

STARTING AGAIN IN FEBRUARY 2021: BRIEFING NOTES FOR COUNCILLORS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

2016

HARAH (Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing, members Action Hampshire, Hart, New Forest, Test Valley, Winchester Local Authorities, Homes and Communities Agency, Hampshire County Council, New Forest National Park Authority, South Downs Park Authority and Hampshire Village Homes, a consortium of five housing providers, chief of which being Hastoe Housing Association) informs South Wonston Parish Council (PC) of an offer of land on Christmas Hill for affordable housing. There are 22 households with South Wonston connections on Winchester's housing register.

2017

There are offers of land for joint projects from the Jolly Community Project (JCP) on Alresford Drove (allotments and field next to Sanctuary Farm) and on Drove Links Rd (two fields north of Bridge Bungalow). HARAH are investigating land adjacent to Goldfinch Way (Persimmon Homes), land adjacent to West Hill Rd North and Christmas Hill. The PC meets a representative of Hastoe.

HARAH and PC meet Winchester City Council (WCC) officers to discuss suitability for development and the planning potential of the various parcels of land. A site visit is made.

West Hill Rd North consists of two portions. Only one isn't for sale. See below. The other one is, and Persimmon Homes and the owner and architect of Christmas Hill are still on board and all will be approached by HARAH.

Hunter Page Planning (HPP) and Beechcroft Ltd (BL) approach the PC about a prestigious retirement complex to be built on the West Hill Rd North properties. Our support is required to bypass planning difficulties such as being outside the settlement boundary. We concede that we would like affordable and downsizing homes, but we can't agree to anything without consulting WCC.

NOTE THAT ALL THESE PARCELS OF LAND ARE OUTSIDE THE PARISH SETTLEMENT BOUNDARY. SPECIAL RULES APPLY SUCH AS THOSE FOR RURAL EXCEPTION SITES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

COMMENTS BY A WCC PLANNING OFFICER

LAND BELONGING TO THE JCP

The allotments are unsuitable for affordable housing because of their position in open countryside, too far from the settlement boundary and with highways issues such as proximity to an unsurfaced restricted byway and the narrow section of the made-up Alresford Drove. The field next to Sanctuary Farm isn't suitable either as it is too separated and has access and highways problems. It would however suit a memorial garden, orchard or agricultural use. The two fields off Drove Links Rd are very unlikely to get permission for dwellings; a memorial garden or orchard might get approval but possibly not allotments as they are separated from the residential area and accessed off an unmade narrow track in joint ownership by the frontagers.

The JCP land is unsuitable for rural exception sites but could provide locations for legacy projects such as a memorial garden or orchard.

CHRISTMAS HILL

The plot on offer is just north of the substation on the C234 (Sutton Scotney direction). The owner's agent has put it forward for affordable homes. There are no major concerns from Highways with a new or existing access but development here would change the village pattern; the very clear settlement boundary would be distorted. An access might be created through the substation paddock with permission.

FIELD ADJACENT TO WEST HILL RD NORTH NEAR THE JUNCTION WITH ALRESFORD DROVE

There are possible highway concerns and issues around planning policy and uncertainty as to whether two of the owners are willing to sell. HARAHA offers to speak to them. Although affordable homes here would increase the numbers already present (La Frenaye Place) leading to overdominance, the site seems worthy of consideration. It is close to the settlement boundary but still separate and so a cause of concern.

LAND ADJACENT TO GOLDFINCH WAY

Persimmon Homes are apparently happy to put this site forward, according to HARAHA, but point out a potential problem with a ransom strip across the originally planned access from Goldfinch Way. HARAHA confirms it spoke to Persimmon Homes about rural exception land values (lower than for commercial land) and volunteers to ascertain who owns the ransom strip from Land Registry. Access from Goldfinch Way wouldn't give rise to the same issues as via Alresford Drive. The scheme if allowed would be close to the main residential area although outside the settlement boundary and might be combined with a memorial garden and allotments on the further side with screening. The affordable homes might be funded by including market housing, which is permissible if they only constitute up to 30% of a rural exception development. Hastoe Group will advise. Part of the rural exception site could be "downsizing" homes via shared ownership within rural exception policy.

