

WIDFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Widford Parish Council Extraordinary Planning Meeting Monday 28 September 2015 at 7pm in the Village Hall

PRESENT: Cllr Jill Buck, Chairman (JB); Cllr Barbara Edwards (BE); Cllr Glen Parcell (GP); Cllr Paul Riddle (PR); Cllr Neil Rogers (NR)

Eleven members of the public

Clerk: Colin Marks, Clerk to the Parish Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone and opened the meeting at 7.05pm

15.041 Apologies for absence: None

ACTION

15.042 Declarations of Interest: None

The Chairman proposed, and it was agreed, that agenda item 15.044 be brought forward so as to not be missed at the end of the meeting

Agenda item 15.044 The following Decision Notices were noted:

3/15/1590/HH 2 Benningfield Road: Front, rear and side extensions: GRANTED

3/15/1576/HH Swan Barn: Fenestration and infill extension: GRANTED

3/15/1475/LBC Swan Barn: Fenestration and infill extension: GRANTED

15.043 To consider the following planning application:

3/15/1793/FUL Land West of Wilmoor, Ware Road, Widford: Construction of two detached four-bedroom houses and one detached five-bedroom house, with garages, together with associated access, parking and landscaping.

In her opening comments the Chairman said the Parish Council recognised that more houses were needed in Widford and that it is not opposed to development that meets local needs, particularly for low cost housing. Unless new homes are affordable, local young people in particular will be prevented from getting on the housing ladder and therefore be unable to continue to live in the parish. This could result in the village becoming a commuter dormitory, which could destroy the heart of the community.

The Chairman drew attention to East Herts' approval in June 2014 for five houses to be built on land to the east of Wilmoor. When added to the current application, the impact of creating a larger development and the possible traffic and road safety implications do not appear to feature in the accompanying documents and comments. The effect of four entrances within 100 yards or so on the left-hand side coming into the village ought to be considered. Nothing of this is mentioned in the current planning application nor in the accompanying comments

The Chairman then invited comments from parishioners and from members of the Parish Council.

Various comments and concerns were expressed about safety aspects of the existing kerb and road layout approaching the site, and the fact that traffic speeds are often quite high coming into the village at that point. It was felt the additional pressure of yet another entrance would exacerbate the danger.

Parking along the road was also raised as a safety concern, particularly outside Northview Cottages and when there is a football match at the playing field.

A question was raised as to why a development of five houses on the smaller site opposite Northview Cottages did not attract such attention. It was explained that the plans were more in keeping with the existing street scene.

There was a discussion on the possible alternative of a service road running behind

Wilmoor that would reduce to a single entrance the access to the properties.

There was a strong body of opinion that a lay-by would be needed on the north side of the road before the proposed entrance so that vehicles, and in particular delivery lorries waiting to enter, could clear the highway - which will not be possible under the existing proposal.

Cllr Riddle expressed grave concerns about the assertion of Shire Consulting that Planning Policy OSV2 is out of date due to EHDC not having a 5-year supply of housing land. He believed that were East Herts planners to support this view, it would place all Category 2 villages in the District at risk of unrestrained development. Cllr Riddle similarly rejected Shire's argument that the development is "infill" when clearly it is not. A precedent for ribbon development would then be established for Category 2 villages.

The view was expressed that the plan is not in keeping with the character of the village and represents unsustainable development in the Rural Area.

It was further noted that Planning Policies are in place to protect the amenities of the surrounding area and that an Important View of the Ash valley is identified in the 2013 Conservation Appraisal. The development would encroach upon this View.

An opinion was offered that Ash View mains drainage runs through the site, although it is not mentioned in the plans.

There was disappointment that the HCC Highways comments did not take into account the full impact on traffic and road safety. Distances quoted were not realistic, there was no suggestion of road widening, the need for a lay-by or the necessary improvement to sight lines. The sharp left-hand bend coming up the hill from the direction of Wareside makes it dangerous for vehicles turning into Ash View Nursing Home and The Lodge and there have been some near misses.

It was also pointed out that by not taking the present application in conjunction with that of 2014, Section 106 was not triggered. Obligations under a S106 agreement would at least enable some of the deficiencies of the proposal to be addressed should the application be approved.

A number of parishioners said that comments they made on the 2014 application were ignored by EH Planning, which was very discouraging. It was hoped that they would be taken into consideration this time.

It was remarked that, with a better understanding of planning issues that the meeting had brought to light, a Neighbourhood Plan would be a very good idea. The Parish Council acknowledged that it was intending to call a public meeting to consider this.

The Chairman concluded by saying the Parish Council would respond to EH Planning taking into account comments expressed at the meeting. She reiterated that the Council was not against development per se, but wanted to see proper account being taken of the siting of houses and that they should be, in the main, low cost to give the next generation an opportunity to remain in the village. She said that all planning should give regard to the implications on traffic levels.

15.044 To consider any other planning applications received after the publication of the notice and agenda

Dealt with following agenda item 15.042 above.

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.10pm.

Signed.....**Dated**.....

Note: A copy of the resulting Parish Council's comments to East Herts Planning is appended to these Minutes.