

**Minutes of public meeting on Bennell Farm
Meeting held on Monday 28 September 2015 in The People's Hall, Toft at 7.30 pm**

In attendance: 69 members of the public, including Parish Councillors, parishioners from Comberton, District Cllr Tumi Hawkins, and Mrs A Griffiths (Minutes Secretary, LGS Services).

Cllr Martin Yeadon presided. He welcomed everyone present to the meeting and thanked them for attending. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to obtain an understanding of:

- the views of residents about the outline planning application for 90 dwellings at Bennell Farm;
- their views on possible benefits to the community via the S106 contribution, should the development go ahead;
- given the location of the development within Toft Parish but on the edge of Comberton, to ascertain whether consideration should be given to moving the parish boundary.

Cllr Yeadon provided a summary of the current status of the application. The outline planning application for 90 dwellings was in the Green Belt and outside the village boundaries of Comberton and Toft, but within the new Local Plan, although this was currently suspended and might take another year to resolve. Toft Parish Council had hitherto opposed the development on the grounds of its being outside the village envelope and in the Green Belt, and also because of concerns regarding infrastructure, sewage, flooding, doctors' provision, the traffic impact and also the design of the buildings.

The proposed development was composed of 90 dwellings, of which 54 would be private housing and 36 affordable housing, to be managed by a separate organisation for those on the SCDC housing register with priority for local residents. The application also provided for a football pitch, changing rooms and car parking. Toft Parish Council had stated that it was not interested in a football pitch. Comberton Parish Council felt that it would be better to improve the facilities at Comberton recreation ground, and the developers had indicated that they would be happy to consider that proposal. The application claimed that the impact on traffic would be minimal and that there was adequate capacity in the local schools. It was however accepted that the doctors' surgery was currently undermanned with no scope for expansion; this issue remained unresolved. Following discussions with Cambridge Water regarding the lack of capacity for sewage, a scheme had been proposed for additional storage tanks.

Questions and comments were invited.

Clarification was sought as to why the application was coming forward at this time. District Cllr Hawkins explained that the shortage in the 5 year housing land supply had prompted developers to come forward to meet the need, and the economic downturn had contributed to this. Developers could put applications forward at any time and were doing so independently of each other.

Some residents expressed surprised that they had not been notified of the development earlier. It was explained that the application was in the new Local Plan and the developer had attended Toft and Comberton Parish Councils in July and August.

The relationship between the development and the idea of a boundary change was questioned. It was confirmed that these were separate issues and one was not conditional on the other but given the large development it might be an opportune time to consider a boundary change.

Concerns expressed by members of the public:

- Drainage and water supply. It was understood that Cambridge Water had limited excess supply and developers would be scrambling to secure what was available. It was observed that a local farmer had experienced flooding on his land since the construction of Cambourne, and a resident asked how this development would affect drainage and sewage. It had been acknowledged that there was insufficient water supply for all the new developments, and allocation would be on a first come, first served basis, but the developers had said if necessary they would fund improvements to pumping stations. A

resident stated that adjacent land was already under a foot of water for most of the winter. Another raised the effect of blockages in the ditch parallel to the school. The back gardens of houses near the Village College were also affected. Residents reported problems in Kentings, and historically, sewerage problems at the eastern end of the village had caused entire gardens to be submerged. It was observed that a Flood Risk Assessment should have been undertaken. Residents were referred to the outline plans available for perusal and on the website.

- Traffic issues. Concerns were expressed about traffic congestion at school arrival and leaving times, with a number of school buses coming and going, making the location unsuitable for a large development. Residents agreed that potentially more than 90 cars seeking to leave the village right opposite the school would be unacceptable, commenting that it was already difficult to access Cambridge for work. There was surprise that the developers had claimed there would be negligible traffic impact, including on junctions. It was noted that the District Council had referred this aspect to the Highways Group but the outcome was not known.
- The safety of children. Children attending the Village College would have to negotiate the egress from the development. It was felt that at least a pelican crossing should be provided. There were concerns at the need to cross the access road. No bus was available to Comberton Meridian Primary School. There was a particular risk to children from heavy construction vehicles during the construction period and timing constraints were felt essential to avoid school times. District Cllr Hawkins explained that a traffic plan would usually be put in place to minimise disruption but enforcement tended to rely on residents reporting problems.
- Cycling provision. Residents commented that the cycle path was very narrow at the Comberton end, requiring cyclists to pass only two inches apart. This was considered very dangerous. Whilst the proposals included making a path or cycleway on the section without a path by the bus stop, and covering up a ditch, it was observed that even so the cycle path ends and turns into a footpath, so this was not considered a viable solution and not conducive to safety.
- Development within the Green Belt. A resident had understood that the Green Belt was sacrosanct under the Local Government Act 1949 except in exceptional circumstances. It was explained that the Government's National Planning Policy Framework had changed the planning regulations whereby local authorities were permitted to review the Green Belt boundary if necessary to allow development to take place, due to the demand for housing.
- The design of the dwellings. Residents were in agreement that three storey buildings and blocks of flats were totally out of keeping with the rural nature of Comberton village, especially at the western end of the village.
- Ecological considerations. A member of the public queried the choice of the site as it was an example of pasture land which was probably untouched since Medieval times, and the nicest piece of pasture land in the area, which it would be a shame to lose. In response to a query why this site had been chosen, the Local Plan process starting with the Call for Sites was explained. Of 5 sites proposed around Comberton, this had been deemed the "least worst". Residents were referred to the SCDC planning portal for the background.
- Medical provision. It was observed that Toft residents already experienced problems getting medical attention in the evening, having to go to Addenbrookes or Chesterton. Concerns were expressed that the new residents would have difficulty in finding a GP, given that Comberton were already full, understaffed and unable to expand. Residents felt that basic services needed to be in place first. The developers had not responded positively on this point.

