Application for Front Runner status to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan for Fernhurst
Comments of support from local councillors

1.1 Heather Caird, Leader of Chichester District Council and ward councillor for Fernhurst:

"I am very pleased to support this initiative being taken by Fernhurst parish council, which is a bold step to further the objectives of the Localism Bill, in providing opportunities for local communities to have a say in the development of their housing provision. Fernhurst is uniquely positioned in the need to carry out this work, and it is particularly important here as its critical mass is such that, without a plan, it could easily attract attention which may bring with it unsuitable development in unacceptable places. Chichester District Council also applauds efforts such as this and will endeavour to provide assistance where practicable to any parish wishing to embark upon the development of a neighbourhood plan."

1.2 Norma Graves, Chichester District Councillor for Fernhurst ward:

"I most certainly support this Front Runner application. Fernhurst is a village with a breadth of population and an extremely well developed sense of community. It provides opportunities for all from the very young through the seven ages of man. Not least, the Parish Council is an effective body."

1.3 Michael Brown, West Sussex County Councillor for Fernhurst ward:

"Fernhurst has an important role as one of the larger West Sussex villages, with a great many active clubs, societies and groups - more than any other in my electoral division. It has an active and conscientious Parish Council and through its location in the northern part of the County, has an important role to help ensure spatial balance to growth."
Introduction

1.4 South Downs National Park Authority, in partnership with Fernhurst Parish Council, wishes to apply to become a Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner. This will be for the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, rather than a Neighbourhood Development Order.

1.5 This bid has received support from our district and county councillors, as shown above. This demonstrates commitment to this bid across all the tiers of local authority.

1.6 Fernhurst has a rich history, shaped by its geographical location and, most importantly, its people. It has shown resilience over the years and recognises that change is something that should be embraced because it will help the parish and particularly the village of Fernhurst to sustain itself into the future.

Part of John Speed’s Sussex map of 1610

1.7 South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) formally only came into existence seven months ago and, because of this, is in the early stages on the production of its Core Strategy. This bid therefore represents a unique opportunity for local planning authority and parish to work together in producing complementary forward plans that appropriately reflect both the strategic and local needs of one of Britain’s national parks and one of its communities. Both the SDNPA and Fernhurst Parish Council are proactive bodies that have already built up a strong working relationship together. Both recognise the size of the task and the challenges to be faced, but see this as an opportunity to not only work together but to share the benefits of that with communities and their districts across the country.

1.8 The neighbourhood plan is expected to examine in greater depth – in terms of the evidence and the views of the wide range of stakeholders in the parish – the issues that have been identified by earlier work undertaken by the Parish Council. This work includes the Parish Plan, the Village Design Statement and the Parish Action Plan. In particular, the opportunity for a neighbourhood plan to underpin growth with resilience in terms of low carbon technologies and sustainable building is seen as an exciting opportunity.
1.9 The parish of Fernhurst is located in the north of Chichester district, which itself stretches down to the south coast. A large proportion (67%) of the district, including Fernhurst, lies within the South Downs National Park, which came into effect on 1st April 2011. The map overleaf shows the area of the parish which would also be the area for which a neighbourhood plan would be produced.

1.10 Fernhurst has a long and rich history; Mesolithic flint and polished hand axes have been found in the area and the Church has Saxon origins. There is also a suspected Roman tileyard and Fernhurst lies midway between two well recognised Roman roads. We have two pre-industrial iron works and an industrial charcoal manufacture - today, the Fernhurst Furnace is one of the best preserved Wealden blast iron works and currently is the subject of a £0.75 million Heritage Lottery bid for further conservation. The needs of the iron works for ore, charcoal and water has helped shape the landscape with field names like Minepit Copse, Cavalry Quarters, and North Park Copse indicating the varied historical connections. We also have our own Medieval ruined castle, Verldy Castle, which was probably a hunting lodge. Currently there are 44 listed buildings in the parish.

1.11 From 1946, ICI Agrochemicals in various guises occupied a large number of sites and was at one time the largest single employer in West Sussex. ICI’s withdrawal from the village in 2000 has had a major impact, but not necessarily in an entirely negative way - it has forced the village to rediscover its self-reliance which we believe will help us to secure a sustainable future for all.

1.12 The population of Fernhurst parish was 2,765 in 2001 (source: 2001 Census). This is only 2.5% of the population of Chichester district, reflecting its comparatively small, rural nature. The majority of people live in the village of Fernhurst itself, which has a largely linear pattern following the A286 road. It is very close to the smaller settlement of Kingsley Green. This links Fernhurst to the market towns of Haslemere, four miles to the north and Midhurst, five miles to the south.

