

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PARISH OF BARFORD HELD AT THE MEMORIAL HALL ON MONDAY 5TH OCTOBER 2009 AT 7.30 P.M.

Present: J. V. Murphy (Chairman)
Eighty-four other electors

By invitation: County Councillor Les Caborn

Proposed Development of Former Barford House Lands

The meeting had been called to afford the community the opportunity to discuss the proposals from Sharba Homes for the development of land near Barford House. These proposals consisted of housing, including affordable housing, public open space and a community building. Households in the village had received a brochure on the scheme from Sharba Homes, though it appeared that a few had not been given a copy.

The Chairman stated that the purpose of the meeting was to raise issues that could be taken to the Joint Parish Council and/or Sharba Homes and to inform individuals' replies to Sharba's questionnaire. The Joint Parish Council had not formulated a view on the site or on these proposals and probably would not do so until a formal Planning Application was submitted. This meeting would, however, enable Parish Councillors to be informed of some of the views of the electorate so that they would be better able to respond to the Planning Application when it arrived.

The Chairman and Parish Councillor Maggie Hayward, as Chairman of the Barford Heritage Group, gave some of the history and significance of the site: the fields surrounding Barford House are the only large green space near the centre of the village and formed part of the setting of the Grade II* building. However, this land holding had been separated from the house since 1973 and over the years developers had held options for development of the land. Several schemes had come forward in this period but none had come to fruition. Sharba Homes now had an option and had held two consultations with the village on the form development should take. Their current consultation was to fine-tune the proposals prior to submitting a Planning Application. Sharba Homes has stated that unless there was significant support from the village, the scheme would not go ahead.

The current District Local Plan, valid until 2011, and the draft Core Strategy for the next Local Plan (2012 to 2026) both did not identify Barford as a village for significant additional housing. The only exception would be to meet local housing needs demonstrated via a Housing Needs Survey. Thus any Planning Application for development of this site was likely to be called in by the Secretary of State and to be brought before a Public Inquiry for determination centrally, since it would be outside the Local Plan provisions. The developers recognized that these, and the site's Conservation Area status, would mean that to overcome these obstacles significant local support would be required. Even then it would be far from certain that the application would be approved.

The meeting then discussed aspects of the proposal. Amongst the points raised were the following:

In Favour of the Scheme:

- (i) the land in its existing state was of little use to residents since it was hardly visible and they had no access to it;
- (ii) if the village expressed itself against this scheme so that it did not go ahead, eventually another developer might bring forward a less sympathetic scheme that had not been the subject of consultation. This was the first opportunity for the village to influence the form of a major development and one which might not be available in future. There was significant support in the meeting for this view;
- (iii) the current scheme did not encroach on existing dwellings and gave benefits through its public building, open space and affordable housing;
- (iv) the new route into the school might ease congestion in Church Street;
- (v) additional houses might help support the viability of local services, such as the shop and public houses;

- (vi) the scheme would provide new opportunities for sport and recreation, which at present the village lacked;
- (vii) the Barford Cricket Club would wish to return to the village if it could find an affordable venue such as this scheme might provide;
- (viii) the design of the houses was sympathetic to existing styles in the village and had taken into account details raised in the Village Design Statement;
- (ix) demand for booking the existing village hall was high so that it was difficult to obtain a booking for evenings, though demand during the daytime should ease with the Pre-School shortly to move. Sometimes a larger space was needed for functions, such as might be provided by the new community building;

Against the Scheme:

- (x) the village's population should not be increased;
- (xi) the proposals would detract from the setting of Barford House;
- (xii) the two parts of the site are separate and need not be developed together. For example, the part off Wasperton Lane could be used for affordable housing without needing to develop the other part of the site;
- (xiii) the school might be adversely affected since, although section 106 payments might cover the capital costs of expansion to cater for larger numbers, they would not cover increased running costs;
- (xiv) the "wild places" of the village need to be preserved;
- (xv) grants were available for sports facilities so that the proposed new building was not the only option to cater for this need. However, where would an alternative facility be built? Perhaps on the school field but the existing recreation ground could not be built upon;

Questions & Answers:

