

STEEP PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN: Cllr. Jim MacDonald

CLERK: Mrs. Jenny Hollington

Minutes of an Extraordinary Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday, 16th July 2015 at Steep Village Hall at 7.45 p.m.

Present:

Cllr. Jim MacDonald (in the Chair)	Terry Cook
Nick Hurst	Peter Cruttenden
Graeme Fairley	Luke Spurdle
Simon Bridger	

In Attendance:

County Councillor, Vaughan Clarke
District Councillor, Nick Drew
Clerk, Jenny Hollington

There were approximately 60 members of the public in attendance throughout the meeting.

- 15/113 **APOLOGIES** - Apologies had been received from Cllrs. Jenny Martin and Peter Thackrey
- 15/114 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** – The Chairman reminded Councillors of their responsibility to declare any interest in any matter on the Agenda – none were declared.
- 15/115 **INTRODUCTION** – The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. He explained that the meeting had been called in order to discuss the current approach by HARAHA/Hyde for possible affordable housing on a site in Ridge Common Lane and, in discussing this, he felt that it was also important to understand a little of the background on the issue of affordable housing in the parish.

In 2011 the Parish Plan Questionnaire had sought views on affordable housing - this had provoked 5-pages of responses – far larger than any other question. From the replies, it was clear that it continues to be an emotive subject and that views across the parish are somewhat polarised. However, the clear outcome had been a desire for “a modest increase in the affordable housing stock, aimed principally at the elderly and young families with local connections”.

Since the proposals for affordable housing for the site in Church Road in 2009, things have been relatively quiet with regard to affordable housing in the parish - this did not, of course, mean that the housing issue had gone away - it had, in part, been a time of recovery, but it had also been a time for the new Trustees (set up to look after the land held in Trust) to establish themselves and consider how they wished to move forward.

In April the Parish Council had received an e-mail from Catherine Kirkham at HARAHA, explaining that they had a land owner, prepared to sell a plot of land in Ridge Common Lane for development and asking whether the Parish Council would be prepared to work with them and their partners Hyde Housing in developing this proposal further. This item was initially discussed at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May, but a decision had not been reached because it was felt there was not enough information available regarding the site. Since then, the Parish Council has made further enquiries, as discussed and agreed at the Annual Meeting, with regard to 3 specific areas:

- Hampshire Highways - Have Hampshire Highways previously looked at this site? Could traffic generated by a rural exception site be accommodated by the current crossroads and the lack of footpath in Ridge Common Lane?
- SDNPA - Has there been a previous site assessment of this piece of land that has ruled it out as suitable? Would SDNPA be able to give a preliminary assessment of the site? Would covenants on the land impact on development?
- What is happening with the plot of land in Church Road?

In addition, since the Annual Meeting a dozen or so letters/e-mails have been received by the Parish Council from members of the public who although generally supportive of affordable housing, queried whether Forge Field was the best site.

The Chairman handed over to Vice Chairman, Cllr. Peter Cruttenden, for a presentation intended to assist the decision Councillors have been asked to make on the current approach by HARA/Hyde:

15/116 POSSIBLE HOUSING ON A SITE IN RIDGE COMMON LANE

The site in Ridge Common Lane was discussed in detail – the large area of specimen trees and the small gate to the lane were pointed out. It was noted that in order to be developed, the site would need to be classified as a rural exception site as it is outside the settlement boundary and, as such, a greater level of community consultation and engagement would be required.

The background of HARA (Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing) and their partners Hyde Housing - a substantial, not-for-profit, housing association with whom Steep Parish Council had engaged previously on the proposal for land in Church Road - was also explained.

The Vice-Chairman confirmed that a housing needs survey would be a requirement of progressing any proposal to the planning application stage, although it is likely that the need remains substantial and greater than the scale of development proposed here.

