

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Newington Parish Council, held on Thursday 12 March 2015 at 7.30pm at the Newington Village Hall

Present: Cllr D Coles, Cllr M Harris, Cllr S Harvey, Cllr E Jackson, Cllr E Layer, Cllr T Martin-Young, Cllr T Mould (Chair), Cllr R Palmer, Cllr G Lewin, Cllr J Wright, Cllr Mike Baldock (Kent County Council), Mr J Burke (MP's Office) and Mrs K Julier (Asst Clerk).

1. Apologies

Cllr D Haigh (illness – accepted), Cllr P Green (work – accepted)

2. Presentation

Cllr Mould opened the meeting with a brief explanation of how the meeting would be conducted.

3. Public Question Time

Cllr Mould called for questions on other matters first before moving to the Pond Farm application.

- The Working Man's Club status was raised and the question as to whether Swale Borough Council had the power to make a compulsory purchase; it was noted that the current owners presently have planning permission to develop the property and that it was unknown why they had not undertaken development, it might be possible to get SBC to issue a 215 notice although the overgrown buddleia and other plants might have some minimal impact on improving the air quality on the High Street; Cllr Lewin did not think that the site qualified for compulsory purchase but that could be looked at.

- The issue of the collapsed wall at the village car park was raised; it was noted that Swale was having difficulty getting information from the owner or even contacting him; Cllr Wright noted that a paper had gone to cabinet recently to go ahead with the repairs to the wall and to then seek recompense from the owner.

Cllr Mould then moved to the Pond Farm application.

Cllr Harris described the Parish Council's role in the application process. When a planning application is made to Swale Borough Council, the public is invited to make comments on the application. The Parish Council also makes comments on the application. The planning officer summarizes all the comments, with comments from the Parish Council being entitled to slightly more weight. The decision as to whether or not an application is approved rests with Swale Borough Council, not with the Parish Council. If an application gets turned down, it can then go to appeal. The current national planning policy framework is between two planning cycles.

Cllr Harris gave a brief description of the applicant's stated benefits to the village,

regardless of whether or not the Parish Council agreed with any of the assertions, as presented in the application to the Planning Authority in order to make sure that the applicant's case was given a hearing. The applicant had requested to meet with the Parish Council privately, which the Parish Council declined. The applicant declined to participate in the public meeting. The application stated that 30% of the 300 plus housing units would be for affordable housing. The application presented that the villages in the area were in decline and numbers of school-age children were falling, and that the proposed development would improve the sustainability of the village. The application presented that the development would provide additional green spaces and further pedestrian access. The application also touted good public transportation and access to services.

Cllr Mould then opened up the floor to public comments and questions regarding the Pond Farm application.

Q – When public protests have been made, how do they fare in the process on appeal? R – Planning is a quasi-judicial process and the judgement is not made based on majority opinion; the applicant has not had success with applications on unallocated sites, that any premature approvals of applications before the emerging local plan would be refused, and on appeal it would be refused as well.

Q – What can parishes do to pre-empt groups like Gladmans from building large developments in the area? R – A local plan has been out for public consultation three times; in the creation of the local plan, the area in question was determined as unsuitable for large developments for reasons of protection of countryside and agricultural land.

Q – How much weight is likely to be put on the need for affordable housing, if Swale has not provided it? R – The application's spin on affordable housing is slanted; the applicant has several other applications for planning in the area; there are many sites more suitable.

Q – What is likely impact on the school, with high density housing likely to bring a demographic with lots of young families, possibly resulting in up to 500 pupils going to the local school? R – The current additional capacity at Newington CE Primary School is 30. Lower Halstow could take 60. There is already insufficient capacity on the Isle of Sheppey, resulting in a spilling over to other schools. The Swale Borough Councillors are also looking at cumulative impacts from other developments outside of Swale but nearby, such as the proposed development at Otterham Quay Lane. The planning authorities of both areas need to work together to ascertain potential cumulative impact on services from multiple applications. It was noted that Newington School already has a problem with parking during school runs, that the exit from the new housing across from the

school will be opposite the school gate, and that the school cannot expand in its current location even if land were made available. Newington is supposed to be a green corridor between Sittingbourne and Rainham.

Q – Comment about the lack of infrastructure – roads, schools, doctors, etc., traffic on the High Street. Parishioner had a letter from G Henderson that Pond Farm would be opposed.

Q – Comment that surveyors were out at the field opposite the exchange.

Q – Comment of concern that Newington would not be able to continue to avoid these types of development because of the need for affordable housing in the area.

R – The area around Newington only needs around 15 – 20 homes.

Q – Comment that most of the new estates have not been bought by local people.

R – This is partly the result of the Thames “Gateway” Initiative, which should be focused on identifying brown-field sites. There is a need to make sure that local buyers get first chance at new homes in the area.

Q – What about a bypass? R – A bypass is not likely to happen. Not cost effective for a developer to build or fund a bypass as a developer would need to build around 3,000 houses to make such a scheme worth their while.

