

Development at Roughmoor Lane, Westbury

Notes of village meeting on 24 July 2024. Start 19.30

(29 attendees).

Mick Fletcher (MF) explained the purpose of the meeting. It was an opportunity for those who hadn't attended the Church Commissioners presentation on 10 July to see the CC's latest proposals for Roughmoor Lane (RL) development. It was also an opportunity for villagers to share their views on the proposed planning application to help people to respond to the CCs and to any subsequent planning application submitted by them. A show of hands indicated that a number of people present had not attended the CC's presentation.

MF stressed that we are at the outline planning stage and more detailed plan will follow when a developer puts in a detailed planning application, possibly next year.

MF introduced Kate, a post graduate Urban Planning student at UWE working on her Agency Practice Project to assist the Neighbourhood Planning Working Group (NPWG) to draft the Neighbourhood Plan (NP).

It was explained that the Mendip Local Plan had allocated land at RL for housing. Various requirements were attached to the allocation. There have been pre-application consultations with Somerset planners and the community and it is expected that a formal outline planning application for the RL site will be made by the CCs in the Autumn. The legal planning process then kicks in. If the planners turn down the application the CCs can appeal.

The government's requirement for more housing to be built tilts the planning balance in favour of any planning application being approved.

Assuming outline planning is approved, it is likely that the CCs would sell the site to a developer, who could land bank the site for later development, or put in a detailed planning application which could change some of the features agreed in the outline planning. Many items of detail are not fixed at the outline planning stage.

The Mendip Local Plan sets a minimum of 40 houses on the RL site. This minimum housing requirement is not constrained by the notional allocation of 50 new houses to be built in the village of which 12 have already been built.

Tony Westcott (TW) went through the CC's latest proposal. The brownfield site is outside the development area and is not part of the planning proposal. There has however been some discussion about the potential use and future use of the brownfield site which is ongoing.

The current proposal shows: 60 houses; 0.1 ha in NE corner of the site for community use; 30% affordable housing; new access to the site and RL through the Mortar Pits layby; an attenuation pond to the SW of the development site, but outside the boundary of the allocated land; a 0.13 ha bat corridor; some views of the church are included. No safe pedestrian crossing of the A371 is shown; this is still under discussion with Somerset Highways. Simon Reece's paper, written in February 2022, suggests the bat corridor should be 12m wide, instead of the 8m on CC's plan. The CCs have a copy of this paper. Prior to final agreement of the Mendip LP, the Planning Inspector had

proposed a bat corridor of 0.27 ha. The design and appearance of the houses is not stated and will be included in reserved matters, which will be finalised when a developer puts in a detailed planning application. There is an indication of £100k for social infrastructure funding for each of health and education. A landscape visual assessment will need to be done.

MF opened up the meeting to attendees to add any information they had gleaned from the CCS's representatives at their presentation and to express their views about the application.

A – Had been told that the PTP sewage plant in SW corner would be emptied by tanker. MF said this will be queried with the CCs.

It was agreed that the bottom of the site sketch had a large degree of artistic license and does not reflect the reality of the southern edge of the field.

B – Was concerned about asbestos contamination which was potentially in the barns on the brownfield site but could impact on the development site. It was felt that the previous removal of the roof and sides of one of the metal barns was not well carried out.

C – Agreed that asbestos cement was in the side and roof panels of the metal barns but that there was only a danger of contamination if these were not properly removed.

D – Confirmed that the CCs had put in a separate planning application to demolish the metal barns. The Parish Council (PC) will express to the planners the need for a professional demolition of these barns.

A – Why does the planning application not include houses on the brownfield site?

MF – The brownfield land is outside the village development area. Getting planning for houses here would be more difficult and expensive because of the proximity to the listed buildings and the conservation area. Planners have already expressed a view to the CCs that a planning application for houses on the brownfield site was unlikely to succeed.

A – What was the future for the brownfield site?

MF – CCs have been pressed to sell the brownfield site to the village. CCs say they are constrained by their obligation to get the best possible value from any sale of the brownfield site. Talks are continuing with the CCs about acquiring this site.

D – Planners concerned that any development on brownfield site would affect the views of the church and impact on adjacent listed buildings.

C – He understood the CCs did want to sell the brownfield site.

B – Concerned that the site entrance onto the A371 would create a traffic pinch point in the village in addition to the one at the narrowing of the road at the current RL junction.

MF confirmed Highways will have the final say on road layout.

A – Reported that the CC's consultant mentioned the possibility of changes to the A371 might include a single-track road, rumble strips but no roundabouts.

D – Said the PC had funded a highways survey. The expert who wrote the survey will be used, if appropriate, to professionally challenge highways proposals in the final application.

E – Does the moving of the community space affect the housing density on the site?

MF – No.

F – Asked if the majority of villagers were in favour of the development? His fear was that once the development was completed then further applications will be made to develop other sites in the village.

Chris Langdon (CL) – Village survey suggests 70% of villagers OK with 40 houses in village over next 15 years. The spread of views of numbers of houses is from none to 50. Everyone who expressed a view says 60 is too many. We need to say why 60 is too many for it to carry weight with the planners.

MF – 80 people (10% of village) turned up to latest CC presentation. 42 completed the exit poll. The majority objected to 60 houses. 12 wanted no houses.

A – The attenuation pond is shown as outside the development area – putting it into the site should reduce the number of houses.

It was asked whether there was any guidance given by planners on attenuation ponds?

MF – Planners say dispersal of water should happen throughout the site and not simply rely on large ponds.