1.13 The village lies in the Milland/Fernhurst Vale, drained by the river Lod which in turn is a tributary of the Rother which joins the river Arun near Littlehampton. The valley for the most part is composed of heavy Wealden clay which, at its fringes with the Greensand of the northern wooded ridges, gives rise to some land suitable for arable cultivation, otherwise it is pasture, previously dairying, and now horsey culture prevails. On the northern elevated Lower Greensand plateaux (including parts of Blackdown at 280m, the highest point in Sussex) is the be found open heathland of heather, bracken, birch and conifer, both native Scots Pine and commercial plantations. The whole area is well wooded with much Sweet Chestnut coppice and many fields are bounded by attractive hedgerows with mature beech and oak trees. The area is well served by public rights of way and well used by walkers and riders. It retains an exciting hidden and mysterious feel with twisting sunken lanes, gylls and long range views to the South Downs. There are a number of sites of special scientific interest in the parish. Major landowners include the National Trust and Lord Cowdray, who is a resident of the parish.

1.14 Despite being on the main route between two market towns and close to the strategic A3 route to London, the village of Fernhurst has not been subject to significant expansion over the past 30 to 40 years. Growth has been more organic, with development largely being in the form of infill. The village has the majority of the listed properties in the parish, with a significant cluster around the village green.
Due to its location, traffic management is an issue with speeding being the principal problem. A neighbourhood plan is seen as one way of trying to properly address these problems which commonly fall under the radar of the local highway authority.

The services in the village are limited but are very important to local life. They include a stand-alone post office (busy enough to have two full-time staff), newsagent/convenience store, pharmacy and greengrocer, as well as a range of services which are a well-integrated part of village life. It is seen as very important that the village maintains and strengthens these services by supporting appropriate growth and change.

There is also a surprisingly large and resilient employment base for such a small village, underpinned by the Hurstfold Industrial Estate and Fernhurst Business Park which provide range
of services and employment, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing and engineering which have traditionally been in decline across the country. Fernhurst Fuels also provides heating fuel for the village and wider hinterland.

1.18 The village has a range of special interest groups, including the Fernhurst Society. Whilst set up relatively recently, in 1998, the group has been very active in seeking to deliver its aims of enriching the enjoyment of Fernhurst village and protecting and improving its amenities and appearance. In 2000, the Society produced a Millennium Map of Fernhurst and conducted a biodiversity project with Heritage Lottery funding. The Society has also helped form a Village Archive and art group. The Fernhurst Centre acts as a community resource run entirely by volunteers and offers a variety of courses requested by local people, as well as acting as a café and social venue for all ages.

The Fernhurst Millennium Map
Planning context

1.19 The South Downs National Park Authority (SNDPA) is seven months old, the newest planning authority in the country. With the imperative provided by the emerging National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for local planning authorities to put in place local plans as soon as possible, the opportunity for Fernhurst to produce a neighbourhood plan also creates an opportunity to assist in the production and delivery of the SNDPA’s Local Plan.

1.20 The table below illustrates why this is important. The SNDPA draft Local Development Scheme considers that the Core Strategy is not expected to be in place until Autumn 2014. With the NPPF attempting to speed up plan production by authorities which have yet to put a Core Strategy in place, the SDNPA is at a disadvantage by simple virtue of how recently it was formed and how complex it will be to appropriately reflect the planning policy framework of so many different existing district authorities that previously covered the area.

Comparison of timetables for Neighbourhood Plan and Core Strategy

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<tr>
<th>Key stages in production</th>
<th>SDNPA Core Strategy</th>
<th>Fernhurst NP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draft plan</td>
<td>November 2012</td>
<td>November 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examination</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>October 2014</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
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1.21 What this means is that the SDNPA area could be left with a policy vacuum for a considerable period after the NPPF is adopted. With the emerging NPPF suggesting that, where plans are out-of-date they will have no status (notwithstanding announcements about transition arrangements), the neighbourhood planning process has an opportunity to partially fill that vacuum.

1.22 The table shows that the Fernhurst NP is intended to be adopted by Autumn 2013, a full year ahead of the SDNPA Core Strategy. Clearly it will be important for the neighbourhood plan to reflect the emerging Core Strategy, but the issues it wishes to cover will be local matters, rather than the strategic matters which should be dealt with by the Local Plan. Nevertheless, the timescale for the draft neighbourhood plan is the same as the draft Core Strategy – November 2012 to ensure that the two documents demonstrate their complementarity.

