

SEDGEFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the proceedings of the **SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL Meeting** held at **6p.m.** in the **Council Offices**, Advice & Information Centre, Sedgefield, on **Tuesday 19th May 2015**

MINUTES

Present **Cllr. Mel Carr (Chair)**
Cllr Gloria Wills (Vice Chair) and
Cllrs. Allan Blakemore, Mark Cant, Tim Jeanes, Chris Lines, Ian Sutherland and
Dudley Waters

Officer Dr Jane Ayre (Town Clerk)

1. Apologies

Cllrs. David Brown, Vanessa Carmichael, Lynne Dentith, Alf Walton
County Cllr Rachel Lumsdon

2. Declaration of interest

None

Cllr Chris Lines joined the meeting at this point.

Cllr Mel Carr, Chair, welcomed Cllrs and members of the public to this Special Town Council meeting. He reiterated the purpose of the meeting was to hear a presentation regarding revised proposals in relation to land at Eden Drive/Stockton Road, Sedgefield. Cllr Carr welcomed the following presenters to the meeting:

Mr Neil Westwick, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners

Ms Nicola Rosul, Story Homes

Mr Jerry Johnson, Smiths Gore

Mr Rob Murphy, Smiths Gore

3. Mr Neil Westwick, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners – Presentation of revised proposals for land at Eden Drive / Stockton Road:

Mr Neil Westwick, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners thanked the Council for the opportunity to present revised planning proposals. He circulated paper copies of a “Land at Eden Drive/Stockton Road, Sedgefield Revised Proposals” document and explained that he would like to give a short presentation based upon the following:

- A summary of the history of the planning applications
- The original submissions
- The Durahm EIP inspector’s interim report
- The revised proposals
- The next steps

Mr Westwick gave a brief summary of the history of Story Homes who have almost 30 years experience in developing land and has become one of the most well known housebuilders in the north of England. Story have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the industry as well take care to retain the character and ethos of an area and surroundings in order to build sustainable communities. A brief of summary was given of the history of the planning applications relating to Eden Drive/Stockton Road as follows:

- The applications were submitted in response to the allocation of houses being recommended in the Draft County Durham Local Plan;
- The Durham Diocese had submitted an outline planning application with all detailed matters reserved except means of access for the erection of approximately 300 dwellings, formation of access and associated works. This application had been validated on 11th March 2014.
- Story Homes had submitted a detailed planning application for 113 dwellings, formation of access and associated works. This application had been validated on 7th March 2014.
- Within the booklet provided by Mr Westwick were diagrams showing both of the above mentioned planning applications.

Both planning applications had been with DCC for some time and this had included their issuing for public consultation. Matters had then been held in abeyance until the outcome of the EIP relating to the County Durham Plan. The subsequent Inspector’s Interim Findings Report was published on 18th February 2015 and the County Durham Plan’s future is currently unknown as DCC have now lodged a Judicial Review to challenge these findings. In the meantime Story Homes and the Durham Diocese have taken the Inspector’s comments and those of DCC into account, with particular emphasis on the Inspector’s view

that the allocation for Sedgefield should be reduced, and have revised their proposals for Eden Drive / Stockton Road accordingly.

Mr Westwick referred Cllrs and the public to the site plan which was entitled "A Cohesive Scheme". The revised proposals see the Story Home proposal being reduced from 113 dwellings to 85 dwellings with the layout of the development being broadly the same as previously ie featuring a central road and a gateway to Sedgefield, however, there will be more open space within the development reflected by the reduction in dwellings. The development will be a mix of 2, 3, 4 and 5 bedroomed houses. The central road will be 7.5m in width capable of bus access and will join the road from the Diocese proposed site.

Mr Murphy explained the revised proposals see the Diocese site retaining the same outline layout with more open space being retained at the northern end of the site and the access to Thurlow Road being removed. The road in the centre will link to the Story development. This revised outline application sees a reduction in the proposed number of dwellings from 300 to 230. Both applications are for 315 units in total with close partnership working between both plans. Mr Westwick confirmed that the revised plans have now been submitted to DCC. The next steps are to obtain feedback on the plans with a view to these applications then going to DCC's Planning Committee for determination. This concluded Mr Westwick's presentation and Cllr Mel Carr opened the meeting for questions from Cllrs and the public.

Cllr Allan Blakemore asked what NWL's views were on these revised proposals. Ms Rosul confirmed that NWL are happy for an additional 300 dwellings to be built in the Town at some point until 2021 when NWL would be determining the upgrading arrangements for their infrastructure. In response to this answer Cllr Blakemore sought clarification as to timescales for the proposed development as it was clear that 315 dwellings could not be built in entirety before 2021. Mr Westwick replied that Story Homes would like to be on-site to commence this development as soon as possible. Ms Rosul confirmed that the development, pending determination, could start in Spring 2016 with the aim of selling between 20-30 units per year. Whoever develops the Diocese land will probably work towards a similar pace meaning between 50-60 units per year as being reasonable for the entire site. Ms Rosul pointed out that the Diocese plans are approximately 3 months behind those of Story.

Cllr Allan Blakemore questioned the central road running through the entire proposed development. He asked if each development would build half the road each or would it be put in as a continuous road so that traffic could flow through the area as the units are being

built. Ms Rosul confirmed that the road would be built in two halves with each developer taking responsibility.

