

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BARFORD HELD AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON MONDAY 15TH FEBRUARY 2010 AT 7.30 P.M.

Present: J. V. Murphy (Chairman)
Fifty-seven other electors

Proposed Development of Former Barford House Lands

The Chairman stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the report from Sharba Homes on their latest consultation on their proposed development on former Barford House lands, to decide on whether to accept the results and on what action, if any, the Parish Meeting should now take.

It was evident from a show of hands that a substantial minority of those present had not received a copy of the report, so the Chairman read the summary:

“Sharba were pleased with the substantial and representative numbers of votes received on this third consultation by Sharba, the fifth in total to take place in respect of this site.

Less than a quarter of voters objected outright to the proposals or mix, and in excess of half supported both as proposed – more than twice that of objectors. The middle quartile demonstrated a range of partial support/disagreement with proposals as they stand.

Preferences for the hall were clearly in favour of the larger hall with complementary facilities to the existing hall, catering for a range of sports and social activities – i.e. not a restaurant, bar or social club. As an indicative view, voters clearly liked the broad and traditional styling of hall types 4 and 8/20.

The full report and feedback is being circulated to those who asked for a copy, and the Parish is invited to engage with Sharba to interpret the results and discuss a way forward, including a suitable working party for the design for the Parish facilities.”

The Chairman had received copies of the 280 responses and confirmed that the figures reported in Sharba’s document were accurate. However, the conclusions might be viewed as subjective. Furthermore, the questions assumed from previous consultations that residents supported a development of this land and, therefore, the latest consultation had been on matters of detail. However, the response-rates of the previous two consultations were very low (only 24 comment forms returned in the October 2008 consultation, 39 forms in the July 2008 consultation). In addition, the procedures used by Sharba in the latest consultation could be viewed as lacking rigour.

There was considerable support in the meeting for the view that the consultation report could not be accepted as an unbiased survey of villagers’ opinion on the proposals, as Sharba had a vested interest in developing the site. Moreover, the figure of 58% in favour was not a significant majority sufficient to provide the basis for such a major development, which would change the shape of the village for the foreseeable future.

There was a lengthy discussion of the arguments for and against the development, rehearsing again many of the points made at the previous special Parish Meeting. Amongst the points raised were the following:

- (i) the proposed development would be contrary to current District Council policy and, therefore, Sharba Homes were seeking to gain villagers support in the hope of convincing the District Council that there were reasons in this case to make an exception;
- (ii) the impact of the development on the village needed to be assessed in order to make an informed decision on whether the village should grow in this way. There were pros (e.g. helping village services be more viable, such as the school, shop and public houses) and cons (e.g. increased traffic). Although the shop and school were viable at present, they might not be in the longer term;
- (iii) the Housing Needs Survey for Barford, Sherbourne & Wasperton showed a need for 11 affordable homes. In addition there was some anecdotal evidence and from the 2004 Parish Plan survey of a need for low - and medium-cost market homes;

- (iv) government policy was to promote more housing. This meant that at some time in the medium- to long-term future this land would come under pressure for development, so it was better to work with a developer who was willing to work with the village on the type of development and to give planning gains. Though some characterized these as “bribes”, planning obligations were a normal part of the planning process;
- (v) Barford’s location and ambience were principal drivers for house price rises and any homes initially thought of as low-cost would be affected;
- (vi) it was unrealistic to expect a benefactor to enable the village to purchase this land for the public benefit and anyway it was unlikely that the owner would sell. He had retained the land for many years in the hope of making a profit through developing it for housing. He might continue to hold on to it in that hope;
- (vii) what did those opposed to this development want – for the land to remain the same?
- (viii) underlying all the issues was a basic question – do residents want the village to expand?
- (ix) whilst residents might be more interested in access to open space and in favour of affordable housing (e.g. in the area off Wasperton Lane), was there a realistic chance that these could be brought about without market housing on the site as well?
- (x) might a new housing development increase the likelihood of local sand and gravel extraction?
- (xi) although there were public footpaths over countryside adjacent to the village, older people might find open space within the village more attractive for recreational use;
- (xii) policy on housing densities might change in future to require a more intensive development;
- (xiii) if Barford needed a larger hall could funds be raised for this? Some felt that the amount needed would be too great and, in any case, where would such a facility be built?
- (xiv) It was contended that the size of the proposed public building would be too small for activities such as badminton and that there was insufficient space allowed for a cricket pitch. However, these statements were disputed.

Discussion then turned to whether it would be desirable to conduct a further, independent survey of residents’ opinions. It was felt that this would give guidance to members of the Joint Parish Council’s Planning Committee, help influence the District Council when it took a decision on a planning application and would provide useful information to be placed before any Public Inquiry. However, there was a danger of “questionnaire fatigue”, which might reduce the response rate. Any further survey should, therefore, ask a small number of basic questions. There was a contrary view: that no new survey was required and that all the information in the Sharba surveys, the Barford Parish Plan and the Village Design Statement should simply be put to any Public Inquiry, leaving the Inspector to assess their significance.

It was pointed out that the Barford Residents Association had considerable experience of conducting surveys of village opinion (e.g. on sand & gravel extraction and on the bypass) and perhaps that organization could be used again to frame questions for a new survey. However, in view of the divisions evident in residents’ opinions, it would be necessary for the analysis of responses and the reporting of the conclusions to be conducted by an outside agency so as to avoid accusations of possible bias.

The meeting then proceeded to a series of votes. It was **resolved**:

- (a) that in order to obtain more accurate information on residents’ opinions on the proposed development, a survey be conducted involving an outside organization (31 votes for, 17 against, 4 abstentions);
- (b) that the Barford Residents Association be asked to appoint a working party to draft the questions (28 for, 18 against, 6 abstentions);
- (c) that Sharba Homes be asked to fund this survey, though without in-put as to the questions or the drafting of the report, with the funds being held by the Joint Parish Council (41 for, 6 against, 5 abstentions). If Sharba were not willing to provide the funds, then the JPC be asked to do so.

Residents wishing to suggest the issues to be covered or questions for the survey were asked to send them to the Chairman, who would forward them to the BRA working party.

The meeting closed at 9.28 p.m.