

Appendix 6

TRANSCRIPT OF OCTOBER PUBLIC MEETING Kirtlington Parish Council and Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan Forum

PARISH CONSULTATION MEETING *“Future Housing for Kirtlington?”* Thursday 5th OCTOBER 2023

WELCOME:

Jean Conway (Parish Council Chair) welcomed everyone to this Public meeting and introduced David Richardson (MCNP Forum member and ex-PC Chair). He then introduced the speaker for the evening Martin Lipson (Chair of the MCNP Forum) who explained that the meeting was to present, discuss and the assess proposals for more dwellings in Kirtlington and Steeple Aston. The specific focus of this meeting would be on Kirtlington and the assessment of possible sites for housing around the village for the purposes of the MCNP Review.

BACKGROUND

Martin Lipson outlined the history of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan (MCNP) which came into force in 2019. It included an assessment of the local housing needs of Steeple Aston, Fritwell and Kirtlington, all of which were then classed as large villages. The Forum, representing twelve member parishes in all, is now reviewing their Plan, with two teams (Development and Environment) looking again at the existing policies, and adding some new ones.

The original Neighbourhood Plan for Kirtlington permitted 17 additional houses, representing 5% of the current number of homes. In January 2023, Cherwell District Council’s Local Plan to 2040 was published (and then withdrawn). In this, possible additional housing numbers for Steeple Aston and Kirtlington had risen to 47 and 46 respectively, which, in comparison, represented increases of 11%. At the time of this meeting, consultation on the District Council’s Plan had just restarted, but some details have been omitted from this subsequent version, and numbers for possible extra homes in large villages like Kirtlington and Steeple Aston have been withheld. Instead, CDC has set out a rural areas strategy for 500 additional houses across their eleven ‘larger villages’. By comparison, in Parishes with Neighbourhood Plans the number of houses may vary according to community preferences and the size of each site, rather than risk the District Council deciding which site and how many houses.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Using a map of potential sites, Martin explained that each village’s team had been around their village to identify and assess possible sites. No site was considered if it was not large enough to take at least five dwellings, or it had no potential access. Any potential development was also required to be ‘*adjacent to the settlement area*’ (where people live, as defined by the current Neighbourhood Plan), so no sites that were not adjacent were considered.

Twelve potential sites had been identified in Kirtlington. All the landowners of these sites have been contacted and all have responded to indicate whether their site or sites would be available for potential development. For six of the sites, the owners were not interested in their land being developed. These are shown in blue as ‘unavailable’ on the map. The six remaining ‘available’ sites are shown coloured purple on the map. Martin then explained the MCNP’s Site Assessment Criteria that were being used to categorise the sites, which were based on national standards, and afterwards he invited questions.

Questions arising on the Site Assessment Process

Jan Shackleton, Resident

Your presentation gave us the numbers stipulated by Cherwell. I believe that the number of houses that have to be found are sometimes challenged. I read in the local newspaper today, I think it was South Oxfordshire had challenged the number of houses they'd been asked to produce because of Oxford's unmet housing needs. Is there any prior discussion to all of this whereby Cherwell is challenging the numbers or has Cherwell accepted its share?

JC. Some of the Districts have actually challenged the method that the numbers were calculated on. Cherwell have actually accepted these and didn't challenge those figures. The unmet housing needs for Oxford will not be part of what we're having to produce.

Barbara Kemp, Resident

I just wanted to understand who the examiner was and whether they're a government official and do they say 'yes' or 'no' and is their decision final?

ML. Yes, the examiner's decision is final and the examiner comes from the planning inspectorate so it's part of the government's planning department at the top level, they are generally very experienced people and, interestingly, Cherwell make the appointment, they paid for the examiner to do the work, but they have to consult us as the Neighbourhood Plan Forum, and we can reject an examiner if we wish to and nominate somebody else instead, so we do have a bit of control about who the person is, but once the person is appointed they make the final decision and they have been known to throw neighbourhood plans out completely.

So, it's not always a benign process. The first time around the examiner required us to modify some of our policies which we had to do if we wanted to proceed.

John Harrison, Resident

When you talk about the criteria for each site, is there any way that sewage treatment works are considered?

CM. One of the criteria is certainly to do with any potential flooding of the site and if there are any known problems with water courses and that kind of thing, but sewage is a bigger infrastructure problem affecting the whole village. It doesn't tend to affect particular sites. Any extra housing will affect the local sewers.

