

MINUTES

Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting of Woodham Walter Parish Council.
Held at 8.00pm in Woodham Walter Village Hall, Rectory Road, Woodham Walter.

Wednesday 18th March 2015

Present:

Cllr. Peter Warren
Cllr. Joanna Symons
Cllr. James Bunn
Cllr. Angus Neale
Cllr. James Rushton
Cllr. John Tompkins

Others: Jacky Bannerman (Parish Clerk)
District Councillor Henry Bass

Public: 52

1494. Welcome Cllr Peter Warren welcomed those present to the meeting and gave an explanation of the format of the meeting. District Councillor Henry Bass introduced himself to those present and explained that he would be observing proceedings but would not be commenting.

1495. Apologies For Absence Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr. Mark Durham. It was explained that he has declared a Pecuniary Interest in the planning application which is to be discussed FUL/MAL/15/00047 as the applicant is his employer and he is therefore not present for the meeting.

1496. Disclosure of Interests/Consideration of Dispensations To disclose the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, other Pecuniary Interests or Non-Pecuniary Interests relating to items of business on the agenda having regard to paragraphs 6-10 inclusive of the Code of Conduct for Members. (Members are reminded they are also required to disclose any such interests as soon as they become aware should the need arise throughout the meeting).

Other than Cllr. Durham's interest which has already been declared, there were no other issues declared. The register was duly signed.

1497. Public Forum There were 52 members of the public present.

Mr Matthew Manning representing the Warren Golf Club spoke about the application. He explained that the housing development was needed in order to make investment into the business. It has been apparent since taking over that the business has lacked investment over many years and now finds itself needing considerable money to be invested by shareholders to keep the business going. They are trying to diversify as the golf industry generally is declining and the business is losing money. They plan to expand more into the weddings market and they also hope to develop other areas of the business and improve facilities. The project requires an £8m investment. The original plan had been for 6 homes but subsequent analysis of the business has shown further funding will be required. During a consultation process in 2013 and a pre-application meeting with Maldon District Council several areas of concern were raised with the project including the original proposed location of the housing scheme which has now been moved to address the issues raised by MDC officer. It had in fact been the officer at MDC who had suggested moving away from the woodland because they felt that the visual impact would be reduced in the current proposed position and they had suggested that the village green would benefit from being enclosed. Also the fact that it was to be an enablement project had to be expanded upon and this has now been more fully explored and will be a legally binding commercial enablement scheme. The full financial enablement document will be cross examined by MDC. There are no affordable houses included in the scheme at this stage, there may be the opportunity to add some but this would increase the size of the scheme. He believes that the site is sustainable and that they have proved this in the application documents.

They have addressed any traffic/highways issues by having the entrance/exit via the lodge park and the main entrance to the Warren and this would therefore not increase the traffic through the village. There is likely to be a rural allocation of 420 houses across the district which could mean local villages would need to have approx. 12-15 houses or so and this development could more or less achieve that for Woodham Walter in a contained and managed way negating the need for other development around the village.

The Warren Estate is supportive of the village and local community.

Cllr. Warren thanked Mr Manning for his comments and invited those members of the audience who had declared their intention to speak to give their comments.

Mr John Williams: Commented that the application seemed to have arrived very suddenly. The recent Village Design Statement document which was being prepared shows that this application is contrary in many ways to village wishes. It is outside the village envelope. None of the proposed houses are affordable. He was concerned at the time that the Herbage Park development was approved that it would lead to more development and this is now proved so. He does not think that the village should help the Warren Golf Club out of their financial difficulties. He hopes that the council will reject the application.

Mrs Patricia Herrmann: Commented on the enabling development aspect of the application. The last time she remembers this coming up in the village was for The Bell – look at it now under correct ownership/management! She does support local business and wants them to make the most of their business and opportunities but the application as enabling is not acceptable. Under normal circumstances this should come with terrific benefits such as heritage but nothing links this development to ensure this goes hand in hand with the future plans and it should not be allowed to proceed as an enabling project. There are plenty of reasons in the advice letter contained within the documents from the officer at MDC for refusal in spite of problems with MDC land supply. There are plenty of policies which would apply that should be used to refuse this application. Woodham Walter is not designated for development. The village has a poor infrastructure in place which would not be suitable for this development. She is cynical as to how the project can be tied into investment in the business, the case for enabling has not been made. Considers the Parish Council would be justified in recommending refusal.

Mr Tony Maxwell: Commented that the application contained no affordable houses.

Miss Kayleigh Durrant: Commented that she has lived in the village all her life and wouldn't want to see The Warren business close and supports the application for houses.

Mrs Gill Orford: Commented that Maldon District Council don't appear to listen to the views of villagers and asked how we can get them to hear what the village want. Also how can the village be kept informed.

