



Woodford Neighbourhood Forum

Annual Progress Report 2015

A report of the work of the Neighbourhood Forum

2 December 2015



Woodford Neighbourhood Forum

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Where are we now – an update

The Localism Act envisages that local communities will have a greater say about their neighbourhood and its development. Our Neighbourhood Forum enables us to consider what makes Woodford special for us and in what ways we would like to influence its future development.

Our Neighbourhood Forum was established and the Constitution and Neighbourhood Area approved by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council on 17th October 2013. The Neighbourhood Area applied for was essentially the Parish of Woodford, which includes the Stockport portion of the former BAe Woodford Aerodrome. However, the latter was excluded from the Neighbourhood Area granted to the Forum. Therefore, the Woodford Neighbourhood Forum is unusual, possibly unique, in that the Neighbourhood Area to which the Plan will apply it is immediately adjacent to a development (within the Parish but outside of the Neighbourhood Area), which will lead to a major expansion of the existing settlement. It is the intention of the Forum to apply for an extension of the Neighbourhood Area to include new residents on the Aerodrome site in the future.

It should be noted that the current Plan being developed will only apply to the existing Woodford settlement, although it will take into account the effects of the Aerodrome development where possible.

The Constitution of the Forum sets out the purpose and principles of the Forum which are ‘to promote and improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the Neighbourhood Area’. In addition, it defines the nature of the Neighbourhood Plan which enables the community to influence any development which takes place in Woodford and within the Neighbourhood Area, which was established and agreed with the Local authority, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC).

The Neighbourhood Plan will ‘*set out the Forum’s policies for use of land in the Area*’. *We must seek to balance the concerns of the people who live or work in the area and the powers and resources of the Local Authority in relation to planning matters*’.

The Constitution envisages that we will ‘*protect, preserve and enhance.....*

- *The architectural heritage and physical and environmental character of the area*
- *Green spaces and the natural environment*
- *Local businesses serving the area*
- *Use of land for public purposes*

whilst acknowledging that ‘some change for social, economic, and environmental reasons can be desirable’

Other key Principles are ‘*encouraging the development of a close and integrated community, recognising the importance of good service provision for all sections of society, supporting efforts to reduce crime, acting at all times on the basis of equality*’.

The Constitution also states that the ‘*Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan will set out the policies for the development and use of land in the Area. This will be established following extensive consultation and examination, ultimately to be confirmed by a Referendum of Woodford residents. The Plan will include, where appropriate, specific policies for the Area including conservation, enhancement and re-development policies.*’



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The Constitution can be viewed in full on the Forum's website.

Evidence gathering

Crucial to the whole process in preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan is the gathering of evidence on which our proposals for the Plan will be based. This evidence will include feedback obtained via consultation with residents, as well as information gleaned from a number of studies conducted by external specialists, and local and national policies.

Consultation with residents is a key component. It commenced with a residents' questionnaire which was sent to everyone on the electoral roll for Woodford in 2014 (1,200 people). 276 people responded, although not all answered all the questions. The information has been used to show frequencies of response to each question. Expert advice suggested that statistical tests for significance need not necessarily be applied for simple frequency data, but it is clear that large differences will be more meaningful than small differences between numbers choosing options within a question. The resultant information was analysed by an external consultant (Kirkwells) who also led a Forum workshop in December 2014 and from that process a draft Vision for Woodford and a series of draft Objectives emerged.

The analysis of the questionnaire and a report prepared by Kirkwells can be found on the Forum's web site.

The initial objectives were subsequently rationalised into six key themes - Environment, Community, Development, Movement, Employment and Integration.

Consultation continued with a public exhibition held in June 2015 to both inform the community of the outcome of earlier stages and to gain further feedback. This was attended by 150 people. A further short questionnaire was made available at the exhibition. 26 people responded to this questionnaire.

Evidence to support the Plan will include information provided by external specialists. The Forum Management Committee has received grant funding or technical support for expert advice on:

- Housing Needs in Woodford
- Movement in Woodford (vehicular and pedestrian)

Further funding or support is being sought for:

- Habitat surveys (to support wildlife)
- Landscape assessment

Volunteers on the Forum Management Committee will also be supporting these studies with local on the ground surveys of habitats, footpaths and pavements.