Resident

Please, could I say I live at the bottom of the village and the sewage pipes run from the corner of Bletchingdon Road right round to Gossway Copse on the Bletchingdon Road and we have frequent floods and it really is enough.

ML. I agree with you. This is a common problem in villages and what happens is planning applications go in, the water authority is consulted, local people tell them there is a problem and they tend to reject the criticism and do nothing and there's not an awful lot we can do about it other than protest.

Kate Buckingham-Fry, Resident

I live off Troy Lane and on the authority of the planning authority we were advised to find other means to object during a particular application, and it was said then that sewage was not a criterion for rejecting a planning application because the sewage on the site would be provided for and the system it fed into was not part of the jurisdiction of the planners.

ML. I believe you're right. That is correct, actually what happens is the utilities are asked to provide their opinion on what would happen, and quite often they will say yes without knowing every detail. JC added that she had raised the issue with Cherwell District Council, who said it does become part of the planning process. Also, that, for any planning applications that go in when sewage and water is an issue, it should be raised with the District Council officers.

ML. So, to answer your initial question, Christine has just confirmed that it is in one of the criteria. We have drainage problems in there, so if a site has known drainage problems, it will score badly. OK.

Jake Collinge, Planning Consultant.

I just wanted to ask three questions around the criteria. One, what was the derivation that you applied or used? Second, is there intending to be any public consultation of the criteria? Third, what is the interrelation in weighting terms between the different criteria?

CM. I might have to ask you to repeat those. Just on the criteria, they are published on the village website at the moment. These were based on a Leicestershire Neighbourhood Plan, but we tried to make them more specific to our villages. Now, obviously Steeple Aston is very steep, Kirtlington is quite flat. We were trying to look at criteria that would apply to all the villages, but we did find some where we thought: every site we have will score green on that. For example, "are they all vacant?" They are all vacant. I'm open to discussion on the criteria and certainly on heritage we ended up with one scored against conservation area, one against registered park, one against listed building. Now is that too much weighting for heritage issues or not? In the end, we've scored all these three on all the sites.

If we look at just the aspects of topography around Kirtlington and how sites are connected to the settlement boundary we do end up with quite similar scores across all the criteria, so they don't have those great differences, and the differences do appear when we have sites that are within the registered park and garden and then other ones that are not and that has perhaps been the bias in the weighting. So, any comments on the criteria are most welcome. Thank you.

ML. So, to answer your other questions, is this being consulted on? Yes, we are going to publish all the things that you see here when we go out to consultation in November, we are inviting people to comment on any aspect of what we've done. OK. I think you asked a question about weighting. They've all got equal weight. We tried out the idea of having some more importance than others and it raises conflicting opinions, so they've all got equal weight. You may know of another system and there are many ways of doing this.

What we have learnt though is that we started off thinking this part was the most important way of deciding about the sites and I think you'll find when you get to the end of this process that it's only one of nine different elements that we are putting together. Once you weigh all of those together this scoring of the 'red, amber, green' is only one factor. So, it's probably not worth getting too excited about. We thought at first it would be the only thing we had to do. Now we've discovered that there are lots of other elements.

Paul Clifford, Resident.

Have you taken into account at all whether or not previous planning permission has been denied on any of the sites?

ML. Yes, we've just mentioned that we've discovered there are nine different things and one of them is the planning history of the site. So, some sites have never had any planning history at all, some have had a lot. If sites had proposals put forward that have been rejected, of course that is significant and must play a part in the judgement that the team is making.

Paula Harvey, Resident.

It's a question about the assessment. I gather the assessment scoring has been done now?

CM. Only on a draft basis between the team.

Right, is there going to be public consultation after the assessment, but before the decision making?

ML. Yes, that's the whole idea. We are going to publish absolutely everything that the teams have done in both villages in November. The whole point of publishing it is to get community reaction. So, you'll be able to comment on any aspect of what we've done. If you think we've added up the scores wrongly, you know, tell us and there probably have been some little mistakes here and there.

What I hope I have indicated is that this 'red-amber-green' part alone is not quite as important as we thought it was at the outset. Things like planning history mentioned there probably have just as much importance when you're thinking about weighing up all the different factors. So, we've learnt through this process quite a lot about how to do it.

Questions and comments arising on the individual available sites

Before each site was opened up for discussion, CM showed its location on the map projection and gave a description of its key characteristics.

