



# CHICHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

**Date :** Tuesday 30th April 2024.

**Location :** 23 Oak Avenue, Chichester, PO19 3AH

**Present :** Councillor Clare Apel  
Alan Bradbury  
Greg Fielder (Secretary)  
Ash Pal (Chairman)  
John Pegg

**Apologies :** Apologies for absence were received from  
Michael Bevis  
Councillor Louise Pramas  
Councillor Sarah Quail

**Introduction :** The meeting was quorate, as per CNPSG Terms of Reference, section 6.f

The chairman opened the meeting by thanking all those who have attended and those who gave their apologies. He then gave a brief account of the two meetings held where he was verbally asked to resign the chairmanship of the Steering Group by, first, Councillor Ann Butler and secondly by Councillor Sean McHale.

The meeting moved on to agenda item 1. The report on the Chichester City Council Planning & Conservation Committee meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024, by Greg Fielder, Secretary, which was read by the meeting. See appendix 1.

The chairman then canvassed responses to the report from all present as under agenda item 2.

John Pegg wished to clarify that the P&C Committee Agenda Item 5B portrayal of the Steering Group's total expenditure of £68,786.25 failed to identify the true amount spent under the currently constituted Steering Group and Chairman, which is £6,904.16 and he also pointed out the amount of £4,500 invoiced by his company was for work contracted by the Council from him in 2020 prior to any involvement with the Steering Group.

Councillor Apel requested that we take into consideration that the Town Clerk is only recently in post and that much of the City Council is made up of new members, many of whom will not have knowledge of the problems previously experienced.

Alan Bradbury pointed out that the City Council appear to be forgetting one salient point and that is the Localism Act 2011 requires the Neighbourhood Plan to be community driven, not Council driven. In addition to which the Steering Group have repeatedly requested data on the Local Plan from both the City and District Councils, data which is essential for the compilation of a Neighbourhood Plan, and which has not been forthcoming.

Greg Fielder expressed his concern that the P&C meeting was not a debate at all. There were, to his knowledge, at least three P&C committee members who didn't even speak on the subject, giving the distinct impression that this was a pre-conceived attempt by two councillors to remove the chairman of the Steering Group without proper scrutiny of the accusations contained within agenda item 5B. In addition to which it was his belief that the Steering Group's letter to Councillor Butler (see appendix 3) had not been seen fully by the other committee members, a fact subsequently confirmed by Councillor Butler in an email dated 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The chairman moved on to agenda item 3, correspondence received from Councillor Ann Butler. The secretary read aloud the email dated 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024 received by the chairman formally requesting him to stand down as Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. See appendix 2.

The chairman's response to which, agenda item 4, was no, he would not stand down.

The secretary then proposed a motion of confidence in the chairman with the following resolution :

*It would be wholly inappropriate to accept the Chairmans resignation at this point in time.*

The resolution was seconded by Councillor Clare Apel and a vote taken which was unanimously in favour.

The secretary then drew attention to the Chichester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Terms of Reference, Section 11. Para a.

*The Steering Group will be dissolved once its objectives have been attained and/or when at least two-thirds of its members and Chichester City Council consider its services are no longer required.*

The Steering Group consider that its objectives have not been attained, and that two thirds of its members consider its services are still required.

John Pegg noted that a large proportion of Steering Group members have been, and are, elected members of the Council. As such these individuals bear equal responsibility for any perceived failures of the Steering Group. He further noted that for the P&C Committee to seek the removal of the Steering Group's chairman without having in mind either a replacement or a contingency plan in place was not a credible strategy for success.

Clare Apel concluded by saying that without another organisation in place she would continue to support the chair, and that she wanted it recorded that she was saddened that it had become such a mess.

The chairman wished for a complete list of the Steering Group be appended to the minutes. The Steering Group composition as of the date of this meeting.

