



## **Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Development Order Submitted**

The Burcot and Clifton Hampden Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) have finally been submitted to SODC, 12 years on from the launch event held in the village hall in October 2012, which was attended by more than a hundred residents.

Control of the NP and NDO process has now passed from the Parish Council to SODC.

Once the submissions have been checked over, a step known as validation, SODC will launch the next statutory consultation. We anticipate this will be in early February and will last 6 weeks. The Public Examination by an independent inspector starts immediately after the consultation is over. The Inspector will decide whether or not a public hearing is required. The Inspector may also recommend changes to the NP and NDO to ensure compliance with national and local planning policy. Once content that they are compliant, he/she will ask SODC to organise a referendum, which will be settled by a simple majority of those eligible residents that vote.

In an article in the December/January edition, Nick Fielding claimed that the NDO was a dead duck. I wish to assure the significant majority of residents that support the proposals that this is simply not the case. Far from it.

I would like to explain why the Parish Council have submitted the NP and NDO despite the objections made in the last consultation. The reason is simple. The NDO and NP is community led, and that means it must be decided by the community at referendum, not the Parish Council reacting to a small lobby group, the so called 'Friends', who are in effect arguing that the Parish Council should stop now.

Since we started in 2012, you the residents have given us a very clear message: we need surgery that is fit for purpose; we need more housing, especially smaller and less expensive ones; we need to improve our existing amenities such as the village hall and recreation ground facilities; we must sustain the school; we need more parking; we need a new burial ground. You have said these things consistently, starting with the village plan survey in 2014, the consultation in 2018, and the Initial Parish Consultation in 2020/2021. In the Initial Parish Consultation you (not SODC as objectors would have it) also expressed some significant concerns about the first scheme – too many houses, too big, and an unacceptable impact on neighbouring properties. We listened, and made fundamental changes to the NDO, resulting in the present scheme.

The views expressed by objectors to the 1<sup>st</sup> statutory consultation, which can be viewed on the Parish Council website, whilst strongly held, are not sufficiently persuasive in terms of either argument or volume (29 objections vs the 72 who supported the scheme in the Initial Parish Consultation) for the Parish Council to set aside the wishes of the majority, expressed over so many years. The proper, democratic way for the community to decide is by referendum, and your Parish Council are committed to giving you that opportunity. If anyone says to you ‘this is not community led, ask them ‘Why should members of the community not be allowed to decide for themselves, at referendum?’.

I would also like to take the opportunity to set out the benefits that the scheme will bring to the Parish.

**Firstly**, benefits directly generated through the NDO scheme:

- A new, modern surgery fit for the 21st century, to replace the existing facility located in a pair of cottages which were converted in 1978. The freehold for the building and associated car park will pass into community ownership.
- 17 new homes to meet local demand, including 4 Affordable Homes.
- An extension to and refurbishment of the Village Hall
- A new burial ground
- Land for new allotments
- Improved public access to community land, creation of new footpaths and a new orchard
- The building that houses the village shop and post office will pass into community ownership
- The undeveloped land on both sites will pass into community ownership protecting it from future development, together with a £10,000 initial grant towards its upkeep. .
- Improved village parking – an increase from 23 to 55 public parking spaces in the centre of the village and by the new burial ground, a 139% increase. (This does not include parking for new homes and their visitors)
- Capital Projects Grants
  - Clifton Hampden Primary School (£150,000), for infrastructure improvements
  - Improvement grants for amenities on the Recreation Ground (£50,000)

**Secondly**, benefits generated via enabling agreements with the landowner:

- Secured rights for residents and visitors to use the Barley Mow car park.
- Land for a new footpath and cycle path between Clifton Hampden and Long Wittenham

**And thirdly**, other benefits It is the Parish Council’s intention to use its proportion of CIL funds generated by the development for safety improvements on the bridge improving pedestrian access to the Barley Mow and the car park. The decision on this matter will take place outside of the NDO process.

It is not only the Parish Council who believe this is an outstanding deal for the village. In 2021 a professional planning consultant who was entirely independent of the Parish Council

attended a Parish Council meeting at the request of a resident. The professional consultant expressed the view that the proposed NDO 'is the best deal of its type I have ever seen'. Your Parish Council concur.

Lastly, I would ask you to consider the alternative. Whilst the case for the NDO is built on the significant benefits it will bring, the risks to and lost opportunity for the parish should it fail are considerable. The Gibbs Estate is being wound up, and we are being offered a unique opportunity to benefit from the disposal of their assets.

Let me spell out what the alternative scenario might look like:

- The Gibbs land will be sold on the open market. There will be no shortage of developers looking to acquire the sites which they believe may be developable at some point in the future. Public access to the allotments site, currently at the discretion of the Gibbs Estate, may be restricted by a future owner, as happened at Dorchester a few years ago to considerable public anger. Or a future owner may not allow the land to be used for allotments.
- The shop/post office building will be sold, potentially to a commercial developer who raises the rent to a level where the business becomes unviable, and the developer applies for change of use to residential.
- The surgery may close should, for example, the current owner of the building wish to realise the value of the asset as a residential property, and terminate the lease, or the Quality Care Commission give notice that the building is no longer fit for purpose as a surgery.
- Visitors in summer may lose the right to park in the Barley Mow, or may have to pay as has happened at a Greene King location in Sandford. Imagine the impact of parking in the village centre if that were to happen.
- The opportunity for the proposed footpath and cycle path between Clifton Hampden and Long Wittenham will be lost.
- Residents looking to downsize into smaller homes will have to move elsewhere.
- Residents currently renting and looking to buy a smaller, cheaper home, will have to do so elsewhere.
- There will be no Affordable Housing.
- There will be no grants for the school or recreation ground facilities.
- There will be no CIL contribution for safety improvements on the bridge.
- There will be no additional parking, and the Village Hall parking may be lost (being owned by the Gibbs Estate, not the Parish Council or Village Hall trust)
- There will be no new burial ground and as the churchyard is running out of space for full burials it will no longer be possible for people to be buried in the parish, other than in existing graves of family members
- And a risk, small in likelihood but huge in its impact, that SODC will impose housing targets in a future Local Plan, and remove some or all of the parish area from the Green Belt to enable those targets to be met.

Details of the SODC consultation, and links to the NP and NDO documents will be published on the Parish Council website as soon as the validation is complete and the consultation launched.

Chris Neill

Chair, Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council

11 January 2023