Christmas Hill, West Hill Rd North and Persimmon Field look most suitable for affordable housing.

SUNCROFT

This was added as an afterthought. It is only accessible at present from a private track and Ox Drive, unless a way through Pine Close can be found.

JAZZMYN FIELDS

This was also an afterthought. It has issues of former landfill status and access from Alresford Drive.

IN CONCLUSION

WCC planning officers conclude that the sites proposed all have issues in some form. The possibility of development can therefore be ruled out from a planning perspective on the following plots: Christmas Hill, all the JCP holdings and West Hill Rd North. They leave out Suncroft and Jazzmyn Fields altogether. The land off Goldfinch Way (Persimmon Field) is left. Development here would detract from the very clear settlement boundary lines in South Wonston; however, given that this area is less defined by the ridgeline and development is less constrained, some form of affordable scheme may be possible. There are however a number of issues with this site: access, visual intrusion into the countryside and archaeological features to name a few. Given these issues and that the other sites are not favourable." I am unable to give a positive response in terms of planning"

says one officer. HARAHA thinks Planning seem to be saying that it appears only the Goldfinch Way site has any potential and even this site has constraints - but it might be possible for the constraints to be addressed.

Hastoe has had a positive meeting with Persimmon Homes and the owners of the ransom strip about trying to bring a small affordable housing scheme forward on the Goldfinch Way site.

Highways state they would definitely not allow access from Alresford Drove to the Persimmon Field, leaving only the ransom strip for gaining entry from Goldfinch Way as was probably always intended.

PC wish to retain interest in Christmas Hill and West Hill Rd North.

A Housing Survey will take place alongside the New Amenities Survey. The PC will be assisted by HARAHA.

HPP circulates details of its proposals: retirement homes and affordable homes.

2018

The JCP comes back with a scheme for five houses, allotments and social enterprise. PC advise seeking pre-application advice from WCC.

The results of the Affordable Housing Survey come in. Out of 630 replies, 25 think the Alresford Drove area is suitable for affordable housing, 17 vote for Persimmon Field, 8 go for West Hill Rd North and 2 for Christmas Hill. 189 think there should be affordable homes prioritized for local people. The survey shows some conflation between different types of less expensive housing.

The New Amenities Survey shows affordable housing to be fifth of six priorities.

WCC Housing Register shows 21 households wanting to rent and 5 wanting shared ownership, all with links to South Wonston

Hastoe design a scheme of 16 affordable homes and 4 market houses to support them. The PC is requested to seek approval from its members for a rural exception scheme for Persimmon Field of 4 market houses and sixteen affordable houses, also to coordinate a date for an open consultation and a prior meeting with HARAHA. Hastoe will continue to explore matters further with Persimmon Homes, neighbours affected by the ransom strip and the issue of the tenant farmer. The housing figures will be checked again.

At the February PC meeting, the PC vote in principle for no more than 20 homes. No site is named, even though Persimmon Field is being promoted as the only option and there seems to be no real alternative with a suitable access available to purchase at rural exception land values. An open consultation will take place.

HPP are still in touch, offering more affordable homes and allotments. They are looking for as high land value as possible. Is this achievable with affordable homes, we wonder. HPP are willing to approach WCC to see if their scheme is feasible. Nothing else is being looked at on West Hill Rd North

Persimmon Homes and the ransom strip owners are both willing to sell, Hastoe confirms. A Hastoe architect is brought in to meet the latter. A topographical survey is proposed. The PC approves.

Nowhere else has the same advantages, although the evidence of the Affordable Housing Survey is questionable. Findings will be displayed at the open consultation meeting.

The JCP asks the PC how it can proceed as the pre-application advice isn't working, apparently.