Ash Pal, Chairman  
Councillor Clare Apel  
Andrew Bain  
Michael Bevis  
Alan Bradbury  
Laura Eccott  
Greg Fielder, Secretary  
Councillor Craig Gershater  
John Pegg  
Councillor Louis Pramas  
Councillor Sarah Quail  
Sarah Sharp  
Ian Swann  
Councillor James Vivian

- Appendices :
1. Report on the P&C Committee Meeting 25/04/2024
  2. Email from Cllr. Butler to Mr Ash Pal 26/04/2024.
  3. Letter to Cllr. A. Butler dated 23/04/2024



## **CHICHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP**

### **REPORT ON THE PLANNING & CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING, AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE, CHICHESTER ON 25/04/2024 REFERENCE AGENDA ITEM 5B**

I attended the above meeting in the capacity of Secretary of the CNPSG to witness the committee debate the above agenda item. It is necessary however to describe the context within which the following report is based, by summarising my communication with the P&C committee chair, Cllr. A. Butler, prior to the meeting.

Owing to a verbal approach by Cllr. Sean McHale to the Steering Group chairman Mr. Ash Pal requesting his resignation, the Steering Group sent a letter to Cllr. Butler, setting out the Mr. Pal's response to this approach, the contents of which were germane to the subject being presented as Agenda item 5B at the committee meeting.

Upon receipt Cllr. Butler telephoned me to discuss the letter, and during the conversation asked me if I wished to speak at the committee meeting. My response was no, I intended to attend so that I could witness the debate and answer any questions in relation to the letter. I was then asked if I would speak if I was called upon, to which I said yes.

When the committee reached item 5 on the agenda, Cllr. Butler introduced me and asked if I would give the Steering Group's report. To which I replied that I could not do so for that was not the reason why I was there. But I did ask if the councillors had been given sight of my letter to her, to which she said that they had all been briefed. I asked again, quite specifically if they had been given the letter, to which she again replied that they had all the information.

I then spoke for short time outline my credentials as secretary of the Parklands Residents Association, through which I had established a very positive working relationship with Mr Pal over the past two years, and one where I felt my skills had benefited the organisation. I went on to say that my association with the Steering Group only commenced at the end of last year and that I had attended three meetings. I said that I believed there to be an issue of communication between the Steering Group and the Council and that having taken on the role of secretary I would ensure that a robust, punctual and comprehensive channel of communication with the Council would exist.

The debate then opened with Cllr. McHale proceeding to brief the committee with what appeared to be a litany of failures under the chairmanship of Mr Pal. The committee's attention was drawn to the council's expenditure to date on the Neighbourhood Plan of just under seventy thousand pounds.

This generalisation was challenged by Cllr. Anne Scicluna who pointed out that sixty thousand of this was spent by previous Steering Groups before the current chairman and group took over.

Cllr. McHale continued with what can only be reasonably described as a well-planned, and partial assault on both Mr Pal and the Steering Group by directing the committee to items which directly favoured his argument. He pointed out that the last item posted on the Neighbourhood Plan page of the City Councils website was in 2020. He cited the new project management database had little real information on it, nothing new, and several blank pages. He accused Mr Pal of refusing to meet on City Council property with him insisting on meeting on 'neutral' ground, and also stated that Mr Pal was overheard to say the if he was dismissed he would burn all of the documents in his possession. This accusation was countered by Cllr. Butler who said that he was probably joking.

Cllr. Vivan supported Cllr. McHales position and the mayor then voiced his opinion, which was strongly in favour of Cllr. McHale's, by adding that what was on the project management database was now too old and would be of no use as it was out of date. This was contested by a councillor as being incorrect as the work done on PLACE would still be valid. The mayor continued by saying that there was no data, and data is what was required. The emphasis being very much on the word data. Cllr. Chant agreed adding his support to that of the mayor's.

Cllr. Apel said that the CNPSG should be given a further 6 to 9 months to address the concerns highlighted by Cllr. McHale, a suggestion which was not met with enthusiasm. At this point I interjected and stated that what was required was not 6 – 9 months, but that a meeting between the Steering Group and the Council be convened within 6 – 9 days. I went on to say that recent work had been completed and provided to the council in February, prior to the previous P&C Committee meeting, in the form of the proposed consultant's specification, a project management milestones and dependencies document, and the organisational chart, but the mayor dismissed all of them of being of no value.