1.23 In particular, the neighbourhood plan can help to shape the SDNPA Core Strategy in respect of its evidence base. For example, this may be on the opportunities presented by key sites or in terms of infrastructure needs for the parish.

1.24 SNDPA and Fernhurst Parish Council see this as a unique opportunity to start with an almost ‘blank page’ with which to put in place a strategy for sustainable change over the next 15-20 years. For the people of Fernhurst, this is seen as an opportunity to decide for themselves what Fernhurst will look like in the years to come. There have been instances in the past where there has been a slightly adversarial relationship between local residents and Chichester District Council (as planning authority). The chance to produce a neighbourhood plan with, to a degree,
a slate wiped clean is seen by the Parish Council as an opportunity to take a positive step forward.

**Key issues for the neighbourhood plan**

1.25 For a small parish, the future of Fernhurst is likely to be shaped and influenced by two major development sites.

- The first of these is the former Syngenta site in the south of the parish, just over a mile from Fernhurst village. This is being proposed for a major housing development, with potentially up to 200 homes. Plans have been brought forward for development over a number of years but no scheme has yet to be granted planning permission. Whilst separated from the village, the residents of Fernhurst are keen to ensure that any development is properly integrated into village life so as to avoid the feeling of it being an isolated development with the associated loss of community.

- The second is the King Edward VII Hospital site, a further two miles to the south, outside but on the boundary of the parish. This site already has planning permission for housing but this has not been built out. Other options for the site have been considered and it will be important for the neighbourhood plan to feed in the needs of Fernhurst parish’s residents in order to help shape the type and scale of uses on the site.

1.26 The people of Fernhurst are pragmatic - whilst they do not wish to necessarily simply preserve the village exactly as it is now, they are concerned that development does cause existing residents to suffer. The fundamental question that the Parish Council wishes to underpin the neighbourhood plan is:

> **What will a sustainable Fernhurst look like in 15 to 20 years’ time?**

1.27 One of the issues that is going to underpin this – and we know this from previous parish engagement – is what infrastructure is going to be needed, and then delivered, to support growth which can be truly sustainable for the village. Local people are not necessarily asking for development of Syngenta and King Edward VII Hospital to solve all the existing problems in the parish – we know that this is unrealistic and is not permitted. Rather, we have an aspiration for development to be something that all can be truly proud of:

- Proud of because of the way it looks.
- Proud of because of the limited impact it has on the environment, through use of innovative low carbon technologies.
- Proud of because of the way it integrates new residents and businesses into the local community.

1.28 With all this activity happening in a national park where the environment must be at the heart of planning, such matters increase in importance.

1.29 The Parish Council sees the neighbourhood plan process as an opportunity to plan such developments positively, so that they support the existing village and its residents and businesses, whilst also helping to secure a sustainable future for the parish. In particular, the Parish Council is keen to ensure that development is supported by appropriate infrastructure. Whilst such infrastructure should really only mitigate against the impacts of the proposed development, this is seen as an opportunity, through an appropriate neighbourhood planning strategy, to ensure that such infrastructure also delivers wider benefits.
1.30 The neighbourhood plan will not simply wish to shape policy for large development sites. Village life also must consider the ‘little’ issues which have importance in our everyday lives. In particular, it is expected that the following issues will also be addressed:

- Protecting and improving the quality and use of the village green
- Traffic and road safety along the busy A286
- Underpinning the ‘High Street’ and protecting key local services
- Access to facilities for children/youths
- Reinforcing local resilience/sustainability through low carbon development techniques and technologies (reflecting the potential opportunities afforded by the significant viability of development in the area, a function of the high property prices)

1.31 The overall aim of the plan will be to ensure that Fernhurst remains a vibrant village and parish which contributes to and enhances the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the South Downs National Park. In particular, the need to encourage young families to live in Fernhurst is vital to ensure that this vibrancy is achieved and then retained.

**Strength and experience of Parish Council**

1.32 Fernhurst’s Parish Council is very much a reflection of the community. Whilst it could be a sleepy institution that does not embrace change and opportunity, it chooses to be active and make Fernhurst a place to be proud of. This mirrors the buoyant nature of the local community, with numerous organisations supporting life in the village. People recognise that their enjoyment of life is a function of their involvement in village life. The Parish Council’s mission is to facilitate this where it can.

