

**Meeting of Steering Committee  
on Friday 15 November 2105**

Present

Giles Baxter

Estelle James

Irene Steinbrecher

Simon Russell

Gerry Moscrop

Charles Champion

Christopher Purvis

In attendance

Chris Brotherton of Thomas Homes

- 1) Giles Baxter introduced the development project. He explained that, after many years of false starts, there was now a real possibility of a development that would satisfy the needs of the village.

The approach to obtaining the appropriate permissions would be through a Neighbourhood Development Order. This route would have the benefit of providing access to some financial and advisory support. The referendum process would also ensure that village fully supported the plan.

In conjunction with this the Neighbourhood Development Plan would be finalized. This would provide the case for their being Very Special Circumstances which it was necessary to demonstrate in order to overcome Green Belt objections. The main thrust of that argument would be the need for more housing (to sustain school, shop etc) and the need for a new surgery.

- 2) Chris Brotherton introduced Thomas Homes. This is a private company 50 per cent owned by him and 50 per cent by the Thomas family. It is a significant company with a substantial banking facility on the basis of which they were able to finance ambitious projects.

He explained that at any one time they had a scheme on the go that was charitable or community led. These included the St Aldates youth centre, Marcham village hall, Fairmile and Long Wittenham. He explained that our project would be a commercial scheme, but they were a firm that was interested in the quality of the outcome.

- 3) Giles Baxter said that the different participants each had a different objective albeit that all shared the same overall ambition for the village: the Gibbs Trust, the parish council, the surgery – and if, they became a partner, Thomas Homes.

- 4) Chris Brotherton explained that, although things could be structured in different ways, his assumption was that none of the current participants had access to significant cash. Thomas Homes would provide all the financial investment.
- 5) Chris Brotherton was fairly relaxed about highways. He suggested that it would be possible to demonstrate that the impact on traffic flows would be negligible. The greater planning challenge was around the Green Belt. In this regard the Very Special Circumstances were critical.
- 6) The Very Special Circumstances route might make it possible to consider again going for a larger scheme. It had been assumed that it was necessary to have a smaller scheme to satisfy the Green Belt arguments; but that might all be reopened. This would allow us to plan for a much larger part of the field beside and behind the allotments. In turn this might allow for a larger number of houses. The original ambition had been an increase of 15 per cent in the number of houses ie 30 and it might be good to revert to that number. In turn it could be possible to consider having the development only on the north side of the Oxford Road rather than on both sides – although there might be good reasons to have some on the south also.
- 7) It was envisaged that there would be a contract between the Gibbs Trust and Thomas Homes. Secondly there would be a contract between Thomas Homes and the surgery. The applicant for planning purposes would be the parish council.
- 8) The surgery might be rented by the doctors' partnership or it might be owned by the partnership. If rented the owner could be an investment company specializing in the ownership of surgeries.
- 9) Chris Brotherton explained that if there were more than 10 dwellings it would be necessary for 40 per cent to be affordable. Thus, if there were 30, 12 would be affordable. Of these 9 would be for affordable renting (and owned by a social landlord) and 3 would be shared ownership (where the purchaser buys half and rents half, and perhaps gradually buys the half he doesn't own). The village would have no say in the choice of owners or tenants of the affordable housing. This housing therefore had limited value in meeting the village objective to provide housing for children of people in the village starting on the housing ladder or older people wishing to downsize.
- 10) The need for a number of smaller homes was discussed. It remained an important objective. Older people selling their family houses needed just small houses in order to release some capital; they did not need affordable housing.
- 11) It might be possible to consider building fewer than 10 houses together with the surgery with some land being given to the Community Land Trust for its community purposes. The other ambitions for the shop, the village hall, village car park and burial ground should not be forgotten.

12) Chris Brotherton would produce a draft plan based on the requirements agreed at the meeting within two weeks.

13) The next meeting, at which Chris Brotherton would present his plan, would be held on Monday 2 December at 1pm at Upper Town Farm.

CTBP

15 November 2019