Potential benefits from the development

Consideration was given to whether any benefits would accrue from the development. There would be an opportunity for affordable housing in the local area, making it easier for local employers to retain staff. The need in Toft was for approximately 12 homes. It was noted that affordable homes would be ring-fenced for applicants from Comberton and Toft pro rata based on need, and only if they could not be filled would they be offered to the wider cluster. District Cllr Hawkins explained her role as elected representative in providing information.

Residents queried why development was being proposed in villages when the Local Plan Inspector had recommended development on the outskirts of Cambridge. However the Government had allowed local authorities to revisit Green Belt boundaries and make land available for building.

Residents expressed scepticism about the process and the inevitability of the development succeeding through continued pressure. It was suggested that the Parish Council should negotiate what its requirements would be in the event of the application being approved. If approved building would take place very quickly, in 2016-2017. Comberton Parish Council had strongly opposed the application but had submitted a list of conditions for improvement should the development go ahead.

It was suggested that the Parish Council should seek that the developers take on an enduring responsibility for downstream sewage for a period of time to manage unforeseen problems that might arise.

Another suggestion, given that Comberton already had football pitches at the recreation ground and Village College, was that the suggested football pitch was replaced and the layout redesigned so that homes were built on the site for the pitch, retaining green areas all around. Toft Parish Council had already said it did not want a football pitch or any subsequent management responsibility for it, and the developers had recognised this. Suggestions were made for a green amenity area or allotments, and a new doctors' surgery.

Clarification was provided on the definition of affordable housing. This would be split between shared equity and totally rented accommodation and would be subject to discussion with the provider, CHC, as to how it would be managed, and SCDC. Legislation to enable the purchase of rented affordable houses had not yet been approved. The view was expressed that more affordable homes were needed and that these should be sustainable, ecologically sound and attractive in appearance. More housing was needed for young couples and families. It was not yet known what the new dwellings would look like as it was an outline application and all matters were reserved.

Possible changes to parish boundaries

A resident expressed the view that lessons should be learned from other developments, to ensure that the boundary was in the right place. One suggestion was the western edge of Bennell Farm. It was asked whether the financial benefit from the development would go to Toft. Whilst the parish precept would be increased, so would the outlay and maintenance responsibilities.

Concerns were expressed at pressure on school places. It had been stated that schools could cope with the additional numbers. No additional support for the primary school was proposed, but some money had been proposed for the library.

An elderly resident recalled a previous attempt to move the boundary so that the whole of the Village College was within Comberton, entailing a county-wide consultation. Small changes had been made.

The view of the meeting

A show of hands took place.

Those in favour of recommending approval of the application as it stands – none.

Those with no objections – one.

The remainder of those present were in favour of recommending refusal of the application.

It was suggested that there should be a poll regarding changes to the application which would be beneficial to the parish. Toft Parish Council had already asked for a reduction in the number of dwellings. It was felt that if outline planning permission was given for 90 dwellings this could not be subsequently reduced.

A resident recommended that the Parish Council should respond that the current proposal was not acceptable, listing all the objections, but suggested that a meeting should take place with the District Council planners before a decision was made, to influence the provision. It was suggested that a response would carry more weight if Comberton and Toft were working together. Discussions had already been taking place. Residents felt that the planners should be invited to meet residents at a joint meeting in a larger venue.

Further suggestions for improvements included guaranteed broadband services and the use of environmentally friendly materials. Residents were strongly in favour of bungalows for the elderly, which were not currently proposed.

Cllr Yeadon explained that as regards boundary changes, the intention had been simply to obtain a feel for residents' views.

The application will be discussed at the next Parish Council meeting on 5 October. Residents were invited to attend and to email their views. Information would be placed in the Calendar and on the notice board. Residents were urged to respond to the planning application on the South Cambridgeshire District Council website.

Closure of meeting

Residents were thanked for attending. The meeting closed at 9.00 pm.

SignedChairmandate.
