

Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG)
Feedback and Update: Initial Consultation at the Village Hall - events held November 2023

Thanks to all who attended the initial November Consultation Launch Events at Roxton Village Hall. This leaflet is a summary of the comments we received, but a full list of all comments (*verbatim*) is available on our website www.RoxtonPlan.org.uk

Now we'll begin talks with other stakeholders - local landowners, businesses, government bodies, volunteer organisations, etc. Then, using all feedback and responses received, we'll draft a village-wide questionnaire.

Roxton
Neighbourhood Plan
Consultation Launch Event



Friday 17th November (5-7 pm)
and
Sunday 19th November (3-5 pm)
at
Roxton Village Hall

If you would like to add any comments or ask any questions, please email info@RoxtonPlan.org.uk. Or you can drop off written letters/hard copy comments at the NPSG drop-off boxes, located in Roxton Post Office or Roxton Village Hall.

You can still use the Information Booklet and questions issued before the consultation events (see image, left) If you need another copy, there are spares at the Post Office and Village Hall). Copies can be also downloaded from our 'Documents' page on the website.

Please send any further comments by **18th February 2024** (this is the deadline for Stage 1 Consultation). This is so we can consider them when speaking to landowners or in forming the residents' questionnaire.

Finally, you can still get involved! If you would like to join us in the NPSG, please contact us for details of our next meeting.

Best wishes,

Roxton Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group - NPSG (January 2024)

The following summaries are simply in the order they appeared in the Information Booklet.

1. The 'Key Issues'

Naturally, and as expected, there was a lot of discussion around **EWR**, the **Black Cat/A421** developments, including the 'Employment Zone' proposed on the *draft* Bedford Borough Council 2040 Local Plan, and proposals for **housing** developments. But there were also many comments about Roxton's **Conservation Area** designation, and what this means for Roxton's historic character and heritage.

2. Housing



There was some discussion about the School Lane development, but this is already in development. As a Steering Group we were keen to hear people's thoughts about any proposed or possible future housing in Roxton.

Generally, those who spoke to us weren't against further housing. They recognised Roxton needs more houses, particularly affordable homes, starter homes, homes for the elderly, bungalows, etc. However, most residents were in agreement any new housing should be in keeping with the existing rural, agricultural character of the village. Comments included that housing should be in a 'village not town style'. In terms of design, 'no more than two stories', 'bungalows', and even 'modern thatch' were all mentioned. Some emphasised the need for green, sustainable housing, built with "very very low carbon materials". Alongside this there were requests that there should be a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), in addition to maintaining existing hedges and trees. The Neighbourhood Plan could potentially include 'Design Codes' for any new houses, so this is something which will be reflected in the questionnaires.

The general consensus for potential sites and size of housing developments was a preference for small, infill development, rather than large-scale estates; though, the latter would mean more funding. Small potential sites mentioned were on Old Bedford Road, or Park Road, with some larger sites also suggested (e.g. the opposite side of the C44). There was a focus on ‘visual amenity’ and protecting the rural approach to, and character of, Roxton. The need for green barriers between the A421 and Roxton, the A1 and Roxton, or future employment zones/train lines and Roxton, were all strongly emphasised.

Finally, there was a general feeling the existing infrastructure would be unable to support more housing. People pointed out there are already issues, including regular cut-offs, with water pressure, sewerage management, internet capacity, and electric supply. They also raised the issue that more residents would need increased access to GPs, dentists, health facilities, and schooling.

Next steps... We’ll speak to local landowners, and perhaps look at the land included in the ‘call for sites’ for the *draft* 2040 Local Plan. It’s important to note, we’ll include specific questions on the questionnaire about any potential sites for your views.

3. Environment and Green Infrastructure

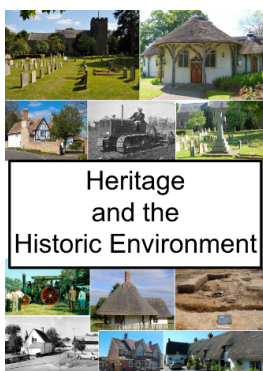


The Steering Group’s role was mainly to make people aware of what Green Infrastructure (GI) is, and people were very interested in this topic. Popular areas for discussion included the need to retain and maintain public footpaths (grass footpaths), bridleways, existing nature trails, and so on. Some asked if there might be a way to ‘open up’ routes to the river a little more, so this asset could be enjoyed more easily (even just the riverside walk), or by allowing for moorings, access for kayaks/water sports etc. We’ll need to speak to the Environment Agency and Rivers & Canals Trust about these proposals, but it all adds to the discussion.

