

# STEEP PARISH COUNCIL



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Steep Parish Council held a second community update meeting in the Village Hall on Tuesday January 21. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions of the Parish Council, in a session moderated by an independent facilitator.

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

## **Q1. Why now?**

A. The South Downs National Park Authority's new Local Plan has now been formally adopted and has included the Church Road site within the settlement boundary of the village. The plan allocates the site a development potential of 8-12 houses (as part of a review of the housing potential across the whole of the National Park). So, the planning uncertainty which existed before has now been removed. The Council feel that now is the right time to welcome proposals about this because it has been looking for sites for a modest increase in affordable housing for many years, a community wish which was reconfirmed in the 2012 Parish Plan. No other sites have been found to be suitable except for Church Road. We want to follow through on these community priorities as set out in our Parish plan. It is perhaps worth noting that no affordable housing has been built in Steep for around twenty years.

The Steep in Need charity – which holds most of the site – has finally established a firm basis for the trust status of the land with the Charity Commission, after negotiations lasting several years. Until now they have been treading water, unable to move forward. The trustees of that charity are keen to move ahead to fulfil their aims and objects.

The removal of these two uncertainties provides a firm basis for a proposal to be developed.

## **Q2. Why wasn't there full consultation about changes to the settlement boundary which resulted in some houses being excluded from the settlement boundary?**

A. The proposals for changes to the settlement boundary by the South Downs National Park (SDNPA) were part of a complete review across the entire National Park for the new Local Plan. The proposals for Steep were quite complex – with the inclusion of the Church Road land, the exclusion of the Island and the area around Crees Corner, together with a host of smaller changes designed to reduce the opportunities for in-fill. Over an extended period, there were a number of public consultations run by the National Park. The Parish Council publicised this process via the Newsletter.

## **Q3. Is it true that Steep Parish Council had the chance to exempt the Church Road land from development?**

A. No. The decision on the classification of the land is ultimately a matter for the SDNPA. However,

the Parish Council broadly welcomed the SDNPA's proposed changes to the settlement boundary - a position explained in the Parish Newsletter at the time - in that they held out at least the potential for satisfying community wishes as expressed in the Parish Plan.

It should also be noted that a local resident subsequently made detailed representations in writing and in person to the Inspector of the Local Plan opposing the change for the Church Road site. The Inspector rejected those objections as a basis for changing the Plan, although he noted that the SDNPA had added a condition that 20% of the site should be devoted to publicly accessible open space. The resident then lodged a request for a judicial review of the decision by the High Court - which was also rejected. An appeal against that rejection was lodged and then withdrawn. So, views expressed against development had an extensive airing during this extended process. The Parish Council strongly welcomed the 20% open space condition.

**Q4. Are the church and the school now outside the settlement boundary? And does that mean the school can't build any more or expand to cope with the children which the new development might bring?**

A. The church is outside the boundary, but the school remains within it. Full details can be found on the SDNPA website:

[https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/58\\_SDLP\\_Policies\\_Map\\_Steep.pdf](https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/58_SDLP_Policies_Map_Steep.pdf) or follow the links on the SDNPA site to the interactive **Local Plan Policies Map** for a more detailed view.

So, with a presumed right of development, the School is able to submit planning applications in the same way as any other landowner within the boundary

**Q5. What exactly is being proposed?**

A. There are no plans for the development on the Church Road site at the moment. Following the adoption of the SDNPA Local Plan, the trustees of Steep in Need (in conjunction with the trustees of the Village Hall) have been through a process to select a "preferred developer". That process, and what it means, is described on the Steep in Need website ([www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk](http://www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk)). At this stage, only the general outlines of the scheme (for example, the numbers of homes and the mix between market and affordable units) have been in discussion. The trustees have also expressed a wish that the affordable element should be delivered in the form of Alms Houses. Most importantly, from the Council's point of view, it is agreed that, once a contractual framework has been established, there will be a full community consultation to capture views on what residents would like to see.

**Q6. If the trustees have a developer, surely that's a proposal?**

A. There have been pre-contract discussions, working within the clear guidelines established by the planning authority. Community views will be sought before plans are developed to show the preferred layout of the site, the style of build and the use of the open space.

**Q7. Steep in Need have suggested they want to build Alms Houses so that they can be kept within the control of the village. Is that true?**

A. Yes. The Alms Houses model is preferred, and strenuous efforts are being made to see if this can be achieved. It is believed that the houses can then remain within local control in perpetuity and that the build quality can be better assured.

**Q8. Can we be assured the developer has restricted or limited powers in controlling what the final outcome is?**

A. All developers operate on a commercial basis. But the process to select this developer was specifically aimed at selecting someone who could work closely with the community at the design

stage and who shared the same aspirations as the trustees for this very sensitive site. But it is the developer who will draw up and submit the eventual planning application which will, of course, be subject to the usual formal review process during which individual residents and the Parish Council will have the opportunity to comment. Approval by the SDNPA (the ultimate decision maker) will be subject to a wide-ranging series of examinations for design, landscape impact, ecology, highways and so on.

