yet to be completed to formulate policies on the GB. He was not making predictions what changes they may be but he thought it highly likely changes would be made. What Mr. Browning had said wasn’t correct.

20 Mr. Browning said he was quoting from the Chiltern and South Bucks emerging local plan and had spent 45 minutes discussing it with a Planning officer. Mr. Edwards said that nowhere does it say this will be the Local Plan position for the next 20 years and Mr Browning was only looking at the Preferred Options consultation. The other side was that the Local Plan will have planning policies about the GB which will take into account the ARUP report which is not concluded yet. In addition changes to the situation re unitary authorities could lead to the ripping up of the Preferred Options document.

21 Mr. Browning said this was just speculation with no basis in fact. If it came to that he could be prime minister. The Parish was not included in any GB proposals.

22 Mr. Edwards said the preferred options consultation was unlikely to get to the examination stage but if it did it would be such a small part of things. In his view it would be delusional to rely on it. It is not the sum of strategic development likely to be identified.

23 Mr. Browning asked if he was saying that a NP should be about finding the nicest way to allow development of GB to happen.

24 Mr. Edwards said that was not what he was saying. Housing need was assessed at a higher level. A NP could identify how to influence that development and it would be far more easy for development to occur without one. He was surprised anyone could suggest anything else.

25 The Chairman said it was important to put the matter to the vote whether parishioners wanted the Council to support pursuing a NP or not.

26 Mr D’Arcy said he was concerned that the talk of what the NP could do had been very narrow and it should include infrastructure etc. The Chairman said he agreed and the content of the plan was what we made it

27 Mr Tearle was concerned that a comment had been made that seemed to say the council should be talking to developers when the April meeting had decided otherwise. He thought that would encourage developers and was concerned about spending money when there was no specific threat. Mr Edwards said he understood the concern about spending money but would just repeat that with no NP and no Local Plan a developer – especially one with an option agreement already in place – will see that the NPPF has a presumption of permitting development and that they will have an open door on appeal even if the local planning authority refuses an application. There was a threat to every parish as central Government believes more houses have to be built and want to make it easier for developers to build more homes. A local community can couch how planning policies appear in a NP so if the Local Planning Authority say must be a target and no NP then an appeal inspector would be powerless to stop any development.

28 The Chairman said we already know of two developers pursuing schemes. If we had a NP we would have greater control. Mr. Edwards agreed that a NP could deal directly with that threat and would be beneficial. Cllr. Dhillon added that he knew of cases where SBDC had turned down cases which were overturned on appeal. He said an analogy would be that if there was no yellow line people would park where they liked.

29 A resident said that if there was to be a NP it must start on the basis of No development in the GB. The Chairman said that that should not be a pre-condition but should come out in the development of the NP. Mr. Edwards agreed that the scope should be defined by the process when embarked upon and he felt it would be wrong to prejudge the scope.

30 Mr. Rowley felt that parish councillors should not be part of the steering group for the NP.

31 The Chairman put the matter to a show of hands – a majority of those present were in favour; one against. The Chairman asked for written signatures in favour. 49 yes votes were handed in to the Clerk. The Chairman said this would go back to the Council to decide on the next steps.

The meeting ended