Mr Paul Mumford: Questioned what the possible outcomes are if houses are or aren't built. What happens to the golf club if they aren't built and contrarily he has concerns if they are built, will more houses follow on the remaining land?

Mr John Clarke: Concern expressed about changing the location – where will it stop? Concern also that there is no allowance for social housing.

Mr Naitan Tucker: Commented that he thinks the government will force Woodham Walter to build houses. These houses will be out of sight and it should be supported.

Cllr. Warren thanked those who had expressed an interest in speaking and as there was time remaining set aside for the public forum, asked if there were any questions?

Mr Paul Mumford: asked what would happen to the business if the application is not successful?

Mr Matthew Manning: responded that the full investment required for all improvements is £8m, they are expecting to receive £3 - £3.5m from the housing development and he would have to source this money from elsewhere which would not be easy. They would probably have to reconsider how the business can develop and some areas of the business which are not financial viable may be lost. They could look to increase the number of lodges and gain funds through sale/rental but there would have to be fundamental changes to the business. They have already committed to refurbishment of the gym and the Warren Clubhouse redevelopment has started. There are 400 members of the Warren who hold them to account. He gave reassurance that the project would be a legally binding commercially enabling project.

Mr Chris Wheadon: asked as they own a considerable amount of land are there any future plans for further development in other areas?

Mr Matthew Manning: The business plans have been presented to MDC. Bunsay Downs is a key part of growing the business. The industry generally needs to attract more families and Bunsay is the place they are trying to appeal more to the family market. But this would probably be the area they would have to let go which would open this up to a developer knocking on the door.

Mr Ken Rennie: Regarding the location – encapsulating the green. Is there any thought to moving more towards Herbage Park area bearing in mind the entrance/exit.

Mr Matthew Manning: The topography of the land would make this very costly and detrimental to the lodge park.

Mr Chris Wheadon: If houses are constructed wouldn't they want the trees at the top of Bell Meadow taken down so they have the view?

Mr Matthew Manning: The trees are part of Bell Meadow so belong to the Parish Council.

Mr Brian Mitchell: Commented that it is all to do with finance – what's to stop someone else struggling with their business but with land (e.g. farmer) from doing the same thing?

Mr Matthew Manning: The Commercial Enabling aspect is an exception to planning policy and will be legally established so that this cannot happen.

Mr David Wallis (Smart Planning) – Agent for Warren Golf Club: The exception is regarding the asset value and the historical aspect attached to the Warren Golf Club defining the character of the landscape in the village and that the preservation of the Warren Golf Club in terms of bringing people into the area would be beneficial.

Mr Naithan Tucker: Enquired how many employees there are from the village?

Mr Matthew Manning: There are currently about 50 members of staff in total and the future plans would require an additional 25-30 staff. (Mr Manning did not provide details of employees from the village)

Mrs Gill Orford: Asked if long term – potentially could the lodges go and houses come?

Mr Matthew Manning: No because the planning consent was done in such a way that stops this. The licence prevents the lodges becoming residential and in fact they are seeking to request a change of condition to make it more enforceable. It is very important for the business plan to have accommodation on site and is fundamentally important.

Mr Chris Wheadon: Would the houses be for sale on the open market?

Mr Matthew Manning: They would be for sale on the open market and sold as soon as possible. There will be several applications for future developments of the business forthcoming.

Mr John Williams: Expressed concern that other developers would use this case to argue their own cases.

Mr Matthew Manning: Care had been taken to make this an exceptional application. The rural allocation will force Woodham Walter to have some houses. 12-15 potentially in Woodham Walter. So this will fulfil that and give you ammunition to refuse other applications because you will already have your rural allocation.

Mr Graham Bannerman: What safeguards are in place to stop shareholders selling having got planning permission?

Mr Matthew Manning: The immediate sale is not possible due to the structure of the business. MDC would place conditions that would mean that even if sold it would still have to be invested into the business.

There being no further questions or comments Cllr. Peter Warren thanked those present and closed the public forum at 8.45pm.

1498. Planning – Application

FUL/MAL/15/00047

Land adjacent Whitegates, Herbage Park Road, Woodham Walter

Residential development comprising 11 dwellings.

Cllr. Peter Warren asked each councillor to summarise their thoughts on the application.

Cllr. Warren: In general terms he supports the Warren and would like to see the business enhance facilities for members and tourism for the district but he cannot support this housing development. He noted the pre-planning advice from MDC. The development is outside of the village envelope. The land is subject to a Section 106 agreement which was established after Herbage Park received approval for the additional lodges, and this area would no longer be visible to villagers to enjoy. He was also concerned that there was no provision for affordable housing.