T2 Architects are keeping in touch as well as HPP, but HARAHA thinks from the Affordable Housing Survey results that the PC will have to inform them that, while grateful for their efforts, we believe both options are unsuitable. The PC eventually comply. The PC must also contact the neighbours of Persimmon Field to explain and justify the choice of location and numbers. A housing officer will speak to the Planning Department with regard to policies concerned with Rural Exception Sites and settlements with boundaries only in which development may take place. Informative notices will accompany the topographical survey and flyers, letters and a piece in the West Dever News will advertise the consultation event organized by HARAHA and hosted by the PC on 6th June 2018.

Two proposals based on Persimmon Field are offered for comments, sixteen affordable homes and sixteen affordable homes plus four market homes. The plans show a buffer zone to the east of the ransom strip and a double garage in an extended garden. About one hundred visitors attend.

In June, a new affordable housing survey is proposed and seconded and passed 5-2 as people feel insufficient support has been demonstrated.

At the September PC meeting, HARAHA present the findings of the open consultation event in front of a large audience. It is confirmed that the Persimmon Board agree in principle to the sale of the field to Hastoe and that talks are taking place with the tenant farmer who will require at least a year's notice. Attendance at the event was judged to be around 105. 51 responses were received. Despite many expressions of concern, HARAHA were certain that the Persimmon site was the most suitable and made three recommendations to the PC: to consider the report and continue to work with HARAHA to develop an affordable housing scheme for local people, to accept the principle that more housing is needed based on the housing need findings of the report and the existing registers and to agree that the Persimmon field is the preferred site, the final details to be agreed before a full planning application is made. (At the time of the consultation, there were 17 local households registered for rented properties and 12 for shared ownership). The PC reads and notes the recommendations.

CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) hold a conference on rural affordable housing at Littleton Memorial Hall on 6th November. This is chiefly interesting for the PC's discovery that HARAHA has a document entitled "Exploring the Blockages to the Delivery of Affordable Housing across HARAHA'S Area of Operation." It covers the causes of unsuccessful delivery – market-led development, too high price expectation, lack of planner impact at an early enough stage, weak project management, lack of registration (don't investigate where there is no customer base for the product) and community support. The document contains an Action Plan involving strengthening the site-led approach, driving ahead and reviewing Rural Housing Enabler site appraisal.

HARAHA also have a ten-step guide to developing an affordable housing scheme for local people in a rural community. Our experience varies a bit. The Rural Housing Enabler visits us to discuss an offer of land and a couple of other bits they are investigating. The Affordable Housing Survey isn't as well put together as it might have been.. Sites are ready produced for us. There is only one housing provider for affordable homes on rural exclusion sites in Hampshire Settlements – Hampshire Village Homes led by Hastoe. We eventually realised that there wouldn't be any planning application from

Hastoe unless we nominated the Persimmon Field and that we were going round in circles. The remaining points are Funding, for which we need a suitable site and planning permission, Building, Nomination Process for local tenants and Open Day.

On 11th November, a very well attended Extraordinary Meeting takes place to allow residents to respond fully to the consultation report.

The PC is unwilling to agree with any of the report recommendations. Instead, it offers the following statement to HARA and WCC: “ The Parish Council would like detailed information about the costs to tenants of affordable homes and a deeper investigation of actual housing need and the recorded local connection of potential tenants, who should be fully appraised of likely expenditure” .It also requested that HARA and Hastoe provide the most cost-effective monthly formula to enable the interviewer to advise potential tenants how much their new home will cost per month. The PC knows it must have sound information to create an unassailable demonstration of need for affordable housing.

2019

The “Verification of Housing Need” is ready by the PC meeting on 8th April. The figures are 7 households for rented accommodation and 3 for shared ownership (although 2 would go elsewhere than South Wonston to secure a home). The PC proceed to vote on the question “Do councillors believe that, as requested by the community, that the need for affordable homes in South Wonston is validated?” Four agree, three disagree. On the question “Would councillors support a future development of affordable homes in South Wonston?”, five support the proposal and two decline. This goes beyond the vote in principle made on 12th February 2018, but still no site is named.

