

Stogumber Parish Council.

Draft Minutes of meeting held in Stogumber Village Hall on Wednesday 19th September 2012

The meeting started at 19:30

Present

T Simpson (acting chairman) J. Spicer, C. Bramall M. Symes
J Leeming, Clerk A Trollope-Bellow (District and County Councillor)
57 members of the public (MP)

TS opened the meeting and explained how it would be conducted. He introduced JS who gave a summary of the background to the purchase of the field and how SPC had been trying to decide how a car park would fit on the field and how that would fit with the other suggested uses. He explained that SPC thought the survey sent to the village with a draft plan for the car park had covered most of the issues but the responses had not given overwhelming support for a car park and had highlighted other uses, which SPC had not expected. JS gave details of the loan used to buy the field: £70,000 over 15 years at 4.45% fixed, no penalty for early redemption if interest rates have risen. The meeting was to give everyone an opportunity to give their views on these additional ideas and for SPC to gain an insight into how to proceed.

There were four main high level questions the meeting wished to consider:

1. Do we want to plan the field as part of a strategic plan for the village or on its own? This could include a new village hall, sports facilities, and housing. This would be a more coherent approach but could slow progress. This would particularly impact on car park as more urgent needs could be identified.
2. Should we consider selling off part of land for development to pay off loan and also pay for other facilities? This would mean development on the field could move more quickly but some green space would be lost.
3. Would we want to keep the field without housing and pay off loan over 15 years, SPC would not have funds to do very much on the field.
4. Would we want to do minimum earthworks to create a temporary car park, this would give SPC breathing space to consider other options / uses.

Before the discussion started on these points questions were asked about whether there were any clauses in the loan which would prevent SPC selling off land for profit, whether the increase in the precept would cover the loan payments, what was the anticipated increase in council tax from WSC and what was the position regarding S106 money.

JS responded that the legal position of the loan would need to be clarified but he thought as part of a community project there would not be a problem selling land. He confirmed that the increase in precept would cover the loan for the period of the loan.

ATB responded that WSC would require a £1 / week increase on a band D house to balance the budget and that S106 money from Hinkley Point would be allocated to communities affected by the development and WSC could not use it to provide services.

Question 1: Do we want to consider field in the wider context of village.

There was some discussion about what that wider context would mean.

Comments raised were:

- What we set in motion now will affect village for next 40-50 years, so decisions should not be made lightly, it would be right to have a vision for village as a whole.
- The field should be considered a long-term asset, but some progress needs to be made, can't keep putting decisions off.
- Strategic approach the right one but need to push things forward
- This is an opportunity to improve facilities in the village and build a community centre and sports facilities on the field.
- Don't rule anything in or out, a major professional strategic study should be undertaken.
- A neighbour to the field was happy to have a car park but unhappy about any housing development as it would affect them
- One person felt SPC seemed to be going away from original concept and thought that the field was purchased for a car park.
- One person felt the field was bought as a village amenity of which the car park was one.

- Could there be a temporary car park as an interim measure
- Lings field could not be relied on for Open Gardens events so a solution needs to be found
- The field is large enough that 2 – 4 houses wouldn't greatly impact on it
- Proposed permanent car park plan involved a lot of money and moving a lot of soil for little gain

There was a discussion about whether the village hall should be moved to the field and what impact this would have on the current site and the field behind.

There was a discussion about the viability of a temporary car park and its cost implications.

MS said that he felt we were all custodians and need to get it right for future, but that SPC would have to make a decision at some point, and hoped as a community we all stay together.

JS said that SPC had agreed in principle to produce a neighbourhood plan. This would involve creating a working party of representatives of different parts of the village, who could then commission a consultant to give advice.

It was proposed that a strategic plan be drawn up for the whole village with the field as part of it, reviewed on a regular basis, this vote was unanimous

Question 2. Do we want to sell off any of the field for development to generate funds.

One person proposed selling off enough land for 1 large house.

Some people proposed no development of any kind.

One person proposed any development should be affordable houses.

ATB responded that a housing association could build 4 affordable homes without a large mixed development.

JS responded that affordable housing would be considered as part of a strategic plan but selling land for those purposes would not generate funds and that private development, which hadn't been initially considered was, one of the ideas raised by the survey for raising funds.