Cllr. Symons: Commented that she wouldn't want The Warren to close, it is an attractive part of the village. Finds it hard to understand how the housing development can be essential. If we have to have houses in Woodham Walter it would be better to have affordable housing. The road infrastructure in the village struggles to cope at busy times and is not sufficient for the extra volume of traffic. The open aspect of Bell Meadow would be ruined. She does not support the application.

Cllr. Bunn: Generally supports the Warren and estates ambitions but cannot support this housing development. It is outside of the village envelope. It would be detrimental to a sensitive location. It will be seen from many areas of the village including the historically important buildings at the bottom of Bell meadow which would form part of a future conservation area and the houses would have a big negative impact on that. Part of the charm of Bell Meadow is that it is not encapsulated. Regarding the Section 106 agreement which was put in place to protect the land from future development – the land would become precluded from the village and the 106 agreement other than benefits to wildlife would no longer have any benefit to the village. A strategic housing policy should offer a mix of housing so the application is not appropriate. Commercial reasons do not outweigh the impact on the village. He cannot support the application.

Cllr. Rushton: Commented that it is not for the village to bail out investors. How far does one go, this is a serious issue and would result in 11 houses on the skyline of Bell Meadow. The application suggested there would be 22 car movements a day – this is unrealistic. The development would damage the heart of the village including the open aspect of Bell Meadow. It may be the case in the future that the village has to accept some houses but this project doesn't even have any affordable homes. He cannot support the application.

Cllr. Tompkins: He has lived in the village for 38 years and the Warren's role is an important one but he doesn't see why we should bail it out. If there is a need for houses – it is for affordable housing within the defined settlement area as was demonstrated in the responses to the recent Village Design Statement questionnaire and as indicated in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Smaller housing units are identified as being required and there is already an over-supply of the size of houses proposed in this development. The road infrastructure is not suitable. The private road system would be upgraded to an adoptable standard, this would be detrimental to the visual appearance of the current boundary track. The junction at Redgates is not good enough for the level of additional traffic movements bearing in mind not just the housing development but also from the resulting proposed increase in trade at the Warren. Regarding the siting of the development - Bell Meadow is an open area of grassland, the elevated development would dominate and spoil the open nature. He cannot see a community benefit. Regarding the Commercial enabling aspect, having been an architect for many years, he has never come across a commercial enabling development unless the reasons are of great exception and usually for heritage projects. The development would be detrimental to the village and goes against the views expressed in the emerging VDS document. As the site is part of the rural landscape and subject to a Section 106 agreement, the application presents as an incongruous development, urbanising a rural landscape. It fails to enhance the landscape or the village generally and the only benefit is to The Warren Estate. He does not consider it to be a sustainable development and is therefore contrary to the NPPF. It would be detrimental to the environment and village. He objects to the application.

Cllr. Neale: The Warren is an historical and important part of the village but the housing development is in the wrong place and with the wrong type of houses. It will be a private estate and nothing to do with the village. The car movements as well as being unsuitable at the Redgates junction would also add to what is already a bottleneck in Danbury. The Parish Council supported the original lodges development but that didn't make the Warren successful. The location at the top of the hill would be detrimental to Bell Meadow. He does not support the application.

Cllr. Peter Warren proposed that the application be recommended for refusal, this was seconded by Cllr. John Tompkins, all councillors were in agreement.

At this point in the meeting several members of the public left the meeting room. Chairman called the remaining audience to order and the meeting continued.

Councillors then concluded their main reasons for objecting. Clerk will liaise with councillors in order to finalise before sending to Maldon District Council. The main points being:

- Outside the village envelope.
- Contrary to the responses in the Village Design Statement.
- Visually dominant. Detrimental to Bell Meadow.
- Section 106 – not just a loss of an area of land but also the occlusion of the land from the village.
- Unsustainable – Woodham Walter does not have that level of infrastructure to support. Inc. broadband.
- Size/Type of development – the development does not contribute what is needed because none of houses are small units/affordable.
- Commercial Enabling – query if this can be used. Commercial reasons should not outweigh the detrimental impact of the development.
- Highways – the road system and junction at Redgates is not sufficient to cope with the additional traffic which will be generated by the houses plus the additional traffic which will result in the business developing.
- Village amenity would be taken away.
- Inward looking and not outward looking to the community.

Cllr. Warren opened the meeting up to ask Mr Manning if the mature trees along the track would remain. Mr Manning indicated that the trees would remain and be contained within gardens.

1499. Date of Next Parish Council Meetings:

The Chairman thanked those present for attending the meeting and encouraged all to attend the Annual Parish Meeting on Monday 30th March at 8pm in Woodham Walter Village Hall.

Date of next Ordinary Parish Council Meeting Monday 13th April 2015 at 8pm in Women's Club.

Signed

Meeting ended at 9.15pm

Dated