

SHERSTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

STEERING GROUP MEETING

Notes of Meeting held on
Monday 13th February 2017
Sherston Village Hall at 7.30 pm

Present:

John Matthews (JM), Mike Johnson (MJ), Sarah Wood (SW), John Knight (JK), Graham Morris (GRM), Kevin Smith (KS), Saara Sharman (SS), Dr Pip Petit (PP), Judy Sharp (JS), Nigel Freeth (NF), Graham Hayman (GH), John Thomson (JT), Polly Clements (PC)

4 members of the public: Alex Ross (AR), John Shipsey (JS), Giles Robinson (JR), Zoe Metcalfe (ZM)

Definitions: NP means Neighbourhood Plan; WC means Wiltshire Council

1. Apologies

Apologies sent from Harry Stevens and Rob Johnson.

2. Register of interests

None.

3. Update

3.1 FOI request for Viability Report

JM updated those at the meeting on the FOI request to access Seymour's Viability Assessment report. WC will need to respond by the end of the month. Until then the group are unable to talk about the report.

3.2 Survey

The results of the survey have been counted and are as follows for the question:

"In return for the construction of a new GP surgery and the reservation of land for the possible future expansion of the Primary School and/or for the erection of a new building for the pre-school group, the Neighbourhood Plan will allocate land on the Sopworth Road site for the erection of up to 45 dwellings including affordable housing for local people."

Result:

Those living within the parish

Yes: 330 (93.75%)

No: 22 (6.25%)

Total: 352

Those living outside the parish

Yes: 191 (99.5%)

No: 1 (0.5%)

Total: 192

The results will go into the Cliffhanger; they are already on the website.

4. Public meeting – The public meeting held on 26th January was attended by 142 people. The notes from this meeting will also be on the website by the end of week. At the meeting a few members of the public raised their concern over the number of houses and asking if all possible options had been explored regarding delivering a new surgery. This concern was noted and the purpose of this meeting was at least in part to discuss this concern. All of the non-Steering Group members in attendance at the meeting shared this view.

5. Public Questions and Concerns

5.1 ZM mentioned concern over the impact on infrastructure, traffic and utilities if the development goes ahead and that seeing detail on this is really important. She also asked if not only the site but surrounding area and roads such as Green Lane and Court Street have been looked at and if the costs taken into account. MJ answered that the surrounding areas has been looked at and provision has been made for most of the works that will be needed (as identified in the WC Highways engineers report). The costs of any additional works to Green Lane and Court Street beyond that identified in the WC report had of course not been included.

5.2 AR believes that the income stream for the surgery is a very attractive prospect but asked if the village would not rather have a risk free option and fewer houses, if a private organisation took ownership of the build and leasing of the surgery. He is also concerned that once the community take ownership of the building if the surgery closes in the future, the community may risk financial liability with an empty building. AR also asked if GPs want to come to Sherston when Malmesbury is so close. PP answered that certain GPs prefer smaller practices; the problem is attracting new ones to the current surgery. The size of the proposed new surgery would be ideal to add enough rooms to provide extra medical areas, including rooms for training all these aspects help attract new younger GPs. PP mentioned that the doctors have spent years looking into other options regarding funding a new surgery including private investors who have repeatedly told us the project, as a standalone, is not viable, unless possibly having a pharmacy on site, which as a Dispensing Practice we could not consider.

5.3 Discussion took place regarding WC and the price of the land and the question whether it was achievable to deliver a surgery with fewer houses. JT answered that might result in a smaller surgery. Also it wouldn't stop any landowner at any point putting in application for more houses at some future date.

A question was raised by JS regarding housing targets as set out in the WC Housing Policy and the stated figure for Sherston (26) which he believed was misleading and should be re-written. He suggested that a number of emerging housing proposals elsewhere meant that Sherston no longer needed to make provision for anything like that number. MJ replied that the figure of 26 that was mentioned came from the original Core Strategy Document (being one fifth of the residual requirement for the Malmesbury Community Area). He commented that what JS appeared to be suggesting is that the other large villages in the MCA should meet the need and not Sherston. The Steering Group had already indicated that it was supportive of some more housing development in the village – to help future proof the village. In any event, this debate had been overtaken by the current discussions re the surgery, as a different number is needed to achieve the desired outcome which is the delivery of a new surgery plus the other facilities identified in the emerging NP.

6. Alternative Funding Options

GM asked if another viability study could be done. JM asked who would do it and pay for it, as it wouldn't be the steering group. ZM through her work could arrange an experienced team to look at study when and if the Viability Assessment Report becomes available. The question was asked what if the report is not released under the FOI. JT replied that the landowners and WC would be asked if they are happy for the document to be viewed and if they had been asked initially there would probably have been no need for an FOI.

GM asked why there was such a rush. JM answered that the steering group has spent over 4 years on the project and the NP must move on. MJ pointed out that WC had indicated some time back that unless progress was made on the NP they would take responsibility for preparing a "housing" only development plan for the village – taking no account of any of the other NP objectives/aspirations. JM suggested that if a working party is set up to look at alternative funding options who will take ownership of it? AR put forward himself in this role.

JM told the group that they will have to talk to the surgery, someone from the Steering Group, Wiltshire Council and the landowners.

JS asked if it would be sufficient for the NP to state that the village would allow up to 45 houses on the most suitable site. MJ replied that the problem is that the site has to be identified as the preferred location. It is a "land use" plan – within which such sites need to be identified. Any alternative proposal has to be deliverable and not just a financially viable option.

JM reminded the group that there are other important factors that need to be included within the plan such as site for a new pre-school, land for possible future expansion for the school, improvements to sporting facilities and of course a new surgery. MJ explained that after 4 years of looking at other sites, the Sopworth Road site became the front runner because it appeared to be capable of meeting all of the objectives. Fundamentally the plan and its objectives need to stand together and this site can deliver all of those objectives.

7. Way forward and future Actions

It was agreed that AR and ZM will form a working party to look at alternative funding; AR will take ownership of the group. ZM will start by (if released) reviewing the Viability Assessment with a team after it will then pass to AR to discuss options. As previously mentioned the group will need to speak to WC, the landowners and the surgery. PP will be happy to provide further information on request. The working party will be given six weeks to come up with an alternative plan and then report back at the next Steering group meeting.

ZM asked if the Viability Assessment doesn't get released could the Steering Group give her as much information as possible, which they agreed.

8. Date of Next meeting

In approximately 6 weeks. JM and MJ will be in contact with the working party before then.

Meeting finished at 9.10pm Notes taken by SW.