Site 1

Dan Moore, Owner's Developer

Hi I'm Dan Moore representing John East one of the land-owners. I just want to clarify a point on the Woodstock Way that's been mentioned. Now there's no historic plan showing the Woodstock Way that you are stating. I would like some clarification on it if possible.

CM. This matter came up on two previous appeals being on this site and we do have that evidence of there being a road that continued from Lince Lane and connected with Crowcastle Lane, so that is the old historic pattern of roads through the village. We produced map evidence at the appeal and we can produce that again if that's necessary. Obviously now it takes the form on the ground as the public right of way.

DM: It's a public footpath. Now your maps from your website, which I'm happy to pass round, never shows any roads. Now, if it's wrong is it before 1898 or 1923 is it before then?

CM. I think it was the tythe map of 1750 or 1757. Can we take this out of the meeting?

DM: Yes. The settlement pattern was breached when Hatch Way was built because the footpath was already diverted at that point

ML. It's not a big point because obviously it's not a road any more, it's a public right of way, but it does have that historical connotation for the settlement pattern. All I'm saying to you is that it forms in most people's minds the extent of the western development at the moment defined by that footpath along the site, that footpath runs inside Hatch Way and continues between Woodbank and the Pound then continues on up Crowcastle Lane.

Site 2

Edward McFarlane, Resident.

I'm just fascinated by why areas one and two are two areas, and areas three and four are two areas, when actually they're exactly the same field.

CM. This is more to do with planning history, to try and repeat responses to various applications that have been put in over the years. Yes, sites one and two were originally put forward as one development site to the village. Similarly, three and four are in one ownership, but the application that was turned down on appeal on that site defined the boundary, which we are now taking as site three. Each of the numbered sites is being considered as one site.

We would point out that although they are split like this at the moment, there are no boundaries on the ground that show that split. It's purely based on the applications that have been submitted and decided or have been withdrawn or are currently under consideration.

Chris Blackwell, Resident.

Just for clarification. If site one or three doesn't go ahead does that make sites two and four non-adjacent?

CM. It makes access a bit more difficult. Obviously, you can't really develop site two without site one because our whole criterion is that it has to be contiguous with the settlement boundary. If there was any phasing that was to come forward on either one, two, three or four, then we would expect site one to come forward first before a start on two and similarly with site three, if access was available and suitable, before site four could be proposed.

So, yes, we would look to develop what was adjacent with access immediately. At first, we had divisions at a line that went West-East, but obviously that wasn't going to reflect what was intended on current planning applications.

John East, Land owner.

Site two won't become available unless we get site one sorted. So, if we get site one in time site two will become available. What you have to remember is site one and two is a land-locked piece of land between the golf course and village, but it's a job to make it viable and there's no hope of extending it either way.

Site 3

Resident.

Are there rules about bridleways?

CM. There are rules about bridleways, but obviously it would have to be looked in the context. I looked back at the inspector's decision for the previous application that went in there, but the previous appeal didn't mention the access at all. I was hoping there would be something where we could say: it's access through North Green past Thatched Cottage listed building, very narrow single carriageway. They must have put something in the appeal decision about how unsuitable the access was, but it's not there. Going back to when the appeal was run, I don't think Highways raised an issue, so it would have to be tested again. It is a bridleway, it stops at the Pound, so access from there is an issue, although Cherwell have tarmac'd it. We appreciate that the access from there on down Mill Lane for vehicles is restricted to residents who live at the bottom end of Mill Lane.

Site 4

Resident

Could I ask who is the landowner of what is sites three and four? We know for sites one and two.

CM. When there was an appeal on this site three it was the King brothers. I understand one of the brothers has now sadly died, but it is still within the family. They have said it is available still and both of these sites would be available for consideration in this process.

ML. We have published the list of site names and owners. It's on the village website.

Site 7

Tim Northey, Developer, Owner's representative

All I would like to say is that obviously this site does have a history and we are aware of the problems, but it hasn't been tested on appeal. The decision on it has been taken on the District Council level. Obviously, because you have highlighted it, it's in a conservation area, but that, in itself, doesn't exclude it. Obviously, it needs a more sensitive approach towards these locations.

Site 8

David Pratt, Resident

Isn't there an archaeological site on the corner of the old Roman road?

CM. Well yes, this site, and all sites, would be subject to archaeological investigation, whether it's before determinations, with geophysics and metal detecting, or whether they need to have trial trenching done before determination of any application on them.

