

West Alvington Parish Council, report on Homefield development 9/1/14

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Intention of the report:

This report is intended to inform the Parish Council of the progress of the development of the Homefield site and to request guidance for the Working Group on the basis for subsequent conversations with the planning officer, developer and architect.

We propose that an amended and agreed version of this report is attached to the minutes and becomes available for circulation to interested parties.

Creation of WAWP:

The working group, Sally Jones and Robin Ladkin, parish councillors, Tony Head and Andrew Clarke, parishioners selected for their particular expertise, was formed by Simon Wright, District Councillor with responsibility for planning in October 2013. Our brief, as we understand it, is to consider in detail the planning application for the Homefield site as it develops, to make appropriate suggestions and comments, and to report back to the Parish Council our findings and suggestions. Our brief is in support of the pre-planning process requirement for local consultation. Our intention is to try to influence the best possible development in the interest of the Parish, with as much support as possible from parishioners.

Background to the Planning Application:

Essentially we recognise that our brief results from the decision of the Parish Council which met in an extra-ordinary meeting with the public on 11th July 2013 to consider the Homefield development proposal. The minutes of that meeting record: "remaining councillors met in closed session with DCC Mr. Gilbert present and resolved as a result of looking at the plans and the material Planning Consideration guidelines as well as the overwhelming support from the public response to the drop in session, taking all this into consideration they voted to support the proposal. The following statement was made "West Alvington Parish Council are in principle comfortable with the site being developed, this decision was reached after listening to the views of the community, over 65% of whom are in favour of a development", agreed unanimously."

We recognise that the process by which this decision was reached continues to be the subject of considerable confusion and may be subject to further contest. Indeed, it has been quite difficult for us to separate out our considerations for the development itself from the process by which the site has been selected. We understand that there remains a substantial proportion of parishioners who are fundamentally opposed to any development on this site, a view we continue to respect.

We have noted that the traditional planning process tends to be set up for debate and conflict rather than generative dialogue. However, we understand that the emphasis on pre-planning consultation intends to shift this emphasis towards more of a co-constructive process. We are hoping to influence the proposed design through offering constructive suggestions, as well as raising potential issues, with the intention of achieving a development of which the parish can be pleased, possibly even proud. The report which follows sets out three scenarios we presently envisage, starting with a limited and traditional development which is likely to be subject to on-going objections. We are suggesting what we believe to be a more acceptable, if still traditional, plan which requires

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an extension of the proposed site. We dream of a third scenario in which the site is subject to innovative design and build, using the latest, proven elements of sustainable design and construction, an exemplary development of which the parish could be truly proud.

Current state of the planning process:

We met with the Planning Officer, Developer, Architects and Estate Agent in Kingsbridge on 18th December for our first opportunity to consider the present state of the plans and to offer some initial observations we had about the proposed development on the basis of a number of conversations amongst ourselves and with individual parishioners.

As a conclusion to this meeting the developers agreed to consider a number of suggestions that we and the planning officer had made. We undertook to report back to the Parish Council our findings and suggestions to date, which is the purpose of this report. We all agreed to meet on site for further discussions at a date to be agreed in the week of 20th January. This meeting will be informed by more detailed plans, showing elevations, prepared by the architects. We hope that the Devon County Council Highways Officer responsible for advising on the proposed development will also be present.

We hope to report again to the Parish Council at our subsequent meeting on 6th February and have asked Dave Kenyon, planning officer to join us at that meeting.

Depending on the feelings of the Council at that time we presume that we will hold some form of open meeting for parishioners to allow the opportunity for more informed discussion of the proposals at the level of detail they will have reached by that time. We clearly propose that this will be a meeting called and managed by the Council.

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Scenario 1: The current proposal.

The 'present proposal', as we understand it, is a slight development on the outline plans discussed at the July 2013 meeting. In this regard we consider it is critical for the Council to clarify what it meant, at that meeting, by its decision in principle to support the development. We would appreciate a clear mandate for our subsequent discussions on matters with which the Council agrees and issues or conditions it considers necessary to maintain its support.

We have raised the following potential objections and made further suggestions.

1. Access, especially pedestrian access.

We consider the present proposal for pedestrian access via the existing footpath out on to the main road through the village as both practically impossible and dangerous. All our conversations to date confirm our view that the footpath is simply too narrow at the point it negotiates between the existing walls, particularly considering the likelihood of disabled residents using wheel chairs and parents with children in push-chairs, trying to make their way, for instance, to the village school or onto the footpath into Kingsbridge. The path emerges onto the main road at a point where the pavement narrows to a point at which it is hard for a single pedestrian to negotiate, necessitating a crossing between parked vehicles which obscure the view in both directions on to a raised pavement, impossible for wheelchair and push-chair users.