In summary the committee were however unanimous in their desire to see the Neighbourhood Plan completed and that they wished for all the current members of the steering group retained, including Mr Pal, the exception being that he relinquishes his post as Chairman.

The mayor then added that he felt that a Council driven working group should be established to drive the Steering Group forward, giving it direction. Some discussion was then had regarding the current Terms of Reference and what, if anything, the P&C committee could do.

The City Clerk, Ms Sam Tate, pointed out that the chair of the Steering Group is appointed by the Steering Group members, and that all the committee could do was formally request his resignation. In case that was not forthcoming a date of 8<sup>th</sup> May was set for an extraordinary meeting of the P&C committee. The resolution to request Mr Pal's resignation was proposed by Cllr. McHale and seconded by the mayor, Cllr. Gershter. The motion was passed with the mayor voting and Cllr. Butler abstaining.

On Friday, April 26, 2024, 9:38 AM, Ann Butler <[a.butler@chichestercity.gov.uk](mailto:a.butler@chichestercity.gov.uk)> wrote:

Dear Ash,

Following yesterday's meeting, the City Council Planning and Conservation Committee formally request that you now step down from your role as chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Your hard work and dedication are gratefully acknowledged and much appreciated but it is felt that at this stage new management is needed for the Plan to proceed to completion in good time.

We ask that you please respond by May2nd.

With thanks from us all and my best regards, Ann.

Councillor Ann Butler

Chairman Planning and Conservation Committee

City Councillor (East Ward)

Chichester City Council

The Council House

North Street

Chichester

PO19 1LQ

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# CHICHESTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP

Councillor A. Butler  
Chair Planning & Conservation Committee  
Chichester City Council  
The Council House  
North Street  
Chichester  
PO19 1LQ

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024

Dear Councillor Butler,

I write to you as Chairman of the Planning & Conservation Committee on behalf, and with the agreement of, the Chichester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (CNPSG). This communication concerns the informal council representations which have been made encouraging the resignation of our Chairman, Mr. Ash Pal.

The current CNPSG was convened in 2021 and encouraged by City Council Officers and Councillors to take over control of the CNP after two previous failed attempts. We subsequently identified significant expenditure on work which was irrelevant to a Neighbourhood Plan.

The continued uncontrolled involvement by salaried City Council officers and Councillor interventions, outside of our governance, has made a voluntary, community driven initiative extremely difficult to continue. One of the SG members described the last year of working with the City Council as “a very unrewarding experience.”

For example, we are aware of the City Council convening formal and informal meetings, and briefings, about the project without inviting CNPSG members for input, or even informing them as a basic courtesy. There is also a clear conflict of interest at an Officer level. A fundamentally different view on what external advisory help is needed also exists, that has been impossible to bridge.

We particularly regret that a golden opportunity for the City Council to show its greatest community impact is potentially going to be lost. Thousands of hours of effort by Chichester residents and their ambition to make our city a better place, are at risk of being disregarded.

It is regrettable that the City Council has again been unsuccessful in providing a supportive environment to enable a piece of work, which by its nature must be community-focused, data driven, and follow the obligations of the 2011 Localism Act.

We understand that the City Council has reserved funds to continue work on the CNP, but we feel that the Council must first fundamentally change its attitude to how it supports neighbourhood planning work before it spends another penny of taxpayer's money. It is inefficient for the work of the SG to be disrupted and undermined in the way it has been over the past 12 months.

By treating the CNPSG like any other supplier the City Council risks throwing away several years of considerable volunteer effort involving experts in their respective disciplines. That is a very poor message to send to the people of Chichester and we hope that this is accidental.

To move forward with the CNP the SG, as currently constituted, must be assured of a more positive working relationship with the Council, access to both funding and information pertinent to its endeavour, and have clear boundaries set which are agreed by both parties, that can be arrived at by frank and open discussion.

If this is considered unachievable by the Council, the CNPSG, having discussed this matter, will reluctantly tender its resignation en bloc. Leaving the way clear for the Council to elect a new CNP chair and steering group.

Should you wish to meet with me to discuss this matter further please don't hesitate to contact me.

I am, respectfully yours

Gregory Fielder, Secretary  
Chichester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

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