Other comments were:

- If money were no object, most peoples would say no to development but as part of a strategic plan if it was a way to generating funds for project it would seem sensible.
- It was important to identify a need for housing first. When 2 were built as part of the Gadds development, they had to widen the criteria to find someone to buy it.
- Against any development, could fund raise to pay for projects. Should look outside for grants,
- If the village is to develop there is bound to be pressure to build more houses at some point
- There has been a 20% increase in dwellings in the village in the last 25 years and don't see process stopping.
- Should not ignore the fact that the village has capital in the field, if you sold off enough for 4 houses then the entrance to the field would be covered by a developer and there would be funds to do other projects with.
- Without a strategic plan you would not know how much was needed and it was best to keep all options open.

A question was asked if affordable housing would release S106 money and JS confirmed it would release some.

A question was asked about any uplift clause and JS confirmed that a 25% uplift would be payable on the increase of the value of land being developed, when planning permission was granted for any development, and that clause lasts for 25 years.

There was also discussion about how other villages had paid for their new village halls

ATB confirmed that the bulk of the costs of building Crowcombe village hall had been funded by lottery money, but that other facilities on the site had been funded by other means

It was felt that there might be a problem getting a lottery grant as the village hall had already had one for the current village hall.

It was proposed to link consideration of housing as part of the strategic plan, the majority were in favour of this.

JS confirmed that if it was found as part of the strategic plan there was a need to sell land, SPC would consult before doing so.

It was proposed that when there is a need to raise money other avenues are considered first before considering selling land for housing, majority in favour, 3 against

Question 3

It was felt that question 3 had been covered by the previous discussions so no vote was taken. The strategic plan would identify any housing needs and funding requirements would be considered then. Nothing would be ruled in or out of the strategic plan at this point. Any plan would be regularly reviewed to ensure it continued to meet the needs of the village.

Question 4. Should we do minimal works to create a temporary car park

JS advised that a quote for improving the entrance and access slope was for £3500 and SPC had sufficient in its reserves to cover this. If, as suggested this was done to highways standards then the costs would increase considerably and there would be a time delay while funding was sought. He felt that if stewards were used when the car park was in use then it would not be necessary to go that far. He confirmed that some of the hedge and wall would be removed to make a visibility splay but some of the wall belonged to Butts Cottage and they wanted to improve their access along with SPC improving the field entrance. A stock proof fence and a gate, which would be kept closed when not in use, would replace the hedge, cones may be needed to stop people parking by the entrance when in use.

A resident on Quantock View said that people park on the 'Keep Clear' signs outside the village hall now making their access difficult and that cones were not always put out.

There was a discussion about whether the field behind the village hall could be used as temporary car park. The entrance to that field could be improved at an approximate cost of £500 but it would only be a single-track access and would have to be stewarded. The field could only be considered for use outside of term times in good weather conditions to ensure the field was not spoilt.

It was felt that a temporary car park would still be needed and that the school field should not be considered.

It was proposed that in principle SPC should use some of its reserves to make a temporary car park with or without proper splay, majority in favour, 2 against

There was then a discussion about whether the access should be made to highways standards. Some felt that the higher standard would future proof the access and that access would be needed eventually. Others felt that money could be wasted if a strategic plan pointed to a different access point.

JS said that SPC doesn't have the funds for the highways compliant option and would need to find the money, which would inevitably delay work, if making access non-highways compliant work could start almost immediately from reserves

A question of risk was considered and SPC would need to check their public liability insurance but also there was a possibility that the risk could be transferred to the event organisers who wished to use the field.

One person asked how much the loan for the field was costing an individual and stated he was prepared to pay more to raise the needed funds. JS said the survey showed a reluctance to increase the precept. MS said there were people outside the village but still within the parish who would have to pay and might not want a car park.

A question was asked about how many car park spaces would be created. JS said the temporary solution would mean cars could park on most of the field apart from the very steep bits. The permanent solution plan was for 40 spaces.

One person suggested that it would be good if something could happen on the top part of the field, beyond the part being considered for a car park.

JS thought this a good point, there had been several ideas for uses of the field and it would be nice to see something going on the top of the field

TS felt if the village were to invest in green space then it was not likely to undo it, and even if development were to go ahead it would only be considered along Station Road

There was a question regarding planning permission, this would be needed to remove hedges but a change of use would probably not be necessary for a temporary solution. SPC would need to check the position.

It was proposed that a temporary car park with the cheaper access option be considered, majority in favour. 5 against

Additional points

There was a proposal that the name of field be changed from Miss May's Field as it had been bought by the village rather than left to the village.

A vote was taken with a majority voting for a name change, 12 voting against. SPC will start consultation on what that name change should be.

The meeting closed at 21:30. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 3rd October at Deane Close Common Room at 19:30.