In November, a planning application from Hastoe is hoped for to settle matters by presenting something to respond to and as part of which questions of community support (how much is enough?) and sufficiency of infrastructure will be determined. There is a proposal to rescind the April agreement (to recognise a need and support an affordable housing scheme) if there’s been no sign of any planning process by 31st January 2020.

The new affordable housing survey is sent out with the West Dever News to every household in South Wonston. The results won’t come in until 14th January 2020. The PC is asked by WCC why it’s doing another survey as it has already demonstrated community support. We didn’t think we had. The PC doesn’t feel well supported and guided through the process.

The PC agree that a Land Consultation Event set up by WCC and HARA will be held at the Pavilion on 16th December to look again at previously identified affordable housing sites and identify new ones. The initial planning comments on the previously identified sites are available to view. Thirty-one households attend the event and twenty-one responses are received. The sites on display are West Hill Rd North, Persimmon Field, Two fields north of Bridge Bungalow (JCP), Field next to Sanctuary Farm (JCP), The Allotments (JCP) Christmas Hill and Suncroft. West Hill Rd North and Persimmon Field attract one supporter, Persimmon Field receives four expressions of concern and Suncroft gets three objections. There are additional comments objecting to all the sites, objecting to breaking the settlement boundary, questioning the need, supporting affordable housing (2), and opposing affordable housing (4, explicitly). Please note the responses are quite nuanced and hard to interpret in simple terms.

WCC recommend that the PC consider the feedback report alongside other community consultation identifying site selection preferences and move forward with identifying site availability and suitability of selected sites as part of a HARAH collaborative process.

2020

Parish councillors meet with WCC and Hastoe on 30th January. As it turns out, feedback from the 2019 Site Consultation doesn't turn up until 28th January. The suggestion that, unless the planning process commences by 31st January, support for affordable housing will be withdrawn, is repeated. The PC questions the validity of previous surveys and explains residents' concerns about the difference between "need" and "want" and the possibility of further development if the settlement boundary is breached – a genuine fear, though possibly based on a misunderstanding of Rural Exception Sites. Hastoe says exception sites need parish support; the PC should now rank the sites and seek assessment from the Planning Department. Again. WCC claims the consultation was a success, only West Hill Rd North and Persimmon Field should be considered. Seven rentable and three shared equity were proposed at the June Consultation but now there are fifteen households registered for South Wonston.

On January 31st, an email is received from Hastoe, outlining the next steps after a site has been nominated, and negotiations with the landowners started, so the planning process is deemed to have begun. No site is named. The PC needs to vote for or against the listed sites or abstain.

At the PC meeting on 10th February. our local city councillor states that an affordable housing scheme in South Wonston should be based on tenant identification and inspection of the many sites available. Community need has been accepted and agreed by the PC and WCC have issued a draft feedback document following the site consultation on December 16th 2019. The city councillor has advised officers not to proceed with any pace where other schemes and sites are already identified and should push forward with those schemes instead. There is no need in South Wonston at present as there are so many opportunities in other villages.

The PC reply that the recent survey has been discarded as there were not enough responses. 207 of 888 have been returned. 106 say no to affordable housing, 101 say yes. Persimmon Field has 48 votes, West Hill Rd North 41, Christmas Hill, 23, Suncroft 9 and None, 8. 116 vote for the vehicular site access. Currently the intention is to list site preferences and go back with them to WCC.

Parish Councillors have studied their notes and are now invited to vote for their site preferences.

A councillor proposes that, as the response to the recent survey had proved inadequate, that the subject should be reviewed in one year's time. Another councillor suggests a clarification; the Affordable Housing Project should be put on hold for one year. This is seconded and carried unanimously at 6-0.

2021

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW?

I wanted to make sense of the above events and actions and justify our conduct where I thought I really should for the benefit of colleagues who weren't there and for those who were, but may not have had a chance to reflect because of so much other business. My next briefing will relate to our current situation, giving updates on the sites, the rural housing world and opportunities for home ownership in Winchester District. With any luck, I will get answers to my inquiries in time for the

Extraordinary Meeting. I would like Cllr Coleman to present her study of the latest housing figures separately to accompany the above research.

Cllr Ann J. Peal