

STEEP PARISH COUNCIL



Chair of Steep Parish Council – Jim MacDonald
Clerk to Steep Parish Council – Jenny Hollington
Rose Cottage, Ridge Common Lane, Stroud, Petersfield GU32 1AX

Tel: 01730 267784 E-mail – clerk@steep-pc.gov.uk

Steep Parish Council held a community update meeting in the Village Hall on Saturday November 30, last year. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions in writing to which the council committed to respond.

Those questions – and the Council's responses - are attached below.

VILLAGE CENTRE

Q1. How does building 10 dwellings create a village centre?

Q2. The Parish Plan identified a requirement for centre of community. How is 20% of open space going to be the heart of the village ?

A. 10 houses do not make a village centre, but good design and layout with the 20% public space used creatively adjoining the Village Hall gives an opportunity to make a significant public area in the heart of our village. This could create a community asset that we can be proud of.

Q3. As a village resident with a very close connection to the war memorial, the current location is completely unsuitable. The plans are therefore great, indeed our views as stakeholders have been sought.

A. Thank you. Any move of the memorial would need to be handled thoughtfully and sensitively – and community views will be sought further on this idea in the next phase of consultation. No conclusions have yet been arrived at.

Q4. What do you envisage the function/uses of the 20% open space to be and where on the plot will it be sited?

A. This is very much open to consultation with the village. It is the Parish Council's intention (and was specified by the Inspector in the Local Plan) that the space should be publicly accessible to all. The logical siting of the 20% would be in the front corner closest to the village hall car park, but it may be that others have more imaginative ideas. It is our space and, as such, we want the community to be involved in the decisions about location and use.

Q5. 10 houses mean more cars - there is a risk that the centre will be a car park!

A. Any new dwelling must have car parking space and Hampshire Highways will not sanction a development that has insufficient car parking. The risk you correctly identify will be considered as part of the consultation process to ensure that we have mitigated that risk as far as possible.

Q6. The Site is, as you say, the heart of the village. The townscape/village-scape needs very careful design to sit comfortably. A standard housing layout will not be appropriate.

A. This is a very important point and the Parish Council agrees with you. The site has mature trees around it and any buildings need to be appropriate for this backdrop, as well as being respectful of the adjacent properties. We believe that Steep in Need share our ambition for excellent layout and design in the evolving project.

VILLAGE HALL

Q7. The Village Hall is used primarily by the privately-run Nursery School. Groups like the Welcome club have to wait until 3.30 to use it. We need a proper village hall for the village.

Q8. We are desperate for another meeting room as the Nursery use the hall during the day, for Welcome Club, History Group etc. Would this be possible?

A. The Hall is a very popular venue used by many groups and individuals, as well as the Nursery School. The trustees of the Village Hall are aware of the particular needs of the Welcome Club and others who like to meet during the day and are continuing to examine ways to meet them better. Your question does underline the need to continue to upgrade the facilities of the Hall.

Q9. The small field 15% should be kept as open land. The Nursery school use it nearly every day playing and it is a natural passage for the wild life.

A. We believe that there is greater community benefit to be gained from having 20% of the whole site fully accessible. We are in touch with the Nursery and are working with them to continue to provide appropriate and attractive facilities. Furthermore, any potential development will have to be sensitive to the implications for wild-life - and respond to a full ecological survey.

Q10. There is a lack of quality community space in the parish - Open space study by EHDC 2018 noted this. Where is SPC proposing new space?

A. The provision of 20% of the combined site as freely accessible public space is a gain for the community. It should be noted that we already benefit from exceptionally high-quality open space (with Steep Common) and with direct linkages into the outstanding open spaces that surround us.

Q11. The Village Hall has failed to comply with its own Objects by agreeing to the possible use of their land for housing with Steep in Need.

A. We do not think that is correct. We believe that the trustees of the Village Hall have complied, and continue to comply, with the objects of the Steep War Memorial Village Club, as recognised by the Charity Commission. We are proud of the work of the trustees - past and present - in developing and maintaining an efficient and popular venue. They have also ensured that the Hall is financially stable and not a drain on the parish funds. The ideas currently being explored have the potential to further enhance the fabric and facilities of the Village Hall and to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the Club. Any incidental contribution to the development of a better centre to the village is an added benefit.

Q12. The Village Hall was forced to accept the 20% as accessible green space it did not intend that when it hooked up with Steep in Need. If it withheld the plot and kept to its wider objects, the field could not have houses but some better village project.

A. The Village Plan of 2012 identified the priority for a better village centre and, from the inception of our discussions, there has been an expectation that a public space would form part of any development on this site. We regarded the inspector's decision to specify a minimum size of that space as helpful.