Further ideas for additional green spaces were presented - allotments being a very popular request - but there were also suggestions of a community orchard, communal gardens, green spaces with seating/ picnic areas, or wildlife areas. Overall, residents felt that there is a need to protect and preserve existing trees, hedges and green spaces. But there was also a definite wish for *more* tree planting, hedge screening and green infrastructure, as well as minimising manmade street furniture (posts, signs, etc.).

Next steps... We’ll speak to local landowners, the Environment Agency, the Rivers & Canals Trust, wildlife organisations, etc. We’ll also look at guidance about GI (such as that from Natural England and Bedford Borough Council, including the draft ‘Trees and Development’ guidance). We hope to commission a green infrastructure survey.

4. Heritage and the Historic Environment



This was very popular, and a number of subjects came up in discussion. There was a general consensus Roxton’s designation as a Conservation Area, and the fact that it has a number of (listed and unlisted) historical buildings, should be at the heart of any future development. A few people used the opportunity to ask questions - to clarify exactly where the Conservation Area is, what the rules are on listed buildings, etc; all of which was fine, even if not directly relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan. If anything, it highlighted an opportunity for further community engagement (perhaps in association with local history groups) if the community could organise heritage events, talks, etc.

A few people were keen to extend the Conservation Area (to include Roxton Park, Ford Lane, or other appropriate areas). Residents discussed how they would like the ‘rural’ character/visual entrances to the village to be maintained (‘College Farm in particular could suffer from warehousing behind’).

Many residents who attended the events lived in, or close to, an historic building or heritage asset. Everyone was keen to state they considered it their ‘duty’ to protect and preserve the historic environment.

In addition to the more general discussion, residents also named a number of specific heritage assets they felt would benefit from inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan (in some way):

- **The Pub** - many residents emphasised the importance of a working village pub 'which provides the heart of the community'
- **The Old Smithy** - was mentioned as in need of protecting/saving ('especially with all the HGVs rattling past')
- **Roxton Chapel** - people were keen to see the space used and building preserved
- **Village Hall** - would like to renovate in keeping with the conservation area - less 80s, more greenery and sort the parking
- **The Church** - should remain as a focal point for the village.

With the exception of the Village Hall, these are all privately owned, so we'll need to work closely with asset owners. Perhaps they may want their building to be added to the heritage list, or see what grants might be available for repair, or consider how they might be further protected/preserved in the Neighbourhood Planning process. However, this will mainly be led by the owners themselves. What was very clear is Roxton residents have a lot of passion for our local heritage, and really value our historic environment.

There were comments about other aspects of the historic environment too. The inappropriateness of some street lighting was an unexpectedly popular topic, as well as the poor standard of footpaths and excessive street furniture (poles, signs, etc.). There was a general consensus future plans must take such things into account, and that the Neighbourhood Plan is a good opportunity to consider the wider historical character of the area (not just listed buildings). Finally, there were a number of requests for some sort of heritage trail ('wayfinding/ history boards'), which would certainly be something the Neighbourhood Plan could consider.

Next steps... Historic England is already a statutory consultee in the Neighbourhood Planning process, but we'll also engage with local heritage organisations, as well as private owners, to garner their thoughts and ideas. We'll also need to speak to the Conservation Officer at Bedford Borough Council.

5. Employment



Discussion under this theme mainly centred around the proposed 'Employment Zone' (EZ) on the *draft* 2040 Bedford Local Plan. Residents mentioned how they would prefer 'business centre' type development, rather than industrial units ('small office/ commercial units e.g. 2,000 sqft should be encouraged over big sheds'). They also emphasised the importance of screening this EZ from the village and ensuring the rural character of Roxton was maintained. There were suggestions for any new buildings in the EZ to be no higher than existing village buildings. There was a duplicated comment (also in Green Infrastructure) for 'all developments to be obligated to retain existing trees and hedges as well as 10% BNG'. Also, a comment about 'dark skies' (again - lighting/ light pollution), along with noise pollution, came up here, as well as in 'Heritage' and 'Environment'.

