

Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council

Notice of Public Meeting

27/08/2024

At 6:30pm on 2nd September 2024 the Parish Council will hold a public meeting before the Parish Council meeting at the Village Hall to discuss the proposed Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO). In particular, the PC wishes to hear the views of the 'interested parties' on various issues raised in correspondence and in discussion with the PC in recent months. We have therefore invited Christopher Purvis (landowner representative), Chris Brotherton (representing the developer) and Giles Baxter (NDO Steering Group Chair) to participate in the meeting. While the meeting will be held in public, participation will be limited to PC members and the interested parties only.

The PC wants to make sure that the claimed benefits of the NDO outweigh any losses and that the NDO complies with national and local district planning policies.

As the 'Qualifying Body' for the NDO, the PC has a legal duty to ensure that the NDO is in the best interests of the parish, both immediately and in the longer term. We recognise that the NDO will result in permanent loss of open space that is both within the Conservation Area and also the Green Belt. We have a duty to ensure that if the NDO goes ahead, any benefits are equally permanent. Put simply, the PC has a legal duty to ensure that what are known as 'Very Special Circumstances' exist to justify dispensing with these planning protections.

Since taking office in May 2023, the PC has worked with the NDO Steering Group (SG) to resolve several outstanding issues with the proposed NDO. These issues derive from several sources, including our own concerns and community comments; errors or ambiguity in the proposed NDO documentation; and from South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) feedback.

In particular, the PC wishes to find answers to the many questions raised in community feedback through two statutory consultations, in which the large minority of parish residents who do not support the NDO put considerable effort into explaining their concerns. A central responsibility for the PC in the NDO process is to ensure that the NDO proposal has the widest possible community support.

The Examiner appointed by SODC to look into the NDO proposal understands this obligation and asked the PC to respond to all the objections. This resulted in the publication of a document written by the PC – and now published by SODC - which consolidates the many pages of community concerns with the proposed NDO. The Examiner has also agreed that a Public Hearing should be held to ensure that all voices are heard. This will be held on 15th October in the village hall.

Our discussions with the NDO SG to date have enabled us to identify issues which we believe need further discussion before the NDO is put to a referendum in the parish. We have phrased them as questions:

1. We believe that as presently constituted, the NDO does not comply with SODC Local Plan policies concerning affordable housing. What steps do the SG believe they can make to address this issue?

2. We note the changes proposed since the NDO was submitted last year regarding the freehold for the proposed new doctors' surgery. As set out in the published NDO document, it was initially intended that the surgery freehold would be in community ownership thus ensuring the community would have the final say on any future usage of the surgery building if the surgery operation were to cease, for whatever reason. Under the new proposals, the surgery freehold will now remain with the developer. The PC believes that this change puts into serious doubt the 'Very Special Circumstances' that would have pertained had the freehold stayed in the community. Can you explain your present position on this issue?

Furthermore, under the amended proposal relating to the surgery, the developer is proposing a rent subsidy that over 18 years will amount to £900,000. This represents a substantial risk to the scheme. To what extent can the developer mitigate the risk?

3. The public consultations highlighted the inadequate parking provisions of the proposed NDO. As a result, the PC asked the interested parties to reconsider the arrangements and come up with a more suitable plan. What is the current state of affairs on this question?

4. Several public consultations strongly indicated that there is no demand for the three very large houses proposed for the Paddock sites. We have asked the interested parties to reconsider the need for these houses and to come up with an alternative. What is the present situation?

Further to this, we understand that the developer believes that the NDO might be unviable without these three very large, expensive houses. One solution to the viability problem would be for the landowner to reduce the land price. What does the viability equation look like if the land is valued at current value, without an uplift, given that this is a community project and not a profit-driven developer initiative?

5. The housing development is targeted at community needs. What assurances are in place to offer the community the best chance of benefit from this housing stock to meet their own needs, before launching on the open market?

6. Our assessment is that the scope of the submitted flood risk assessments in the NDO does not adequately consider the potential impact on housing in Clifton Hampden. We are seeking assurances that recent flooding/sewage concerns in Clifton Hampden will not be exacerbated by the proposed NDO development. What is your response to this question?

7. To date, the PC has not been shown the Post Office lease. Whilst respecting commercial confidence, we need to see this to satisfy ourselves of the risks and potential obligations associated with the Post Office coming into community ownership. When will we be able to see the lease?

The responses to these questions will inform the decision-making process of the Parish Council in determining its next steps.

We look forward to seeing you on 2nd September.

Clifton Hampden Parish Council