With regard to the questions raised at the Annual Meeting, the following feedback had since been obtained:

- **Steep In Need Charity** – The Trustees are currently consulting on their Objects via the Charity Commission and are therefore not able to add anything at this stage, except to say that they are conscious of the priorities in the parish plan and that whatever they do it will, of course, have to be within the constraints of their Objects.
- **Hampshire Highways** – In response to questions raised about access issues and whether anything can be done to address these problems, Hampshire Highways, rather unhelpfully, said that due to financial constraints they are unable to provide any pre-application advice.
- **South Downs National Park** – In response to the P.C. enquiries, an officer from the Park confirmed that initial advice had been given to Hyde Housing in 2014. The Officer had also attended the site in Ridge Common Lane in the previous couple of weeks and enlarged on that advice to give a clear indication that the density of housing proposed (9 affordable homes and 2 market homes) would be unsupportable in view of landscape impact and size of plot (especially in relation to the adjacent listed building). However, a smaller density of houses (perhaps half) aligned along the road, might be appropriate, as long as all other issues (ecology, etc.) could be addressed.

The Vice Chairman confirmed that, in view of the advice received from SDNPA, his recommendation to the Parish Council was to decline to support the current Hyde/HARA proposal. However, in recognition of the continued need for more affordable housing, he also proposed that the Parish Council establish a P.C. led working party, within the next 90 days, of volunteers across the parish to carry out a consultation exercise to find a suitable site within the parish and report findings back to the Parish Council in approximately 1-years' time.

15/117 PUBLIC COMMENT – The floor was opened up for comments from the public (an initial response from the P.C. is shown in italics):

- The Objects of the Steep In Need Charity, available via the website, seem very weak. The Trustees' only option appear to be to sell the land for development of some sort and since they would be obliged to sell for the highest price, this would not include affordable housing.

- The Church Road site is outside the current settlement boundary and, as such, would only be available for affordable housing.
- There is a lack of knowledge on the current housing need - recent correspondence from the Rural Housing Enabler seems to indicate that there are only 7 on the housing needs register at the moment. How is the survey carried out? *This housing register is different to a housing needs survey and tends to fluctuate enormously depending on whether there is a proposal for housing. A housing needs survey systematically assesses the total level of need and is carried out by EHDC according to a well-established process. Any available affordable properties would be allocated on a priority basis to those with village connections.*
- How do you guarantee that housing stays affordable (e.g. right to buy)? *Political decisions influence these issues and are beyond the control of the Parish Council but any agreement to allocate a rural exception site for affordable housing could state the community's wish for it to remain like this in perpetuity.*
- Of the nine sites originally looked at by EHDC, has anything changed which would make a difference to the planning authority? *The changes in the political landscape may have some influence but it is important to look at all possibilities with fresh eyes.*
- EHDC originally looked at the nine sites and rejected them all except Church Road, but it is the local community that have the most knowledge of the parish and should be included in the process – *Assessors look at their own parameters, but the Parish Council is intending to consult the community as part of the working party remit.*
- Will the Bedales estate be included within the Village assessment? *There are no parameters for the working party as yet but it is hoped to include the whole parish.*
- The land at Forge Field had been left in Trust for wildlife – why does no-one have to consider the original intention of the Will? *Trustees make the decisions! Covenants on land are a civil matter and not regarded as a topic for planning consideration.*
- Both proposals for Church Road and Forge Field had been for approximately 9 affordable homes and had been rejected – does this mean that the desire of the developer is incompatible with land availability within the parish? *Church Road was not rejected because of density.*

The Chairman indicated that any issues raised which the P.C. were unsure about would be addressed in full by the new working party and information fed back to the Parish Council/members of the public in due course.

Following public comment, a petition signed by 272 parishioners, against the current proposals for Forge Field, was presented to the Parish Council for information.

15/118 COUNCILLORS' DISCUSSION AND DECISION – Councillors discussed the information received and the recommendations made:

- That the Parish Council should decline to support further work on the current proposal from HARAHA/Hyde for the site in Ridge Common Lane – Agreed unanimously
- That a Working Party be established within the next 90 days to find a suitable site within the parish and to report back to the Parish Council by June 2016 – Agreed unanimously.

A letter will be sent to HARAHA explaining the Parish Council decision not to progress the current proposal for Forge Field, but indicating a desire to continue to liaise with them to find a suitable site for affordable housing within the parish. Anyone interested in joining the Working Party (to consist of 3 Parish Councillors and 3 members of the public from a spread across the parish) should contact the Clerk (clerk@steep-pc.gov.uk).

15/119 DATE OF NEXT MEETING – **Monday, 7th September at 7.30 p.m. at Steep Village Hall.**

The meeting closed at 8.46 for refreshments.