

Report to New Buckenham Parish Council, October 2016

1. Before undertaking a full village opinion survey it is necessary to find out what issues concern people and therefore questions the survey should ask. This is usually done by a small scale preliminary survey which we will probably do, but the Bank Holiday fête provided us with a golden opportunity to do an impromptu 'vox pop' of villagers and visitors alike
2. Last month's report to the parish council, draft project plan and proposed neighbourhood boundary map were submitted too late to be agenda papers. Mary Manning, the newly co-opted councillor and working party member, was not given an opportunity to give a proper oral report. Inappropriate comments were voiced and the atmosphere was unhelpful
3. At the subsequent meeting of the working party (24 September) members concluded that in spite of the comments, they wished to continue with the neighbourhood plan project
4. A sticking point between the working party and some parish council opinion is whether or not a neighbourhood plan necessarily implies the identification of land for development. To resolve this and other technical issues, we are pleased to have arranged a meeting between some working party members and parish councillors in the presence of Susan Heinrich, Breckland neighbourhood planning officer. This meeting is to take place on Thursday
5. The working party still think the task of producing a plan is worthwhile but it will be onerous. As such we would only proceed with the full support and trust of the parish council. A written terms of reference is needed and this in fact has now been done
6. Last Wednesday Breckland Council presented their draft Local Plan in the village hall. It was poorly advertised in spite of efforts by the working party. Diligent research by Janet found that not only were there errors and inconsistencies in the plan relating to New Buckenham but the village was to be designated as having a 'settlement boundary' contrary to Breckland's own assessment of the criteria used. If the village is designated as not having a boundary it is seen as being part of the open countryside - where the restrictions are tighter - rather than part of a community with schools, public transport and significant employment. It's all a matter of definitions and a full explanation has been sent to the parish council

We appreciate that this designation may have been done with the best intentions to help the village's heritage but it is erroneous and the village has better protection without a settlement boundary. A designation of "no boundary" is not incidentally a mechanism to prevent building, it would simply give the village more control over the amount, design, and position of any building taking place

7. The designation or otherwise of a settlement boundary is **not the same** as the boundary we wish to establish for our neighbourhood plan. For the neighbourhood plan boundary we wish to include the whole parish of New Buckenham, plus the small part of Old Buckenham where our village's conservation area extends to include the castle and the fields up to but not including Mr Gladden's farm house. I have been invited to our equivalent in Old Buckenham to discuss this next Monday so need to know whether the proposed boundary is acceptable to the council
8. We look forward to reporting good progress following the meeting with Breckland's neighbourhood planning officer on Thursday.