While we have considered this aspect of the proposed site as a deal breaking issue from the outset, the architects state that they have already received approval from the highways officer. Clearly we will discuss and contest this view when we meet on site. Subject to the views of the Parish Council, which is already exercised by the dangers of pedestrian crossing elsewhere along the main road, we fear that we may have to take issue with this aspect to whatever levels of appeal are available to us. Any subsequent proposals are, therefore, subject to the developers finding a new and safe pedestrian access.

While we have commented in particular on pedestrian access here, we know that there are remaining concerns about vehicle access on to the main road at a narrow point often subject to queues with limited sight in both directions.

2. Aesthetic concerns within the 'Material Planning Considerations'.

Along with the planning officer we have raised a number of concerns about the proposed site layout. These include:

> the relation of affordable houses to open market ones. We are concerned that the distinctions between the proposed homes are minimised to accentuate the sense of an integrated community.

> the siting and design of houses adjacent to existing neighbourhood properties. We are concerned to maintain the character of the village, especially at the boundaries of

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the new site, and ensure that new houses are not built in provocative proximity to established homes. We have also noted with concern the suggestion of north facing gardens for the affordable homes, which seems a shame on such a clearly south facing and sloping site.

> the creation of sight-lines, setting of borders and orientation of new build houses. We are concerned that the new development at least maintains and possibly enhances the existing character of the village through these considerations. This aspect leads us to our further suggestions for an extended site, see below.

3. Contributions to the Parish.

The present proposals suggest that any contributions to the parish emanating from this development will be by financial payments. We note that the original development plans for the Parish, from which these proposals stem, called for a number of potential improvements to the amenities of the village. These included, for instance, the provision of allotments and a communal orchard. We would like to see some direct improvement of village amenities through the development of the site itself.

Scenario 2: An acceptable proposal.

Recognising that Homefield is situated in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty adjacent to a Conservation Area, we maintain that 'Material Planning Considerations' in this case should extend to the scale, proportions and boundaries of the site given its strategic and sensitive location. On this basis we have made a number of suggestions which are dependent on extending the site to the existing southern borders of the village.

Extending the site in this way offers, in our view, a number of possibilities.

1. Pedestrian access: extending the southern border of the site to a point proximate to the existing lane offers the possibility of safe access into the village. Access to Kingsbridge would clearly remain an issue as would vehicle access on to the main road but we believe this option does provide for a possible acceptable solution.
2. Location of affordable housing: we see the possibility in such an extended site for locating the affordable houses to the southern boundary of the site. In this way the strong aesthetic afforded by the present houses along the southern border could be extended into the new development, offering a sense of cohesion and integration.
3. Provision of amenity on site: such an extension opens up the possibility, in our view, of the provision of an amenity to the northern boundary of the site. This could be provision of allotments or orchard as previously discussed, or some other amenity agreed between parishioners and developers.
4. Overview from existing properties: An extension of the site down the slope to the south would make use of the natural advantage of the south facing slope. It would provide for a layout which would reduce the interference of elevations from existing properties.

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5. Maintaining the character of the village: we note that the village is clearly built on a series of rectangles with houses set along the contours. This aspect is seen most clearly from aerial photographs and from the footpath across the south valley. An extension of the site would provide for a clearer extension of this aspect of the character of the village. The present farm track, a recent development, sets up an odd triangle which jars with the remainder of the southern aspect of the village.

6. An integrated and complete site: we are concerned that the more limited site option leaves a vulnerable and odd piece of land to the southern boundary. We would like to avoid the iniquities of potential piece-meal development by creating an integrated site which clearly extends the present boundaries of the village in a coherent way.

A financial note: we recognise in making this proposal that the present negotiations for the provision of land through the balance of affordable and open market homes would need to be re-considered. Our view, to be endorsed or contradicted by the Parish Council, is that provision of a limited number of additional open market houses to cover the cost of additional land would be well worth the provision of additional amenities to the village and development of an integrated site.

Scenario 3: A radical dream.

We have been struck by the tenor of a number of our conversations with parishioners about the development of Homefield. The sense of home is certainly considered to be as much towards the village as towards the farm. Indeed, development of the site would confirm this.

In this regard we wonder whether it might still be possible for the present landowners to consider a more radical development of which the village could be proud.

In essence this scenario would develop the extended site as discussed above, but substitute houses of traditional design and construction with distinctive homes designed and built according to presently proven sustainable methods, including for instance:

1. Houses constructed from sustainable materials and building methods.
2. Maximising insulation properties to the best current standards.
3. Conserving and re-using grey water.
4. Utilising the south facing slope for inclusion of pv panels.
5. Terracing the site to limit intrusive elevations and potentially 'bury' garages.
6. Designing the layout of the site to mimic the best aspects of village community including the provision of additional amenities.

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We believe that such a development could prove highly beneficial to the home-owners through carefully design and limited power usage. This would improve the possibility of affordability.

We also believe that it could establish an exemplary site, not only for West Alvington but also the surrounding district.

This dream scenario, we recognise, would need the whole hearted support of the Parish in partnership with the landowners.

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