

Wolverton Parish Council
Summary of Extraordinary Meeting on 2 December 2014 at 7.30pm
Venue: Wolverton Church Rooms

1. Present and apologies

Cllrs Stone, Payne, Rowley, Tunbridge and Barnes; Clerk; County Councillor Horner for part of the meeting; Ms Keri Dobson from Dobson Grey and her assistant; and twenty eight parishioners. No apologies.

2. Disclosure of interests

Cllr Stone declared a non pecuniary interest in development of the land along Wolverton Rd. In view of this, Cllr Payne chaired the meeting.

3. The proposals

Cllr Payne explained that the meeting had been arranged in response to Ms Dobson's request to consult with the parish about proposals to develop this land. (This was in the context of an exploratory discussion and not in relation to a specific planning application). He invited Ms Dobson to present her proposals, with parishioners having a chance to express their views thereafter.

Ms Dobson explained the purpose of the meeting, to discuss proposals for developing the land - this as a start, to ensure any development reflects the existing and future needs of the community. She clarified the role of Dobson Grey in acting for the landowner Mr Thomas, who wished to proceed in consultation with the village. She provided an overview of the history of the site, including past planning permission and her view of the outcome of prior discussion with the Parish Council as supportive of a new development that reflected a 'farmyard' setting.

Ms Dobson put forward initial proposals for two different layouts, written information about which, including graphics, was made available to the meeting. One was essentially a barn style development of mixed, private housing in a courtyard setting, the other a row of family / executive homes.

In presenting the proposals, Ms Dobson:

- Outlined possible benefits to the local community, including improved infrastructure for example electricity supply
- Suggested this was a opportunity to meet local housing need, for family housing and/or for elderly/disabled residents through a 'small scale, community led development' in line with needs identified in the Parish Plan and in compliance with Stratford District Council's (SDC) Core Strategy.
- Explained that the development would be compatible with SDC's policy requirements for renewable and sustainable energy, as far as was feasible

- Emphasised the central location of the development within the village, which she considered would not be harmful to the amenity of the area village and which, at worst, would have a neutral social, economic and environmental impact. The top part of the field would be retained as community space, such as a garden or seating area.
- Suggested that the addition of family housing would help sustain the local school, which had previously been under threat of closure.

4. Responses

A lengthy discussion of the proposals took place, with most attendees making a contribution.

The Parish Council refuted any suggestion that prior support had been given to a 'farmyard' style development, or indeed any other development on the site. The Council also clarified that neither the Parish Plan nor the Housing Needs Survey evidenced housing needs in the village compatible with the proposals, the need for housing being minimal.

Parishioners raised a number of concerns about the proposals, as follows:

- The contentious history of the site – planning permission lapsed many years previously and a subsequent re-application, opposed by the Parish Council and parishioners, was refused by the Planning Committee under the planning system that existed at the time. The site is agricultural land located within the green belt.
- Lack of infrastructure – public transport, medical services, shop, etc – renders the site unsustainable. It is unsuitable for elderly and disabled people, given the lack of local amenities and geography of the site, being on a hill.
- Consistency of electricity supply was not seen as an issue – slow broadband and poor mobile phone coverage are key issues.
- There is no need for either a row of executive style homes, which would be a poor fit with the village or a new barn style development. The village has developed over time, through the development of agricultural buildings and extensions to existing homes.
- The school is not undersubscribed or under threat.
- It is not reasonable to describe the proposed developments as 'modest', in relation to the size of the village, nor 'community' led.
- Access to the site is problematic, in terms of road safety and parking. The idea of numerous separate driveways directly off Wolverton Road was opposed.
- The prominence of the housing would overly dominate the village; and cause loss of light to the existing housing on the opposite side of the road.
- The curtilidge around the perimeter Manor Farm bungalow prohibits development at the apex of the site, which could not therefore be reserved for use as a community space.

- Development of the site would exacerbate issues of excess water run off and potential flooding to properties opposite, already a problem in case of heavy rain. Reduction of the soak away capacity of the field was identified as a critical issue, notwithstanding the remedial suggestions made.

A small number of parishioners expressed potential support for development, as follows:

- There is a need to re-invigorate the village, attract new life and prevent stagnation
- A chance for older residents to downsize to smaller accommodation within the village; including the provision of a bungalow on the site, the need for which was identified in the Parish Plan.
- Opportunity to take a positive approach to developing attractive housing in the village, supporting SDC's Core Strategy for the provision of needed new homes in the district.

Overall, a majority of those present opposed the proposals.

5. Next Steps

A summary of the meeting to be made available via parish notice board and on the Parish Council's website.

Ms Dobson to discuss the outcome of the meeting with her client. Parishioners are welcome to contact Ms Dobson directly, using the contact details she provided.

Cllr Payne thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting.

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