Elsewhere in the Neighbourhood, people mentioned how they would like:

- A village shop
- A pub (mentioned under this topic as well as 'Heritage')

Roxton's increasing popularity as a 'commuter' village was mentioned, alongside the suggestion we should consider the amount of home-based businesses (or work-from-home employment), especially post-pandemic. Discussion was mainly focused on how we can enhance the community 'by working in the village, for the village'. One suggestion, for example, was how we need better internet/broadband facilities to encourage home-working ('could the village invest in fibre?').

There was a strong emphasis on the need for sustainability; either in the type of businesses and employment encouraged by the Neighbourhood Plan (e.g. 'promote artisan skills', 'green employment') or generally (e.g. a few feel 'current local facilities, such as sewerage, are currently not up to job' and some mentioned the need for 'low-traffic businesses' if located in the village).

Next steps... we'll engage with local business owners and send out a business-owners' questionnaire.

6. Getting about (Transport)



Transport and Getting About

This was perhaps the most popular topic. People are very worried about the impact the proposed EWR route will have on Roxton. We are sure campaigns elsewhere will continue, and the Neighbourhood Plan can only really suggest ideas if EWR goes ahead.

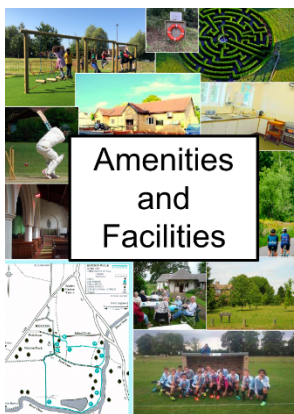


We need to ensure we are prepared if it is built e.g. to request methods to mitigate the impact such as trees to screen, or community spaces. 'The final mile' plans (i.e. footpaths and roads around the new station/surrounding villages) are also important to prepare for. It's clear people feel very passionately about the issue.

Trafficwise, people were in favour of existing proposals to reduce the village speed limit to 20 mph. However, a number of residents also stressed the need for a reduced speed limit on the C44 (old A421) - ideally down to 40mph, or even 30mph. Other suggestions/improvements people would like to see are 'decent cycle lanes [and footpaths] to connect to other villages', as well as 'live digital bus time displays' and better pavements. People noted, with the EWR in mind, that it is even more important if Roxton is to avoid being completely 'cut off' except by car.

Next steps... We'll need to engage with National Highways, Bedford Highways, and possibly EWR, to plan strategically.

7. Amenities and Facilities



Amenities and Facilities

There was a lot of discussion about existing amenities and facilities, including ideas for improvement. The topic of a village pub came up again - mainly with positive suggestions on how it could be used, once again, as a focus for the community (possibly in connection with a shop/ cafe, etc.).

People also asked for more regular bulky waste collections. This is something Roxton Parish Council could suggest (now), rather than waiting for the Neighbourhood Plan. As with other themes, there are some interesting topics to discuss, but it's not clear how any Neighbourhood Plan can incorporate them. People asked for 'more' and 'better' amenities for the disabled and elderly, though nothing specific at this stage, other than improved pavements and footpaths etc. It may be useful for us to organise an accessibility assessment of some sort.

One suggestion for new/better amenities was for a new multi-use pavilion on the playing field and a Roxton tennis court was also mentioned. People are happy with the existing play area. In fact, once the School Lane development is completed, there will be two. The lack of graveyard space was mentioned by people connected to the Church where there's a need for a new graveyard/extension.

Facilities/amenities mentioned in the other topics (allotments, footpaths, parking, etc.) also came up under this topic, as did the need for better infrastructure (sewage, water, internet), but such things have also been covered above.

Overall, people felt there was a good village community spirit, but people would like to continue to build on this (film nights, games nights, shopping/indoor market events, workshops, etc.). Existing facilities and amenities, such as the 'Ivel Sprinter', mobile library, playground, etc. were all praised. One person mentioned Roxton Maze and asked why this isn't well-known/ what will happen to it.

Next steps... We'll meet with local organisations to see how we can incorporate ideas into the Neighbourhood Plan. There are some aspects that can certainly be included in developing the Plan, but there are also some that are really up to the local community and residents themselves to organise.

Again, if you would like to add any comments to these, or ask any questions, please email info@RoxtonPlan.org.uk before **18th February 2024**, or you can drop off written letters/hard copy comments at the NPSG drop-off boxes, located in Roxton Post Office or Roxton Village Hall.