STEEP PARISH COUNCIL

CHURCH ROAD DEVELOPMENT - PUBLIC OPEN SPACE OWNERSHIP

Background:

The new development on Church Road in Steep is due to be completed in early 2027. Currently all but one of the houses are sold. With the three affordable homes bought by Eames Alms housing and reserved for residents in accordance with their objectives. Within this development, there are areas of "public open space" (POS) along the frontage bordering Church Road, along the boundary with the Village Hall, and at the rear bordering Bedales (as shown in green hatching on the attached plan). A final decision over which of the three organisations will take on the ownership and responsibility for these areas in perpetuity as the development draws to a close now needs to be made.

There is a maintenance schedule for the POS (called "Landscape management Plan") which lasts for 10 years has already been approved by South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA). Before works commenced, the developer deposited the sum of £18,746 to SDNPA for the sole purpose of maintaining the POS - this is called 's106 money'. This money will be available to whoever takes over ownership and is to cover maintenance of the POS for the first 10 years on an annual drawdown basis. Once it has been spent, any additional funding will then have to found by the new owner.

As agreed with SDNPA, ownership of the POS is to be offered to the following in order:

1. Steep Parish Council (SPC)
2. Steep War Memorial Village Club (SWMVC)
3. A new management company formed of residents of the new development

The future management company will be retaining the strip of land to the south of the southern-most houses (plots 6-9) bordering Bedales due to the boggy nature of the strip. The remaining POS land is to the north and west of the site.

It is considered that management of the land by SWMVC would not be appropriate due to any possible future financial burden imposed on the club.

Facts:

- The POS will be planted and signed off to the approved plans by the developer and subsequently managed according to the 10 year "Landscape Management Plan".
- The layout and design of the POS including the planting scheme has been approved by SDNPA and cannot fundamentally be changed without applying for planning permission.
- The POS must only be used for "recreation and amenity" purposes by the general public.
- The design is on a gradient and planting is largely meadow grass and flowers.
- The annual upkeep cost is predicted to be between £1,400 (if we utilise volunteers) and £2,000 (for an external contractor) per year. Most of this can be covered by the s106 money and could last for 10 years or until it runs out. Afterwards, this cost will need to be met from SPC funds.
- All legal costs for this transfer will have to be covered by SPC.

Your chance to comment:

Whilst the decision rests with the Parish Council, we would very much welcome residents' views on whether SPC should take ownership of the POS and, if so, the associated management responsibilities.

Considerations for SPC taking over the management of the POS:

1. SPC and the parish would have greater oversight of how the POS is maintained.
2. There would be greater continuity in how the POS is managed during the initial 10-year period and potentially beyond.
3. The Parish Council and the Village Hall Trustees may, in time, be able to consider how the two areas of land could work together as a more coherent space, subject to finances, practical considerations and community views.
4. SPC may be able to use the POS for appropriate parish activities or events, although the Common or Village Hall grounds would be expected to remain the usual venues.

Considerations for SPC <u>not</u> taking over the management of the POS:

1. SPC could potentially consider taking ownership at a later stage, once there is more experience of the maintenance requirements and associated costs. However, this would depend on the future arrangements and there would be no guarantee that the management company would agree to this.

2. The actual maintenance costs may be higher or lower than the s106 funds available. If the funds were to be exhausted before the end of the 10 years, SPC would need to consider how additional costs could be met.
3. Taking ownership would mean accepting responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of the POS beyond the period covered by the available s106 funding (in perpetuity).
4. SPC would need to oversee the maintenance arrangements and establish an appropriate maintenance contract.
5. As with any newly developed land, there may be issues relating to matters such as drainage, flooding, settlement or hardscaping which would need to be monitored and addressed as appropriate and could have financial implications on SPC.
6. SPC would need to ensure that any activities permitted on the POS were consistent with any covenants and did not create a nuisance or cause damage to neighboring properties.
7. SPC would need to spend money on any legal costs during the transfer.

Now is your chance to have your say:

We would very much welcome your views on whether you think SPC should take over ownership and management of the POS, or whether an alternative arrangement would be preferable.

Please send any comments to our Parish Council Clerk, Sam, at clerk@steep-pc.gov.uk by the end of November 2026.