- (xvi) if planning approval were granted, could the developer change aspects of the scheme without consulting the village further? This could happen but permission for the changes would have to be sought from the District Council;
- (xvii) in the present economic climate can we be sure that the developer has sufficient financial health to complete the development? Conditions placed on planning permission could attempt to guard against the communal facilities being left unfinished by specifying the phasing of the build;
- (xviii) can there be independent verification of the number of homes necessary to be handed over to the village as a dowry for the community facilities whilst still producing a profit for the developer?
- (xix) could the village buy this land itself and thus control it directly? It would be difficult to organize even if the owner were willing to sell on that basis. The amount would be much higher than that recently raised after a huge effort to build a new shop. On a show of hands about 20 residents present indicated that they would be willing to contribute;
- (xx) would the control of the open space be transferred to the community? It would be transferred in some way to be decided – perhaps to the JPC or to a trust, so that the community could prevent any further development;
- (xxi) how would the proposed new community building be run? As with the open land this could be the JPC, a trust or a management committee. It might be beneficial to be able to co-ordinate use of the new building with use of the existing hall;
- (xxii) if this development went ahead, would that take pressure off other possible sites near the village? Although there could be no certainty that other developers would not come forward with sites, it would take pressure off those locations (e.g. within the line of the bypass), since the current demand for affordable homes would have been met. The only sites the JPC was currently considering were for small-scale developments purely to meet demonstrated affordable housing needs;
- (xxiii) is there a demand from within the village for more houses? The recent Housing Needs Survey identified a need for 9 additional affordable homes and the Barford Parish Plan questionnaire identified a need for bungalows and smaller homes for residents who wished to down-size;
- (xxiv) would the additional homes adversely affect the village's sewage system? This was a problem but a developer could, through a condition placed on Planning Permission, be made to fund improvements;

(xxv) would expansion of the school lead to it having to build on its own playing field?

Comments on Matters of Detail

- (xxvi) the affordable housing and lower cost dwellings should be spread throughout the site, rather than predominantly on the southern part;
- (xxvii) the entrance off Wasperton Lane needs careful treatment to ensure it does not exacerbate traffic and parking issues in that location;
- (xxviii) the school will need to look at the security aspects of establishing a second entrance;
- (xxix) an additional option to that shown on the Sharba Homes questionnaire would be not to have a community building but to have more open space and fewer houses;
- (xxx) the community building could be positioned so that it was available as changing accommodation for the existing recreation ground as well as for the new facility. It would even be possible to have the building on a different site if one could be found, thereby increasing the amount of open space. One suggestion was that the optimum position was in the north-east corner, giving easier access from the rest of the village and to both the current recreation ground and the new development's open space;
- (xxxii) the school could be involved in planning the new community building if it wished to make use of it, for example in the mornings, when it would be less used by others;
- (xxxiii) similarly, the Scouts & Guides Group should be consulted on whether they might use the new building;
- (xxxiiii) the future running costs of the communal facilities could be covered by charging membership fees, though residents would need to come forward willing to manage it as a club. Perhaps one of the houses given over to the village could be used for a resident steward. The open space could be maintained by a charge paid by residents of the new houses that would surround it;
- (xxxv) the amount of car parking will need to be adjusted to fit the size of the new facility;

General Comments

- (xxxvi) the nub of the issue was whether the proposed development was of an appropriate scale for the village and whether the communal assets being offered by the developer out-weighed any disadvantage;
- (xxxvii) it was intended to revive the Barford Residents Association which would conduct a survey of village opinion on whether the development should go ahead;
- (xxxviii) the current Sharba Homes questionnaire was very limited in scope, concentrating on detail. If respondents considered that the development should not go ahead, they should write this on the form and Sharba would record it. A link would be put on the Barford Community Web Site to the Sharba site;
- (xxxix) if the decision was to support the proposals, there needed to be negotiations with Sharba to ensure that the village gained the maximum benefits from the development. The village's stance should be to pitch its demands as high as possible;
- (xl) it was too early in the process to consider the size, style and content of the community building the village needed first to decide whether it would support the proposals in principle. There was significant support for this view. On the other hand a decision was needed quickly on the building in order to influence the planning application – the earlier we could take those decisions the greater the influence we would have on the application.

In conclusion, residents were urged to return the questionnaires to Sharba and copy them to the Chairman so that he could gauge opinion.

The meeting thanked the Chairman for his work in structuring the discussion through a complex and important issue for the future of the village.

The meeting closed at 9.34 p.m.