

## ELSTEAD – THE FUTURE?



Elstead is a great place to live in. Carolyn and I have been here for nearly 30 years so can almost qualify as proper residents! We brought up two sons here and have been enjoyably involved in village activities.



Bonfire Hill in the middle of Elstead

Elstead is surrounded by wonderful countryside and we have every reason to be grateful to the Army and the farmers and equestrian establishments, who keep it looking as attractive as it is. Much of this is down to the protection that Natural England gives to the wildlife and heathland habitat on the Commons. The River Wey and its tributary streams also give the village much of its character, even if it does sometimes stray out of its proper place!



Elstead Bridge

Like so many other rural villages Elstead has changed over the decades. Many shops and businesses have closed, including Weyburn Engineering, which was the biggest employer in the area for so many years. New houses have been built and old ones extended or converted to provide more space for growing families or incoming buyers who want to live here but prefer and can afford a larger home. This has meant that much of the housing stock in Elstead has moved “up-market”.



“The Gables”

One result is that some people whose families have lived in Elstead for generations cannot afford to buy a home here. Similarly people who have jobs here have to live elsewhere and travel into the village to work. Another odd effect of the increasing value of local property is that residents who have lived here for many years in family homes sometimes cannot move into a smaller property in Elstead when they either no longer need the space or want to raise some extra money for their pensions. Many bungalows and smaller homes are no longer available and new homes are usually built with families in mind, often at a fairly high level in the market.

There are some Housing Association rented homes here but a new government policy to include them in the “Right to Buy” scheme may take them out of the reach of low earners and first time buyers. It might take a few months to transfer ownership of a Housing Association property to a tenant but considerably longer, possibly years, to find suitable land and build a replacement.

Waverley Council is under pressure from the government to have many more homes built in the Borough and we know that some of them will be built here. Finding the land to build them in large numbers in or close to Elstead will not be easy, because of the Green Belt and the several types of environmental and landscape protection for birds, beasts and plants that apply here.



Weyburn Engineering Works Gate

One possibility for a large scale development is the derelict Weyburn industrial site in Peper Harow and there is a current planning application there for 70 houses and a care home. This is not a simple case, as the leaflet published recently by the Weyburn Working Group has shown and it may fall through. In any case so-called “affordable” homes built there are likely to be sold or rented at 80% of the local market value – well outside the range of low earners and most first time buyers.

The Neighbourhood Plan Housing Group will soon be circulating a Housing Requirements Survey to find out whether there is any unfulfilled need for homes of one sort or another in Elstead. If it shows that there is a real need for low rent housing there is the possibility of using a Rural Housing scheme to provide homes of this type, tied to people with a connection to the village. Such schemes are intended to help preserve continuity and tradition in rural communities. Another possible solution would be more Council houses in Elstead but we know of no plans for this to happen.



Springfield

Another purpose for the Survey will be to help set up the Neighbourhood Plan as a guide to developers and the Local Authority on the type of homes best suited to Elstead. This will fulfil the same function as the Elstead Design Statement compiled 20 years ago but still relevant today.

The Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups are investigating much else that affects our lives in Elstead, and will be reporting on their progress at a public meeting in July. They will also be asking for ideas about the future of the village, to help to build a vision of what we would like the village to be in the decades to come. Should it become an attractive dormitory for commuters, or perhaps mainly a retirement village with suitable support services, or should attempts be made to attract businesses, shops and employment to Elstead, with the right sort of homes for people who work here?



Tanshire Business Park, Peper Harow

At our age Carolyn and I have no right to determine Elstead's future, which should be for younger people to decide. We like it the way it is and would prefer it to remain a balanced community with a good mixture of young families and people living and working in this great little village. Other people may have different views and economics and government policies could force changes that cannot now be foreseen.

At least setting up a Neighbourhood Plan for Elstead and the Weyburn part of Peper Harow gives us all an opportunity to influence the way in which Elstead will develop over the next 15-20 years. This is an opportunity that should not be missed. It involves a lot of hard work and requires good organisation and careful management to negotiate the sometimes complicated rules for producing policies that will be acceptable to the Local Authority.

As far as possible the plan will also have to fulfil the requirements of the government for more homes to be built in the area. The Neighbourhood Plan will allow us to influence the type of homes and where they can be built, as well as the shops and other facilities needed to support a larger population. We will also know far more than before about what is lawful and acceptable for development applications.

There will be meetings, newsletters and other sources of information about the Neighbourhood Plan from time to time. Please get involved in this if you have any ideas or spare time - it cannot work without you.

The next public meeting will be in early July and will be intended for everybody who works or lives in Elstead and Peper Harow to bring their concerns and ideas for the future for discussion. The meeting will be led by a Planning Consultant with experience of Neighbourhood Plans in other areas.

It will also give everybody the chance to find out what the five Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups have been doing over the previous six months to discover what Neighbourhood Planning is all about and what problems there are to be solved in Elstead.

After this meeting there will be a period when facts and ideas are brought together so that we can consider what practical solutions can be found for some of our problems and what policies need to be written in the Neighbourhood Plan for the future guidance of the Local Authority and the Parish Council.



For more information about the Neighbourhood Plan go to [www.elsteadplan.info](http://www.elsteadplan.info). We are working on a file that will be available for viewing in St James's Church.