(More information is provided in the appropriate sections below)

Analysis of all the information gathered to date has enabled us either confirm or develop both the Vision and the supporting Objectives as well as identifying areas where further evidence gathering is necessary for us to formulate policy. More details of evidence gathering and analysis of data can be found in a separate



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document entitled Interim Analysis of Objectives (see Part 1 – Introduction, Information Gathering and Vision).

Liaison with the local authority is another important part of the process in developing a Neighbourhood Plan. Therefore, members of the Forum Management Committee who are leading the way on preparing the Plan for Woodford have held discussions with members of SMBC and will continue to work with them.

Ultimately, the Vision and Objectives will be translated into a practical set of policies and proposals as a means of achieving them. The Plan has to meet a series of ‘basic conditions’ before it can come into force.

The Plan must:

- have regard to national policy, particularly that expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the Development Plan for the local area
- be compatible with EU obligations

Our vision

Having considered the thoughts of the community expressed in the questionnaire, a draft Vision for Woodford emerged in the workshop. After further consultation, particularly the feedback from an Exhibition in June 2015, and with regard to our Constitution, we suggest the following amended form (amendments in italics):

“The Vision for the Woodford Neighbourhood Development Plan is to manage and *support beneficial change whilst retaining and enhancing Woodford’s rural identity, character, quality of life and sense of community.*”

This Vision is supported by the six Objectives derived from the outcomes of the workshop.

1. Environment

Protect the area’s Green Belt and preserve the open and rural character. Protect the landscape and important views

The analysis of our earlier Questionnaire revealed that an overwhelming majority of respondents (83%) said that they wanted enhanced protection of the landscape and positive management of the varied local wildlife. Over 60% cited the rural environment as a reason for choosing Woodford as a place to live in the first place.

From comments received it was also clear that the Green Belt and Woodford’s open, rural environment are highly valued.

With support from Locality*, input from the Local Authority and grant funding, we are undertaking studies which will identify key features in our physical landscape as well as important habitats for wildlife in our



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Neighbourhood Area, so that they may be protected and enhanced. We are commissioning a Wildlife Study and have set up a volunteer team to undertake a habitat survey which will support the study. This will map the rich habitats around Woodford – trees, hedgerows, verges, ponds and ditches. We are considering the appointment of a specialist to undertake a Landscape Character Assessment (subject to funding) and we are mapping all our historic buildings. We are also inviting the community to identify the views or places which they feel are special and contribute to the specific character of Woodford.

*Locality is the national network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, working together to help neighbourhoods thrive. They offer financial and technical support to help us achieve our ambitions.

Further information about the evidence base and our analysis in respect of our Environment objective can be found in the supplementary paper: Interim Analysis of Data (see Part 2 – Environment).

2 Community

Preserve and enhance recreational assets and open space to promote a healthy community

Woodford is blessed with a wide range of facilities – the community centre and its playing fields, clubs and their facilities, cricket grounds and pitches, open landscape, footpaths and bridleways. The Community Centre also rated highly when asked what the Plan should encourage and important when asked how the enlarged community should be integrated. The significant growth in our community may impose extra demands on such existing facilities.

Open Space is identified in the NPPF as valuable in terms of promoting healthy communities - ‘Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities’. Neighbourhood plans are able to identify local green spaces which can be designated where they meet specific criteria in order to afford protection. We hope that the community will help to identify spaces which are special to the community and hold particular local significance.

Further information about the evidence base and our analysis in respect of the Community objective can be found in the supplementary paper: Interim Analysis of Data (see Part 3 – Community).

3 Development

The draft objective arising from the Forum Workshop in January 2015 was:

Provide variety and mix that meets local needs and manage infilling and backlot development, including residential, employment and community uses

In response to detailed analysis of all the evidence arising from public consultation and professional studies this has been modified to read:



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Provide variety and mix that meets local needs and manage limited infilling including residential, employment and community uses

Woodford is a small settlement which is washed over by the Green Belt. This to a large extent determines the nature of any development. When asked if the Plan should identify land to meet local need over half agreed (57%) but there was a clear preference, over two thirds, for total development of less than 50 homes.