I think all these would be needed, given the importance of that site at the junction of the Roman road, Akeman Street, and Portway. It would be unusual for it not to have anything in there. If you look across it now, it's got a few lumps and bumps in it, but we can't say if it's archeologically important. It was an important junction historically a long time ago.

Questions arising at the end of the meeting

Barbara Kemp, Resident

One thing I'm not quite clear about. We talk about numbers of houses. Will it be stipulated in the plan the nature of those houses, and whether a site is to take ten large detached houses as opposed to a site that's for more affordable houses?

ML. A. The idea is that if we want to allocate sites in either of the two villages that we sit down and try to determine that based on some factual information about need. We know for example the number of people on waiting lists in each village. We know what the demographic profile is and whether there are more older people wanting to downsize, that sort of thing. We have quite a lot of data about this and it is perfectly possible to put together a profile of what type of housing should be provided.

However, this can only really be done if we are in control of the process at the level of the community. I'm sorry to say this in front of some of the land owners and developers here, but if we leave it to you, it probably won't be directed at the needs of the village. There are other matters that you have to consider obviously, but that isn't quite the case if community led housing can be allowed to blossom.

Mark Harrison, Resident.

Just one question, in the process, is there any account taken for the need for social housing throughout the process?

ML. Yes, obviously, there is a need for social housing. It's quite likely that that would be housing for rent rather than housing for purchase, but there are also other mechanisms that enable people to buy into affordable housing. The whole question of the types of housing and who they are for and the tenure has yet to be determined.

We are at an early stage in this process. Identifying possible sites is the first step, working on what goes on them and who's going to build them and when is for later. Yes, it's very much in our minds that we are trying to address the needs of the community.

Michael Shackleton, Resident.

Could I just understand the relationship between what this process is about and the two applications which are in front of the District Council in November. So, do I misunderstand, could the District Council decide in favour of the two applications that are there for Jersey Cottages, or the other one, and that would render this process, if I understand it, a little bit pointless?

ML. It's a good question. Obviously one that has occurred to us as well. We don't want to have put in months of work for no purpose, we are, if you like, running in parallel, that's one way of looking at it. The land owners have a perfect right, and we have a perfect right to propose what we are proposing as well. We have asked Cherwell, whose job it is to determine those applications, that we ask them to defer consideration of these planning applications until we have published our consultation document.

It's not very long, as I say, it is in November, and then at least there's an opportunity to compare the two situations side by side.

I guess the answer to your question is that it is possible for Cherwell to determine these planning applications, and, if they were to approve them, then it would make quite a lot of work that we have done redundant. We are hoping that will not happen as we have permission from Cherwell's officers to defer the deadlines.

Resident

Sorry, going back to the Jersey Cottages there are already houses there. Does that mean it's more likely to go through?

CM. Historically there was a withdrawn application for that, and one refused that retained the four existing cottages and used the same access as now. We saw improvements and that's the application that's before the council at the moment. It's up on the web if you want to see the plans for that.

Jake Collinge, Planning Consultant

Question for Martin really. I was very conscious of what was on one of the opening slides about 500 additional houses. As a Neighbourhood Plan Forum are you saying that these are in addition to the 17 in the current Neighbourhood Plan for Kirtlington?

ML. When we put a policy into the Neighbourhood Plan Review, when we get to the point next year that we have new policies, it resets the clock. So, the policies will then run from next year to 2040, that's the way it works. That has nothing to do about what the local plan is saying about 500, that is a completely separate issue. As I said at the beginning, we are not generating our proposals from Cherwell District Council's numbers. We agree our policy working from the bottom up.

Let's get some clarification. You are clearly adding in the current Neighbourhood Plan?

ML. The current Neighbourhood Plan says there can be 17 more houses built in Kirtlington to 2030, and next year when we have a new policy in place to 2040, the number will be reset, so whatever number we say then replaces the 17. So, I think it's the opposite of what you've just said. It is not incorporating the 17, it is a new number.

As there were no further questions or comments, Martin Lipson reminded the audience that they could send in any further questions or comments which they wished to have considered by email, and that these would all be taken into account in the assessment process, along with those raised at the meeting.

David Richardson thanked Martin, Christine and all the site assessment team for their hard work on this process over the last months with the objective of achieving the optimum outcome for Kirtlington and all its residents. He then thanked all the audience (counted as 74), for attending and for their participation in the meeting and closed the meeting at 8.30pm.