Q13. Are you going to increase the size of the Village Hall Car Park?

A. We expect that any project would involve a re-modelling of the village hall car-park and include a modest increase in spaces.

STEEP IN NEED

Q14. The objective of Steep in Need is to provide grants to those in need. How will individuals in need be identified and how will this not be divisive?

A. Information about the charity can be found on its website at www.steepinneedcharity.org.uk.

Q15. What do i) Steep in Need (ii) the Village Hall propose to spend the proceeds on & how will this benefit the residents?

A. i) We understand that Steep in Need are in discussions with Eames Almshouses Trust and hope to enable Eames to become the 'Provider' of the proposed affordable housing by helping them financially. A substantial proportion of the funds received by Steep in Need from the sale of the land could be used for this purpose, subject to the agreement of the Charity Commission. This plan would have many benefits including ensuring that the affordable housing remains under the control of the Almshouses in perpetuity and that the funds received by Steep in Need remain in the village. The remainder of the funds would be applied to fulfilling the mission of Steep in Need (the relief of local poverty)

ii) The ideas currently being explored have the potential to further enhance the fabric and facilities of the Village Hall and to improve the long-term financial sustainability of the Club - as well as providing an outdoor community space accessible to all in centre of the village.

BUILDINGS

Q16. Is there potential for not having individual houses?

A. No firm plans yet exist, so many options are possible. However, we would expect any development to be in keeping with the village.

Q17. RIBA says that houses on less than 1/10th of an acre are too small for family life (RIBA =Royal Institute of British Architects)

A. We expect the Trustees to work with the developer and the community to achieve the best possible quality/size of build/space for any new houses. Any planning application would be subject to scrutiny by the public and the Parish Council. The South Downs National Park authority would make the final decision on any application.

Q18. Why not have 2 bigger houses and 4 Alms houses to reduce the amount of extra people whilst preserving revenue from it?

A. The SDNPA will be the ultimate decision-maker on the density and mix of housing on the site, including unit sizes. The allocation in the Local Plan is for eight to twelve residential units. The SDNPA also has a formula to balance between market and affordable units.

Q19. How will Steep in Need ensure any houses are "nice" to look at (i.e. not like the new Bedales ones on Church Rd)

A. We understand that this has been a fundamental point in discussions. The design of the Church Road site, the materials used, and the overall appearance of the development will be at the core of the consultations with the community; this has been discussed with, and accepted by, the preferred developer. The SDNPA are, however, the ultimate decision-maker.

Q20. Why can't the previous Parish Council project with Petersfield Housing Association in 2005-2007 for a development project for 100% combination of rental/shared ownership not be revived? The crescent design and open space combined with S.106 principle was appropriate for the site

A. The Parish Council does not now own the land. We would expect the Trustees to propose the most appealing and appropriate plan within the constraints under which they operate. However, we would expect that all possible design options (including previous ideas) would be looked at.

Q21. Why are you going with the minimum number of affordable dwellings; surely Steep in Need should be aiming higher than this?

A. The Parish Council would like to see the largest possible number of affordable homes. However, we recognise the complex constraints on the development of the site, including the legal duties of charitable trustees and the fact that the split between affordable and market units will be based on a formula laid down by the SDNPA. We are supportive of this embryonic project as we believe that it holds a reasonable prospect of leading to a planning application, based on strong community input, which can be properly considered.

Q22. In 2010 the community voted not to develop the land, the plan then was for 100% social housing, this time 50% of the development is for private houses who can be bought by people who have no connection to Steep. Why are you using a private developer who will be making money out of charity land

A. The planning rules and the environment for social housing has changed since 2007/ 2010 and the situation when the referendum rejected a specific project. It is the SDNPA guidelines which will have a primary influence on the accommodation expected on the site. The trustees, themselves, could not undertake the development.

Q23. The 2010 vote was not 52/48 but won/lost by just 6 votes in a turnout of nearly 1000. less than 1% so 49.8/50.2

A. We agree that the result of the earlier vote was quite evenly balanced. What is important today is that the community feels able to influence the development on this important site.

Q24. How will your aspirations be viable for a developer?

A. The Parish Council will work closely with the trustees to try to ensure the community's aspirations are met. The Parish Council will also exercise its usual right to review and comment on any planning applications. If the desired approach has not been followed, then the Parish Council can choose to object or make comments. Ultimately the decision on any application rests with the SDNPA who are required to take account of the Parish Council and public comments.

Q25. Has the Parish Council looked at affordable only or a community Land Trust (CLT) that can be self-funding?