**Q9. If the village wants Alms Houses, then surely we can look at providing them through grants and donations, not through private housing on that land?**

A. It's not clear how that could happen. What we have is a plot of land which, after a substantial process, has been made available for development and given an allocation. It's a complex situation and all parties are trying to do the best with what they have. We are not aware of any benefactor who has made a proposal along the lines you suggest, although the Steep in Need trustees would need to consider any proposal that is put to them.

**Q10. I am thinking of the children at Steep village hall. If homes are to be built on the site, they will be there for a very long time. Can the Parish Council insist they be Passive Houses?**

*(N.B. Passive Houses follow a voluntary standard for energy efficiency in a building, which reduces its ecological footprint)*

A. The Council is not able to insist on the content of any planning application. However, we know that environmental standards are very important to many residents and agree that we should aspire to the highest possible standards. We expect that this will be a topic for the consultation process and be reviewed in any planning application.

**Q11. In terms of "blue-sky" ideas, can we minimise the landscape impact and maximise the environmental benefits by building the new houses underground?**

A. Any ideas will be welcome as part of the consultation.

**Q12. Can the land be bought by the community as a way of avoiding development (or at least the development of market houses)?**

**Q13. Why can't we mobilise the many professional people who live in Steep who might offer services free to put the land on the market without a developer and develop an idea which the community were behind.**

A. It is an attractive idea, but it is difficult to imagine how such a proposal could be developed that satisfies the various requirements, policies and limitations we are all having to operate under. However, Steep in Need would need to listen to any credible proposals received prior to contract signature, as they are required to maximise the value of the land.

**Q14. Why do all you councillors want houses on that land?**

A. The development of this site has been under discussion for twenty years. Most recently, the Parish Council commissioned work in 2010 on the Parish Plan which was the most thorough piece of community consultation ever attempted in Steep. A modest increase in affordable housing was one of the twelve confirmed community priorities arising from that process in 2012. The Council (through a process involving councillors and other members of the community) reviewed all of the possible plots (however unlikely) within the village, and eventually narrowed twenty possible ones down to a very small short list. SDNPA's informal view (prior to specific planning applications) was that the Church Road site was the only significant one likely to be acceptable. To exclude this site from development would therefore be effectively freezing out any development of affordable homes for the foreseeable future. This land is, of course, subject to the objects of the Steep in Need charity and the allocation conditions set by the SDNPA

**Q15. Why can't we just build Alms Houses?**

A. Any development will require a mix of market value and affordable homes – with the market element funding the social one. The SDNPA policy guideline for a development of ten homes leads to six market units and four affordable ones. The requirement for Steep in Need to deliver best value for the charity from a disposal of the land is thought to preclude changing the mix further towards the affordable element.

**Q16. Who are Steep in Need and why do they have the site?**

A. A very full explanation is contained on the charity's website: [www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk](http://www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk).

**Q17. The scope of the beneficiaries of Steep in Need seems to have been expanded to the poor of Steep and "surrounding parishes". Does this mean that residents of Petersfield can benefit?**

A. The Object of Steep in Need has not changed. It is "the prevention and relief of poverty for the public benefit amongst people who are in need, hardship or distress and are resident in the parish of Steep and the adjoining parishes". Residents of Petersfield and a very small number of other parishes could therefore benefit. In terms of the background, the Charity Commission approved the widening of the area of benefit to include those living in parishes adjoining the parish of Steep in order to reflect the fact that Parish Councils did not exist at the time of the original enclosure Act in 1866 and thus the original church parish of Steep included (and still does include) Stroud but the civil parishes of Steep and Stroud are now separate. Thus, the wording was widened in order to avoid confusion. However, determining individual cases for consideration is a complex matter and is subject to the discretion of the trustees within the broad guidelines (finally) agreed with the Charity Commission.

**Q18. We have heard lots about affordable housing; but the majority of the housing will be "unaffordable" housing (in that sense). Isn't this a them-and-us situation?**

A. We understand the point and working together to make this a balanced and cohesive development that works for all will be part of the consultation process.

**Q19. Why are the Parish Council speaking on behalf of Steep in Need? Where are they?**

A. We are not speaking on behalf of Steep in Need. We are responding to the needs of community for information and to communicate with you on what we know. The trustees of Steep in Need are working on behalf of the charity; we work on behalf of the community. A great deal of information about Steep in Need can be found on their website [www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk](http://www.SteepInNeedCharity.org.uk). We anticipate that the charity will play a leading role in the next phase of consultation on the site.

**Q20. Who are "the needy" and how are they chosen?**

A. We suggest that this is a matter for residents to discuss directly with the charity. Advice on how to get in touch is available on their website.

**Q21. What role do Bedales have in this development?**

A. Bedales are clearly an immediate neighbour of the site in question. The school does not have a direct role to play, but their views are important. We hope Bedales will be constructively engaged in the consultation phase, not only as a neighbour but also as a significant member of the Steep community with an interest in being part of a thriving and attractive village.