



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

**Minutes of a Local Needs Housing Committee Meeting held in the Main Hall,
Ashurst Village Hall on Monday 23rd January 2012 at 7.30pm**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllr Woodward (Chairman) Cllrs Mrs Hull, Mrs Soyke, Brown, Langridge, Milner and Cllr Mrs Jeffreys (ex-officio)

OFFICER PRESENT: Chris May, Clerk

There were approximately 40 members of the public present including Borough Cllrs Jukes and Stanyer; Alison Thompson English Rural Housing Association (ERHA) and Sarah Lewis TWBC

1. **Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest:** There were none
2. **Declarations of Lobbying:** Cllr Brown had received a telephone call from a resident about the subject and Cllrs Mrs Hull, Milner and Woodward had been contacted by residents on the issue.
3. **Apologies for Absence:** There were none
4. **Minutes** of the meeting **dated 29th November 2011**, copies having previously been forwarded to all Members, were approved and signed as a correct record.
5. **Matters Arising and Correspondence:**
There were no matters arising or correspondence on matters that was not covered by items on the Agenda.
6. **ERHA** – Alison Thompson said that reports on both Consultation Days had been sent to the Parish Council. She noted that the two key objections or concerns regarding the development were Green Belt and highways issues. She said that ERHA had been contacted by TWBC to prepare a proposal on the site and it was within their rural exception site policy to build on Green Belt. The Highways Safety Audit had concerns about visibility from the site so ERHA had employed an independent consultant to review the highways issue. She said that the new proposals increased the visibility splays from 65m to 86m south and 83m north. There would need to be the removal of some hedgerow but a new one would be planted slightly further back before it was removed and it would be done gradually. There would also need to be the removal of a sycamore tree which would be replaced with a semi mature tree. KHS were now satisfied that it meets the requirements with the 30mph limit extended which may include an ISS.
Sarah Lewis confirmed that the new proposals had been passed at planning officer level.
7. **Public Open Session:**
Cllr Woodward stated that the session had been limited to 30 minutes as per the Agenda and asked who wanted to speak. The following residents addressed the committee;
Graham Smith-Tilley asked how much account of Parishioners views had been taken in to account; did the Council believe the poll figures and questioned the viability of the project.
Sana Smith-Tilley said that she understood the highways report was not available to the public until after the Full Council meeting and queried the reasons; did the email replies after the exit polls alter the

balance of results; she said that it may be defined as a rural exception site but it did not address the concerns of the village and she did not believe, despite assurances of not building on more of the land, that the precedent would not be broken and she said the vast majority were against the development. Richard Larkin again mentioned that a driveway from his house on to the Langton Road had been closed by KHS in 1971, when traffic was much lighter, due to road safety issues and did not understand how it is now considered safe to allow a development to be built there. He also considered the felling of a mature tree unjustifiable.

Ian Danks thought that normally the Parish Council should resist encroachment into the Green belt; that the project should have looked at the Parish as a whole and compared the proposed development to garden grabbing which our MP was against before he was in government.

Tina Arnold had not attended previous meetings but was not convinced of the proven need for these houses.

Cllr Woodward then invited the two Borough Cllrs to speak

Cllr Stanyer said he was disappointed in the proposal and that it should be on a Brown Field site and not in Green Belt; he felt it was in an inappropriate place – it was the gateway site in to the village and it would spoil the approach; he considered that further development on the site was a possibility and that it was the wrong site in the wrong village.

Cllr Jukes was surprised to hear that KHS had already approved the new highways proposals; he was in favour of the scheme in principle but it was the wrong site; he went on to say that the housing problem is not going to go away and that Tunbridge Wells needs to build 1,200 houses over the next few years and that housing could be inflicted upon Parishes.

8. Review of letters sent and replies received

Cllr Woodward asked Cllrs if they were satisfied with the replies received from the three letters that had been sent to ERHA, TWBC and Greg Clark MP.

Cllr Brown read some excerpts from the letters and was concerned that priority would not be given to applicants with the strongest connection to the Parish. Sarah Lewis said that once the connection is made then it is based on housing need.

Cllr Brown was also concerned that applicants whose connection with the Parish changed could stay on for 20 years until tenancy agreements were due to be reviewed.

Cllr Milner said that the criteria for having a local connection were more demanding in the Ashford area and thought the TWBC criteria weak.

9. Review of Consultation Day and results

Cllr Brown said that the views expressed at the Consultation event were a reflection of those that had turned up. In his opinion the Consultation Days were held too late in the process.

Cllr Mrs Hull said that it was TWBC policy that Cllrs should act on the public view.

10. Review of environmental and highways surveys

The issues had been discussed throughout the evening and on previous occasions and Cllrs did not believe that further discussion was necessary.

11. Consideration of whether a referendum of the village/parish is required

Cllr Langridge said that after two consultation days, one in favour and one against, he was in favour of a Parish wide referendum with a member of the public helping with questions.

There was then further discussion on whether it should be a Parish or Village referendum.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys asked what a referendum would achieve – referendums are advisory and Cllrs have to make a decision. She wondered if the Council would be any the wiser. Cllr Brown said a referendum was an abdication of Cllrs responsibility.

Cllr Soyke was concerned that planning nationally was in a state of flux and the NPPF throws this issue in to disarray.

There was further discussion and additional views were expressed. Cllr Woodward then asked Cllrs if they needed to be better informed to make a decision and it was decided that no referendum would be recommended at this stage.

Agenda item 13 was brought forward to item 12

12. Consideration of a recommendation to Full Council on Local Needs Housing (Agenda item 13)

Cllr Woodward asked each Cllr to have a final say on the issue before voting.

Cllr Milner said he felt the criteria were too weak and in balance was against the proposal.

Cllr Mrs Hull was against using Green belt for LNH. Her view was that all affordable housing within the village envelope should be considered as local needs housing and that the Parish Council should liaise more with landlords of existing stock in the village. She thought that consultation with the public should

have occurred earlier in the process and that the public had informed the Parish Council of their views over the last year at all meetings and consultation days.

Cllr Langridge said that with the information currently at hand he could not support the proposal. He added that the survey circulated by residents, which contained inaccurate information, had made the picture more confusing.

Cllr Brown was on balance against development in Green Belt and had a problem with a number of issues. He said that he wanted the minutes to reflect that both ERHA and TWBC have previously said that they would not go ahead without the endorsement of the Parish Council.

Cllr Mrs Jeffreys said that she was convinced there was a need and that the highways issue was workable. The Green Belt issue was difficult but this was a chance for people to live in the Village and therefore she was in favour of the project.

Cllr Mrs Soyke she was in favour of this type of development but the criteria were too weak and consequently she was against.

The committee **AGREED** by a vote of 5-1 with one abstention to recommend to Full Council that the development should not proceed.

13. Consideration of a recommendation confirming the number of houses to be allocated to Speldhurst residents (Agenda item 12)

It was decided not to take action on this item

14. Items for Information:

Cllrs agreed that other site options with more information and stronger criteria were required.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm

Chairman