Q26. The SDNPA local plan allocation is the maximum that would be permitted, the 20% open space is the minimum. The balance between the two can change and increase the open space

A. Steep in Need is leading this project and will explain its approach at a future consultation meeting, including why the Almshouses approach is preferred to a Community Land Trust.

The Parish Council would prefer a project which yielded 100% affordable units but recognises the economics of such projects need market housing to fund the social element. This is further complicated by the charitable status of the sites. How the land is split between dwellings and open space will form part of the public consultation. 20% open space is the SDNPA Local Plan enshrined figure. It can increase but cannot decrease.

Q27. Why was the allotment field not put forward as designated open space? How was it assessed by SPC it was assessed by SDNP as a medium /High Sensitivity Landscape

A. In terms of any discussion on this topic in recent years, the Parish Council's view would be that the 2012 Parish Plan had confirmed a number of possible ideas for the future of the centre of the village, none of which envisaged just a permanent open space. We would also have noted the public access to the rich community resource of Steep Common and the fact that we live in the middle of fine, easily accessible spaces - including the Hangers. Seeking designation as an open space would preclude any of those other possibilities. The last formal assessment was done by EHDC, we believe, in the middle of 2009 at the time when there were public exhibitions being planned for the then current affordable housing project. To propose designating the land as Open Space in that situation would not have seemed appropriate.

Q28. Is 40% of the development being designated to rentable affordable housing acceptable?

A. As the provision of affordable homes is a major priority for the Parish Council, any lesser number would be a significant cause for concern. It would prefer to see more than four but recognises the challenge of financing social housing. It wishes the homes to be attractively designed to enhance the centre of the village; to remain affordable in perpetuity; and also, to remain under local control.

Q29. What will you do if the plot capacity is under the affordable housing threshold?

Q30. How will Steep in Need guarantee that the affordable housing content isn't reduced?

A. A development of, say, 10 homes would need to include a minimum of 4 affordable units (SDNPA Policy SD28). Planning consent will not be forthcoming unless the developer follows these guidelines. However, the Parish Council would like to maximise the affordable content and will be watching this closely.

ENVIRONMENT

Q31. What Energy Efficiency/Sustainability Criteria have been proposed for the homes?

Q32. Will the Houses be built to the highest environmental standard e.g. passive homes?

A. No plans have been put in place yet. As a Parish Council, we recognise that environmental values are an important priority for many in the community and will expect the Trustees to work closely with any developer to achieve high environmental standards.

Q33. I have concerns about the land being suitable for building on as it is clay, prone to flooding especially at the rear of the plot.

A. The site is not straightforward. Indeed, your comments perhaps suggest one reason why allotments and a tree nursery did not flourish on the site over the years. We understand that an initial high-level site survey has been carried out by the Steep in Need trustees, but any developer would need to carry out full ground-work assessments in order make any necessary provisions for such things as drainage or piling.

Q34. I am also concerned about the effect on wildlife's habitat i.e. deer, birds etc.

Q35. Why is the value to nature not being considered enough/at all?

A. Nature is of huge value and we are very lucky to live in the beautiful surroundings of the South Downs National Park. The Parish Council works extremely hard to ensure our natural surroundings are respected and accessible by maintaining the footpaths and helping to look after the Hangers. We do, however, also need to be sensitive to all the needs of the village and housing is one of these needs. This occasionally means supporting the development of previously undeveloped land. There have been a small number of new-build private houses in the village over the last decade which have involved such a change.

We are not aware of any wildlife sensitivities in relation to the Church Road site, but any proposed development would be required to carry out a full ecological survey and to respect/adapt to any recommendations that the survey produced.

Q36. Have you spoken to SDNPA about removing the hedge/wildlife corridor?

A. The trustees are at the very early stages of this project and there are no plans yet in place. As noted above, the Parish Council would expect the wildlife/vegetation questions around the site to be carefully and sensitively handled.

Q37. The site was designated as High Sensitivity. How is that point going to be addressed in the layout of the scheme?

A. In the words of the SDNPA, any developments in sensitive landscape areas must be "contextually sensitive". The Parish Council regards this as one of most sensitive sites - possibly the most sensitive site - in the area and sees the appropriateness and quality of design as paramount. Any proposed development will, of course, be scrutinised by the Parish Council and approved by the SDNPA. It will not be approved unless it meets SDNPA standards. Various environmental studies will need to be carried out and satisfied prior to the SDNPA providing approval.

TRAFFIC

Q38. Impact on Highways hasn't been assessed and additional 20 cars on Church Road will be a major problem

Q39. Church Road is already jammed with traffic and cars parked down one side already makes it virtually a one-way route

Q40. How will the village cope with the extra traffic created by more housing. The junctions i.e. from Village hall/Mill lane are notorious during busy times without an untold increased number of vehicles entering Church Road. How will potential accidents be avoided?

