

## THE CHURCH ROAD SITE – THE PARISH COUNCIL’S PERSPECTIVE

1. Discussions about building on the Church Road site have been going on for more than twenty years. This has focussed mostly on the provision of affordable homes, recognising a real need in the village in the face of extremely high local housing costs.
2. A number of housing development projects have been proposed for the site since 2002 involving various elements and partners but each has foundered for various reasons.
3. One of the reasons the last project came to a halt was the uncertain trust status of the “allotments” site. As a result, the Parish Council resolved to pass the land to an independent group of trustees. This led (after protracted negotiations by the new trustees with the Charity Commission) to the establishment of the Steep in Need charity. This charity now holds the freehold of that land.
4. In 2012, following a thorough community engagement, the Parish Council adopted the Parish Plan. Amongst the priorities highlighted in the plan, two major ones were the need for a modest increase in the stock of affordable housing and an improved village centre on land around the Village Hall.
5. The need for affordable housing is still real and valid (and of a scale that we cannot expect to meet). In the judgement of the Parish Council, our failure as a community to deliver any affordable housing over nearly a generation is a matter of regret.
6. Our options of where these might be built remain extremely limited – even more so after recent changes to the settlement boundary. We have also examined every other possibility, however remote, and we are convinced, following discussions with the SDNPA, that the land in Church Road (which could also enable the “village centre” concept) is probably the only practical option open to us in the foreseeable future. The site is now included in the settlement boundary following the adoption of the new SDNPA local plan.
7. So, we have a community wish as expressed in the Parish Plan, a good understanding of the charitable framework that applies to the land and a site which is officially designated for possible development.
8. Our role as a Parish Council is to facilitate/encourage this possibility in support of the Parish Plan actions and to ensure that there is the fullest possible consultation on any specific proposals. We will have a formal role in the event of a planning application being submitted to review this critically as we do with other applications and to understand and appropriately reflect community feelings on this.
9. We as a Parish Council are not advocating or endorsing or approving what is still an embryonic project. There are many steps still to be taken – but we are very keen that it should have the opportunity to progress to the point of engaging the community in its development, before key decisions are made.
10. We as a Parish Council do not know if a proposal for this site will eventually succeed. We do not know what any development would look like and we do not know what the community’s considered view of an eventual proposal will be. We do know that there are limitations and constraints on all the parties involved which mean that – to be realistic - any solution will be less than what we might like in an ideal world.
11. However, we think that this seems to be an opportunity to create a more effective centre for Steep, provide some affordable housing and to have a specific and detailed project for a properly informed debate about it.
12. In its role as sole managing trustee of the Village Hall, the Parish Council is required to act in a distinct capacity from its council role and in the best interests of the Steep War Memorial Village Club. We have paid careful attention to this separation of roles and duties both in general and in relation to the discussions of the Church Road site.