Further questions sought to determine who might want to move in Woodford, or wanted their own home and what the nature of that might be. 42 respondents wished to move to meet longer term needs, the majority requiring smaller homes. 18 wanted a new home, the majority two-bedroom, owner occupied but currently not available. There was a similar response when asked who might need a home in the next five years, with 28 respondents answering in the positive (out of a total 276 respondents).

When asked about the numbers of homes to be built in our area up to 2030 more than two thirds favoured up to 50, while a fifth felt that no more than 100 would be acceptable. Policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) limit and restrict the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt. However, a number of exceptions to this presumption concern housing and our Plan will aim to set out local criteria against which planning decisions for housing may be made which comply with both the NPPF and the Stockport Development Plan.

The NPPF identifies the following categories of buildings for residential use as potential exceptions: The replacement of a building, provided that the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the building it replaces; Limited infilling of villages; Limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land) whether redundant or in continuing use.

Our Plan needs to be related to national and local housing policy so we commissioned technical support to provide advice on demographic, economic, market and social data at local level. The report, 'Neighbourhood Plan Housing Policy Advice: Woodford neighbourhood Forum' was undertaken by AECOM and is available on the Forum website. The conclusion to the report states "Based on the data presented in the report on the quantity of dwellings required and the market affecting those quantities, AECOM recommend that housing need for Woodford in the period 2011 – 2026 is in the range of 20 to 25 additional dwellings"

The housing need expressed in the study and that found in our questionnaire suggest what might be an appropriate level of provision for Woodford. We now need to understand where and how we might meet these needs and how that provision might relate to that being developed on the Aerodrome site. The Forum will explore this in further consultation with the community. Business and community needs are yet to be identified

Further information about the evidence base and our analysis in respect of Development in Woodford can be found in the supplementary paper Interim Analysis of Data (see Part 5 – Development).

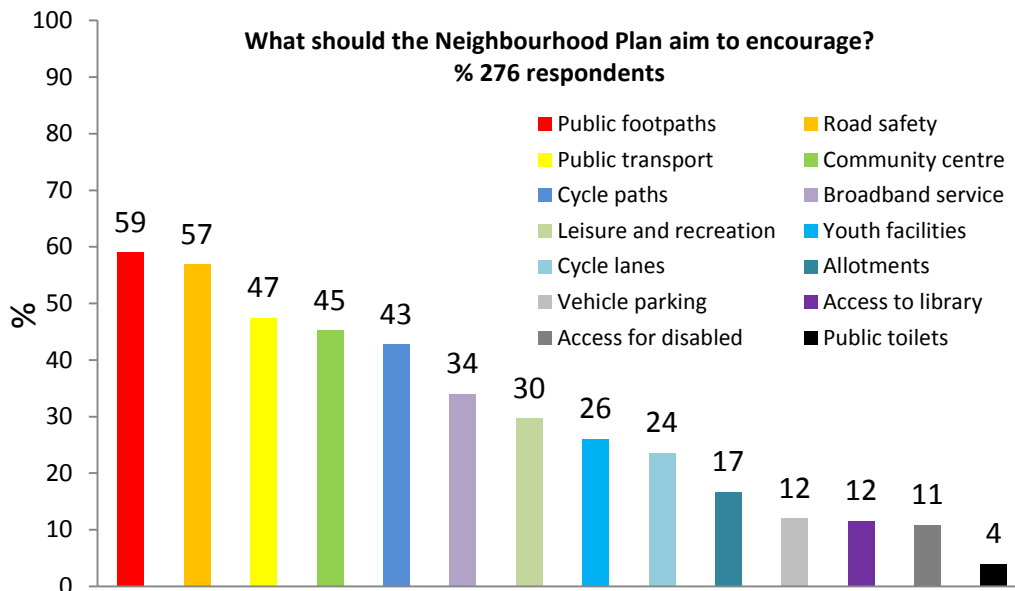


4 Movement

Create safer roads, streets and lanes and increase public access to countryside by foot, cycle and bridleway. Encourage sustainable transport

When asked what the Neighbourhood Plan should encourage, the Questionnaire responses revealed that four of the most important issues related to movement around and in and out of Woodford (Figure 1). 'Public footpaths' heads the list with road safety a close second. Public transport features in third place with cycle paths in fifth. However, when asked whether they would use public transport almost two thirds said rarely. Further consultation with residents will aim to clarify this issue. The short questionnaire which accompanied the Exhibition has also demonstrated an overwhelming response in favour of changes which can improve the footpaths and linkages, restricting traffic and traffic speeds and providing improved public transport in terms of frequency and connections. Many wanted to see measures to improve road safety.