A. Any planning application must be examined by Hampshire Highways with a traffic impact report and will only be accepted by Highways if they feel the infrastructure can support it. There are a number of factors influencing traffic on Church Road and the Council is fully alert to these (as discussed at the public meeting last year). We expect to be consulting on possible ways of addressing these questions in the next twelve months.

Q41. How will traffic be handled on Church Road during construction and after, it is already a problem during school runs?

A. In the event of any construction, the Parish Council would work with trustees to mitigate the impact of traffic, including avoiding school drop off and pick up times.

THE PREFERRED DEVELOPER

Q42. Who is the "Preferred Developer"?

A. We understand that no contract has yet been signed with any developer and commercially sensitive discussions are continuing. Steep in Need have said that they will not announce the name of the developer until negotiations are concluded and a contract signed.

Q43. Is your preferred developer an expert in the landscape-led approach to design as required for the planning application?

A. Steep in Need and the Village Hall Trustees have seen examples of the work of the preferred developer and are impressed by it. They are confident that a jointly developed design can be arrived at that will be sympathetic to the landscape and sensitive to the village. This has been one of the basic requirements during the search for a developer.

CONSULTATION

Q44. Please can the village be part of formulating a masterplan/blue-print with the help of a professional rather than have a layout imposed by a developer

A. We expect the community to be involved in the development of plans for the site. There is no question of a layout being imposed by a developer.

Q45. What effort will be made to consult the young?

A. The Parish Council expects that the consultations run by the trustees on any proposals would try to engage with ALL Steep residents.

Q46. The last proposal was defeated by a public vote: Should this happen this time?

Q47. Very disappointed about there not being a public Vote!

A. The land is now within the Steep Settlement Boundary and is designated in the SDNPA Local Plan as having the potential for development. It is therefore a matter for the trustee/owners of the site to bring forward a planning application, when they are ready, to be considered under the normal planning process. The Parish Council will be focussed on ensuring that consultations about any development are of the highest possible quality to ensure that the opinions of the Steep community can be reflected. We will continue to explore options for maintaining good awareness of residents' views

Q48. Everyone should visit the new build on Ramsdean Road, Stroud before they take a view. Low cost housing only and a covenant on no selling before 5 years

A. We note the comment on the Stroud development. Steep Parish Council would prefer a higher number of affordable homes than seems likely from the Church Road project but recognises the challenges in funding social housing (which may well have had an influence on how the Stroud development finally emerged). On your last point, the Parish Council fully supports arrangements which would keep the affordable homes available in perpetuity.

Q49. In the November edition of the Steep and Stroud Newsletter Steep Parish Council state that they support the development of the land. How have SPC sought the views of their community, who they represent in making this decision.

A. In that Newsletter, the Steep Parish Council reconfirmed its support to this reclassification because it created the possibility of satisfying two of the key priorities in the 2012 Parish Plan - a modest increase in the stock of affordable housing and an improved village centre. Without the reclassification, that potential would not exist. It remains to be seen whether a viable planning application can be produced but at least it makes it possible for the community to engage with a specific proposal. The Steep Parish Plan process had included a parish-wide survey, three public exhibitions in the Village Hall (with opportunities for residents to give feedback) and many individual conversations in determining the priorities which were subsequently adopted.

Q50. The Village Plan 2012: This development runs coach and horses through it. There was an undertaking if the Boundary settlement changes there would be appropriate consultation = there was none.

A. This development has the potential to deliver two of the priorities identified by the community in the Parish Plan - a modest increase in the stock of affordable housing and an improved village centre. In 2017, and as part of a number of communications, the Parish Council wrote about the

SDNPA consultation process. This included details on how to access the relevant SDNPA documents and how to make comments.

Q51. Will you allow the community to be involved in the design of the scheme?

A. Yes, we think community involvement is very important in the design process.

Q52. Can the community vote to dig a pond in the middle of the allotment field with seating and trees for all to enjoy.

A. We want to actively encourage the community to be involved in the design of any development scheme. A pond could be an interesting option as part of the 20% open space

Q53. Please can we have another meeting to follow up the questions that we have not had time to ask?

A. A second Parish Council/Community meeting has been arranged for the evening of 21st January

Q54. Are you going to hold community workshops for the design scheme?

A. The Parish Council expects that consultation on any proposals, will be timely, meaningful and engage with as many Steep residents as possible. The Council will continue to work with the trustees to help with that aim. We would support the design workshop approach.