1.33 The Parish Council, as the leaders in the production of the neighbourhood plan, have the track record of engaging with a wide variety of sections of the community and ensuring that the views of the whole village are taken into account.

1.34 As a demonstration of this, the Parish Council has been active in producing supplementary planning guidance and local evidence to help shape policy and decision making on development in the village:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish Plan, 1998</th>
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<tr>
<td>- This was an early attempt at a form of neighbourhood plan – the Parish Council sought to identify and address issues in planning which were important to the local people.</td>
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<td>- Evidence was gathered through an exhibition and a range of public meetings, some of which were open to all and some with specific focus groups.</td>
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<td>- Of particular note was that the parish recognised that growth was necessary to sustain the village and the plan sought to provide influence over the type and location of that growth – clearly an early precursor to neighbourhood planning!</td>
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<td>- Whilst not formally adopted, the plan was given support and input from Chichester DC and West Sussex CC, both of which saw it as strong supporting evidence to help in their emerging policy planning.</td>
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**Village Design Statement, 1999**

- A simple-to-use and straightforward document which focused on the particular issues important to local people, e.g. open space and planting, buildings and materials and civic amenity and transport.
- Used simple sketches to illustrate the guidance being offered.
- Adopted as supplementary planning guidance by Chichester District Council in 2000.

**Parish Action Plan, 2005**

- This sought the views of a range of local people and groups, including children at Fernhurst Primary School and the local youth group.
- It aimed to identify issues of concern and put together an action plan for addressing these issues. Separate groups were then set up to deliver on the actions.
- Actions included the need to ensure that the Village Design Statement was being properly reflected in developments, improvements to public transport provision, a traffic plan for Fernhurst and effective design of public spaces for all to be able to use.

1.35 The production of these documents shows that the Parish Council is willing and able to undertake significant pieces of planning policy development and evidence production, which has been endorsed by Chichester District Council, the sole local planning authority at the time. Now that there is a new planning authority which will need the support and assistance of its local communities to plan effectively for change in the future, the value of such abilities and experience is magnified.

**Key benefits of the bid**

1.36 The Government, through the Front Runner process, is looking for communities to help others with neighbourhood planning by sharing their experiences of undertaking a plan themselves. For this to be effective, a Front Runner must be able to provide its experiences to other places which have similar circumstances, be they social, economic or environmental. Whilst this bid has many unique elements, its greatest asset is to show how a plan can support the development of the emerging Local Plan for the South Downs National Park.

1.37 The fundamental reason for introducing neighbourhood planning is that local people know their communities better than anyone else. However, this counts for little if there is not a complementary relationship between neighbourhood and district policy. Many neighbourhood plans will have to ‘bolt on’ to existing, up-to-date plans; however, the real opportunities for positive and efficient planning lie where the two tiers can work together towards the same goal.

1.38 This bid’s big selling point is the opportunity to provide a working example of an efficient framework for planning in the new era of localism. The future of planning is about district and neighbourhood working together and the neighbourhood plan for Fernhurst will have this at its heart.

1.39 To do this, the Front Runner grant is needed by SDNPA, to support Fernhurst Parish Council. A full and proper programme of engagement, coupled with the collection of a complementary evidence base, requires resources. We envisage that approximately 50% of the funds will be
needed to produce the plan, with the remaining 50% held back to cover the administrative and support costs of the SNDPA and the cost of the referendum.

**Contacts**

1.40 The lead contact at South Downs National Park Authority is:

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   Local Development Framework Lead
   Planning Department
   South Downs National Park Authority
   Rosemary's Parlour, North Street
   Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 9SB
   Telephone: 01730 811752
   Email: Tim.Richings@southdowns.gov.uk

1.41 At Fernhurst Parish Council, the clerk’s details are:

   David Bleach
   Clerk to Fernhurst Parish Council
   Village Hall, Glebe Road,
   Fernhurst, Haslemere,
   Surrey GU27 3EH
   Telephone: 01428 661150
   Email: postmaster@fernhurst-wsx-pc.gov.uk
Key documents

FERNHURST VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 1999
Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Chichester District Council

“...In Fernhurst lying near to its ancient church, is the nucleus of children parks and one or two
houses and also type of traditional cottages. If it is to be a pleasant place. What we have
must suit it in the view of planning code other or in harmony with anything and everything.”
Fernhurst Parish Magazine - February 1981

FERNHURST PARISH ACTION PLAN 2005

Fernhurst Parish Plan