Q – Comment that Natural England is very worried about the potential development and is investigating the which rare species might be impacted (i.e., bats).

Q – Comment that if Swale is not actively identifying brown-field sites, then the orchards will eventually be targeted. R – the new local plan will show where all the housing is going to be, and explicitly states that Newington is not suitable for large-scale development. Comment that as the draft local plan has yet to be submitted to the inspector, there is a weakness that the applicant is attempting to exploit.

Q – Why do we need a bypass? Why does the Council not strengthen the roads and have traffic come off the motorway at Farthing Corner? R – there is a lot of agreement about that, but not sufficient funds to build such a scheme.

Q – Comment of concern about the portrayal of amenities in the village including “excellent public transportation” and “excellent road”, when there are clearly problems with both. Why does KCC not do something about resurfacing the road?

R – While the applicant put a positive gloss on the state of these things, the actual figures about public transportation were included in their application. Resurfacing

the road is not really part of the Pond Farm issue.

Q – Suggestion that the potholes be left in place to deter further development.

Q – Where does the Parish Council get expert help on these matters? R – The Parish Council relies on experts from the County, from Swale, and from knowledgeable volunteers. While members of the Parish Council may lack the expertise to challenge an applicant’s technical information, experts employed by the County and Swale are able to do so. Other organizations like CPRE and National Association of Local Councils also have expert advice.

Q – What sort of consideration regarding road congestion and road works will apply? R – this is another good point to include in public comments on the application.

Q – Comment challenging the applicant’s estimation of walking time from the proposed development site to the local school and the assumption that busy parents would walk their children to school rather than drive. R – There is also a lack of pavement on one side of the road which would require pedestrians to cross the A2 to get to the pavement.

Q – What about the impact of the proposed brick earth works on the applicant’s proposed development. R – It is difficult to rely on cumulative effects based on speculative proposals, but members of the public can still make an effective argument in this regard. There is also a duty of councils to work with each other on these issues.

Q – Comment that this is prime agricultural land.

Q – Why do we have to raise the same issues over and over with these developers? R – Landowners have the right to seek to develop their land. The public has the right to oppose or support such applications.

Q – Concern that hedgerows along the front of the site would be removed if the developer puts in a bow mouth, despite the applicant’s assertions that hedgerows would be preserved.

Q – What is to stop a landlord from snapping up the “affordable housing”? R – The Parish Council would certainly press for the affordable housing units to be offered first to local residents. One-third of affordable housing must be carried out through a housing association, with a residency requirement for prospective tenants.

Q – Request for clarification on the exact number of houses the proposal encompasses. R – The Parish Council understands the application to be for 330 homes plus 60 sheltered accommodation units.

Q – What is the process of adopting the new local plan and how is it considered in the application and appeal processes. R – The legal procedure for adoption of the new local plan is five stages: 1 – Assessment and Core Policy, 2 – Site Allocation, 3 – Public Comment, 4 – Submission to the DCLG Inspector (examination in public), and 5 – Adoption Process by the Secretary of State. The new local plan is between stages 3 and 4. Stage 5 is about a year away. The new local plan is given material planning consideration, which means that it is given nearly equal weight to the existing plan.

Q – Comment noting that there are actually two separate planning applications for the site – the main application proposing the building of the houses, and a separate listed building application to knock down some of the farm buildings. R – It is important that the public comment on both planning applications.

Q – Comment suggesting a petition be made to the SBC not to reduce the number of planning officers.

Cllr Wright reminded the assembly that Newington is an Air Quality Management Area and that the air quality still did not meet EU standards.

Cllr Lewin stated that he has consistently objected to the proposed development, and that it was not the case that loopholes would result in planning permission – if the case can be made that the proposed development is not sustainable, it will be denied. It was also important that everyone lodge their objections – while it was a legal process and not a vote, numbers of objections would make a difference.

It was noted that the new deadline for submitting comments on the application was 20 March.

Mr Burke stressed that it was important that comments include valid planning grounds. Some examples of objections that were not valid planning grounds included loss of view or the effect on the cost of properties.

The Public Questions were closed to allow the Parish Council to deliberate on their response to the application.

4. Application for 330 Houses on the site of Pond Farm, Newington – Application Number 15/500671 and associated matters

The public comments were reviewed and discussed. Cllr Harris proposed that the Parish Council formally object to both of the Pond Farm applications. Cllr Palmer

seconded; all agreed.

Specific grounds for objecting included air quality, the lack of infrastructure, A2 congestion, lack of pavement, insufficiency of the local schools, that the site was prime agricultural land and green field, strain on wider infrastructure (doctors, hospitals), preserving existing buildings, proximity of the proposed site to the industrial park, cumulative effects of developments proposed along the boundary with Medway, increase in traffic.

5. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of Newington parish Council will be held on Tuesday 31 March at 7.00pm in the Newington Room, Newington Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 9:45 pm.

Date:

Signed:

Cllr T Mould
Chair