Q55. I live close by and was told categorically it would never be built on when I bought the house earlier in 2019. The view will be ruined plus privacy in bedrooms.

A. We would suggest that this is a matter for discussion with your solicitor.

Q56. How realistic is it that ideas from communities will be able to feed back into the outcome?

A. We believe that this is a very realistic expectation. We understand that, during discussions with potential developers, it has been made clear that there must be consultation and dialogue with the community - and that the preferred developer has welcomed and fully embraced this point. The Parish Council will be doing its best to ensure that the consultation process meets expectations.

Q57. Why were the community not consulted in 2017 when the land was offered by Steep Parish Council to the South Downs National Park Authority for development?

Q58. The map shown today of the settlement boundary is incomplete. Steep had the largest change to its boundary of any settlement in the SDNP + no Consultation with those affected /or the village.

A. The consultation on the SDNPA Local Plan proposals was fully open to the public and generally publicised. To ensure that all Steep Residents were able to comment, the Parish Council provided a summary of relevant information in the November 2017 Newsletter, as part of a sequence of communications on the situation. Details were provided on how to access the relevant SDNPA documents and how to make comments.

The proposal for the site being made available for development was made by the trustees of Steep in Need and the Village Hall, not the Parish Council. We do not have knowledge of changes to the settlement boundaries of other parishes but apart from the addition of the Church Road site to our settlement boundary, Steep saw two significant areas moved outside and minor changes around the periphery which reduced the total area available for development.

FINANCES

Q59. How much does Steep in Need propose to raise?

A. Trustees of any charity have a duty to further the objects of the charity and to pursue policies that maximise their assets. Any disposal of land would be required to demonstrate that the best value

had been obtained for it. In the event of a disposal of land, trustees would be required to accept an offer from the highest bidder, so the market will ultimately determine the yield to the charity. All charities must file an annual return stating their annual income and expenditure to the Charities Commission and this is available to the public.

Q60. Why are the finances around this project secret?

A. Steep in Need's view is that the financial arrangements are confidential between the buyer and the seller. Releasing this information would be commercially unacceptable. and not in the best interests of the charity.

Q61. Why can't the community buy the land and do what it wants to with it?

A. As stated at the last meeting, the trustees have selected a preferred bidder that has been narrowed down from approximately ten who expressed an interest. However, no contract has yet been signed and the Trustees would be obliged to consider any offers that are made.

OTHER

Q62. You are using a number of poor decisions with no consultation as a line of reasoning to end up with houses as "inevitable". You can help the needy in Steep by creating a project, teaching skills for use in perpetuity (Badley would approve, he would hate houses) Even a village heat source pump would help the needy with electricity bills, in perpetuity. Why Houses???

A. You are right that helping those in need is a complex question. But this project - in the view of the Parish Council - is about the potential for financing homes for those who cannot access the normal housing market (the suggested four affordable homes) as well as generating funds which can be applied directly to those in need (the mission of Steep in Need). We would be interested to hear more about your ideas for a village heat source pump.

Q63. Housing can be built elsewhere, and the centre used for some other scheme.

A. Following the Forge Field proposal in 2014, the Parish Council in conjunction with the SDNPA carried out a review of all potential sites in Steep which confirmed that the Church Road site was the only significant opportunity for affordable housing in the foreseeable future.

Q64. Can the school cope with more children?

A. Yes, the School needs local children to ensure its long-term sustainability; currently many children travel in from Petersfield and the surrounding areas.

Q65. Where is the Forge Field?

A. Forge Field is towards the Steep end of Ridge Common Lane, on the north side of the road. This was the subject of a Housing Association/charity development proposal in 2014, which was ultimately rejected by the SDNPA. This prompted the Council to carry out a review of all possible sites in the parish which confirmed that the Church Road site was the only significant possibility for affordable housing in the foreseeable future.

Q66. All I wanted was one beautiful house on my 2 acres of land but SDNP with No Notice removed a significant house in the settlement out of it

A. The SDNPA ran a lengthy consultation process on the changes to the local plan, including the revisions to the Settlement Boundary for the village. Steep residents were also made aware of the proposed changes via the Parish Newsletter

Q67. How is the need for housing determined?

A. Evidence is obtained from the EHDC Housing Register and has also been assessed a number of

times by an independently run Housing Needs survey. Any new planning application would be likely to re-assess need.

Q68. Why have the housing associations not been involved?

A. Housing Associations could potentially be involved as the project develops, but we understand that Alms Houses are being considered as a preferred option at this stage because they are believed to offer greater local control over building quality and of the allocation of the properties.

Q69. Why are Bedales against the development?

A. We suggest that you should address that question to Bedales