Figure 1 from data from Questionnaire 2014



In the autumn of 2017, the A6 MARR will be completed and brought into use and it is expected that much of the current through traffic, including the majority of heavy vehicles, will be removed from our roads. Our ambition is that movement around Woodford can be made safer, so that walking and cycling become a more pleasant experience, more sustainable and a healthier option for us all.

To this end, the Forum have commissioned a study which will consider how the traffic will change with the completion of the new road and what opportunities that will present to deliver a framework for future action in order to deliver the safer streets which we desire. Moreover, we will be exploring how new routes and linkages can be formed with the existing footpath network into and through the new housing development to the countryside beyond and into adjoining neighbourhoods. In the longer term, the new housing development should trigger improvements in our current public transport provision.



5 Employment

Encourage and develop appropriate opportunities for sustainable employment

Responses to our questionnaire suggested that no more land should be allocated for employment while existing sites should be protected from change of use. However, overwhelmingly, the responses favoured the use of former business sites, brownfield land or existing buildings and in particular the existing Aerodrome site. Furthermore, there was a balance in favour of protecting existing sites from change of use. At the Forum's facilitated Workshop which took place in late 2014, there was a general view that employment opportunities should be encouraged and the Objective for Employment was derived as a result.

At the recent Exhibition, we asked if this Objective was supported and received many comments favouring support for employment, (see analysis). However, with few exceptions, there was continued favour for protecting the existing settlement from any further development in this respect with a continued desire for employment opportunities to be offered on existing brown field sites. This suggests that our Objective, in alignment with our Constitution, should now be amended to read:

“Seek to protect and support local employment”

Woodford is the home to over a hundred businesses, large and small. We are currently undertaking a survey which will help to identify how the Neighbourhood Plan could support them. This will also help us to understand the nature of local business and any demand for space, if at all. We will be alert to any changes which could result in the loss of any existing employment space.

Further information about the evidence base and our analysis in respect of Employment in Woodford can be found in the supplementary paper: Interim Analysis of Data (see Part 4 – Employment).

6 Integration

Ensure integration and linkage between the existing settlement and the Aerodrome development to achieve an enhanced, enlarged community

While the new Aerodrome development lies outside the Neighbourhood Plan Area and beyond our direct influence, it will nevertheless have an impact on the existing settlement in many ways. Feedback from the workshop suggests the importance of ensuring that there is integration and linkage between the existing Woodford community and the new community that would arise from development. Feedback from the questionnaires gathered from the June exhibition continue to confirm, almost wholly, that the view of the community is that the integration of the new and existing parts of Woodford should be encouraged and that the new homes should be included in an enlarged Neighbourhood Area.

Members of the Forum Management Committee have been meeting the developers, Redrow, on a regular basis and it is mutually agreed that integration will be facilitated where opportunities arise, for instance in the reconnection of historic footpath routes across the Aerodrome ensuring permeability through to the



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countryside. New facilities, such as useable open space, play areas and a new school will benefit us all and encourage this joint objective.

Next steps

Work is ongoing to support emerging policy development work. This includes a gap analysis between NPPF, SMBC Development Plan policies, Woodford SPD and emerging community aspirations.

The Plan will be based on a series of specific policies for Woodford relating to our Objectives.

It is anticipated that a pre-submission consultation on the draft Plan will be undertaken early in 2016.

The draft Plan will be revised following consultation and submitted to SMBC after the consultation. From this stage, the NP process is a joint one but led by SMBC.

SMBC will publicise the Plan (minimum 6 weeks) and then agree to progress the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan to approval.

SMBC will then agree and appoint an independent Inspector in consultation with WNF.

The Plan will be examined and the Inspector's report issued.

SMBC will publicise the Plan and hold a referendum for Woodford residents.

With a majority vote (50 percent plus), SMBC 'make' the Plan and it is brought into effect – we expect this to be in late Spring /early Summer 2016.