CL – CC have planned for some absorbent spaces within the site plus the pond. Planners say attenuation ponds outside the site happen all the time. Not aware of any case law on this issue. Somerset have not granted sufficient planning permissions for the right number of houses to meet any 5-year plan so the planning balance is tilted in favour of more houses not less.

D – Phosphate situation means there aren't the number of houses in the pipeline that there should be. The new government wants more houses. Resolving the phosphate issue could release up to 18,000 houses into the pipeline across Somerset. There are some large development applications potentially coming into the pipeline which could change the outlook on the need for new houses.

G – There are a lot of houses on the market. Questions if there is a need for new houses?

D – Agreed. There is a slowing down of building on existing sites, plus land banking happening,

H – Phosphates can take up to 30 years to be removed from the ground. Will they wait this length of time before building on affected sites?

D – Thought addressing the phosphate issue is likely to be through making phosphate credits easier to obtain rather than removing phosphates. There are 12,000 families registered on home finder in Somerset.

MF- Looking at the RL site requirements: the minimum 40 houses, 0.1 ha of community land and bat habitat requirements met by the proposal. A safe crossing of A371 and impact on listed building

requirements have not been met. Biodiversity Net Gain requirement not demonstrated as met but given that the site is currently mostly used for maize this should not be a problem for CCs. Don't think they have demonstrated that current amenities are safeguarded. Style and materials are reserved matters for later. As is site layout and landscaping.

F – Told there will be no garages despite these being shown on site sketch.

I – Told there was no difference in height of 2.5 storey house compared to 2 storey house.

E – works for a social housing developer. He expects Highways will accept what is in the proposal for roads. Different developers want different size sites but there is currently a big demand for sites. Suggested people look at how the reserved matters have been concluded on other recent local sites for an idea as to what will be accepted. Garages are unlikely on new sites as mostly used as storage rather than to park cars in.

D – Supplementary guidance is reducing the number of required parking spaces in urban areas. Narrower streets are also being approved. We should argue that the lack of public transport, lack of local jobs, distance to train station all point to a need for higher number of parking spaces.

CC said their survey showed only 4 parking spaces in use at Mortar Pits.

D – Photo evidence of parking need might be useful.

CL – Mortar Pits is approximately 45m long, which equates to 10 cars lengthways and 20 perpendicular to road, though this would block the pedestrian marked area.

B – Concerned about fume pollution when cars held up at pinch points.

G – Concerned that current unrestricted areas of highway will have double yellow lines added further reducing parking potential. Thought the likelihood of enforcement was probably minimal.

A – Thought the new kink where RL would meet the new road will create a new pinch point as will go from two-carriageway to single-track on a tight bend with poor visibility because of hedging.

F – He is concerned about increased traffic queues through the village because of traffic volume and additional pinch points.

E – He referred to Stoke St Michael which had 4 sites seeking planning permission at roughly the same time and none of them were refused for traffic issues despite the obvious traffic flow increases.

CL outlined what arguments might carry weight with the planners. CCs were told to consult the community, so we need as many people as possible to comment to the CCs about their proposal.

H – Are comments from previous consultations carried forward if they haven't been addressed in the latest proposal.

CL – He was unsure about this.

CL – The NPWG will provide feedback to CC. Stressed the need for individuals to respond also. The deadline to provide feedback to CCs has been extended to 31/7.

CL – Planning arguments that may carry weight are as follows:

Number of houses. Simply saying 60 houses is too many is not sufficient. Need to say why 60 houses is too many by relation to traffic safety, pinch points, lack of local jobs, poor public transport, impact on village character, urban v village footprint, reference Settlement Character Assessment, government net zero goal by having more housing near jobs and other facilities.

Pedestrian Safety on A371. Planners interpret the WM1 requirement as there is a need for safe crossing to village facilities. The Highways Scoping report suggests what needs to be considered and evidenced. The dark skies policy can be compromised in favour of a safe crossing facility. The documents are on the NP page of the village website.

Highway safety. Visibility splays probably don't meet minimum requirement, pinch points causing tailbacks and pollution, parking issues, lack of public transport, loss of Mortar Pits area. Volume of traffic on the A371 is very unlikely to be an argument that holds any weight.

Phosphates. Issue needs to be resolved. Believe we are in a phosphate affected area.

Attenuation Pond. No reasonable argument for having it outside development area. Destroys more agricultural land.

Settlement Character. 60 houses impacts on the character of the village –. More an urban development in character than a rural development. Back-to-back gardens are a rare feature in the village. Landscape assessments make no reference to views from higher points of the National Landscape (NL formerly AONB) which overlook the village. Detrimental impact on NL. Recent planning appeal refusal refers to importance of preserving views in and out of NL.

Community Space. It is now shown on plan as in the area preferred by the village but need to be reassured that planning for a suitable village hall there will be granted.

D – Can we get planning appeal case judgement on website.

MF – Yes.

TW – We live in a beautiful area where views and the landscape are important. We need to move forward quickly with NP to help protect our village from bad growth. We need policies in place to guide any changes to our village going forward.

A – Concerned about community space being used for village hall especially if village also acquires brownfield space for communal use as this will be moving the village core to the south of the A371.

MF – We will still have community facilities to north of A371 and people living on both sides needing to access all facilities.

MF- Asked people to provide feedback to CCs. NPWG will give a collective response but the more feedback the better.

D - Much better for people to put their feedback in their own words rather than copy a standard format

MF – After doing feedback, next step is to wait for a planning application to be submitted which will then trigger a further round of meetings to consider what has finally been applied for. The meeting agreed this as a way forward.

Meeting closed at 21:30