Cllr Gloria Wills stated that people in Sedgefield do not want the Stockton Road access changing. Mr Westwick replied that DCC are pushing for the Stockton Road junction to be closed. Neither developer has a view on this.

Cllr Gloria Wills asked if both sites are going to be built as one enabling development and if so what happens if one of the developers became insolvent. Mr Westwick stated that both applications would be considered by the same Planning Committee and there will be linking requirements between both applications Ms Rosul commented that Sedgefield is a marketable and desirable area so the concept of an undeveloped element of the overall scheme is unlikely. Mr Murphy that the Diocese scheme has generated lots of interest from potential developers.

Cll Allan Blakemore asked what arrangements would be put in place for the long-term maintenance of the trees and green/open spaces within the development. Mr Westwick replied there are a couple of potential options – DCC could adopt these (although this would not be DCC's preferred option) or the maintenance of these could be put into a management company on behalf of Story and the other developer at a cost to the home owners.

Cllr Tim Jeanes asked what the impact of this development would be upon school places. Mr Westwick stated that research had been undertaken and a contribution towards the enhancement of school places would be required from the developers. In a similar vein Cllr Jeanes then asked about the impact upon already stretched health services within the Town. Mr Westwick confirmed that DCC are currently speaking with health providers to determine this and if needed then a similar contribution would be required. Cllr Tim Jeanes stated that Sedgefield has an ageing population who are relying more upon cars. Car parking is very difficult within the Town and this development has the potential to exacerbate this problem. Mr Westwick replied that the development is within the Town and it is possible to walk from here into the centre of the Town. Ms Rosul also stated that the previously undertaken consultation with a number of Sedgefield residents had highlighted concerns regarding car parking. Story had asked residents for their ideas but nothing had been suggested. A car park on the proposed development site would not help this situation. Cllr Jeanes stated that one resident had suggested the concept of underground parking as used on the continent. Mr Westwick replied that the concept of underground parking would not be feasible with this site but stated that the site would have an infrastructure that would allow

public transport and cycles. Sustainable transport had been factored into the Story development (including accessible pedestrian routes and bus stops) but nothing could stop people from using private cars.

Cllr Chris Lines thanked the speakers for their presentation and stated that he was sure they would have seen The Sedgefield Plan and the Town Council's submissions regarding the County Durham Local Plan. The proposals being presented at this meeting are still over what residents have said they would accept and in addition to these two applications other planning applications are also coming forward. Cllr Lines asked in what context The Sedgefield Plan had been discussed by the developers with DCC or taken into account. He believed this was an opportunity for the developers to listen to the local community and their views. Mr Westwick replied that the proposed number of dwellings had been reduced by 25% in light of comments made by the Inspector in his Interim Findings Report despite DCC still being of the view that their 450 allocation for Sedgefield was sound.

Cllr Chris Lines questioned the 10% allocation of affordable housing and asked what aged person housing was included in the proposals as this was another important issue for the local community. Mr Westwick replied that the County Durham Plan has a requirement for 10% older person housing (even if this housing is not necessarily marketed as older person housing but is capable of being adapted) and these proposals being presented included such a 10% allocation.

Cllr Mark Cant expressed the view that there needs to be more than just promises regarding school places. Mr Westwick replied that DCC have a formula from which they can calculate the number of children to be brought into an area by such a development. In addition there will be Section 106 money associated with the development. Cllr Cant felt that a local school should be built as part of this development. Ms Rosul stated that Story do provide schools on-site where necessary, however, this development is governed by DCC's calculated numbers. Mr Westwick stated that it is clear a contribution will be required to enhance school places but this would be based upon DCC calculations. Cllr Cant did not feel this was acceptable and that if a primary school was built as part of the development then he felt residents would possibly be more likely to embrace the site.

Cllr Cant asked for clarification regarding sewerage capacity. Ms Rosul stated that NWL had agreed there was capacity for 300 dwellings worth of discharge to be taken by the current infrastructure in the Town. This level of capacity will not be increased until 2021 when NWL could upgrade their infrastructure and more could be taken. Cllr Cant asked

what percentage of the existing capacity would be taken by the caravan park at Hardwick. Ms Rosul stated that none of the remaining capacity would be taken by that development. Mr David Bowles stated that during the development of The Sedgefield Plan there had been numerous conversations with NWL which had confirmed that NWL would only accept 300 new dwellings net until 2021 but this capacity includes all other planning applications also being considered or having already been approved within the Town, i.e. the 300 is an already reducing number. Ms Rosul confirmed that this would constrain the annual yield and if other sites get approval first this would mean that others would have to reduce their yield until 2021. Cllr Gloria Wills expressed her concerns that the site could be left as a building site for a considerable time as a result of this. Ms Rosul agreed such a constraint would slow the building programme down. She believed that these applications being presented this evening do have the support of DCC and the capacity of 300 from NWL is currently available. Other planning applications have been received after the Story application was submitted but no judgement on this matter can be made until a decision is made on the actual applications. Story have a Business Plan and funds committed to this site and they feel it is incredibly unlikely that the site would be left as a building site. Cllr Gloria Wills stated that no such guarantees could be given and cited the example of a situation at nearby Wynyard as well as the repercussions from the recession. Mr Westwick stated Story have actually grown during the recession. Cllr Mel Carr stated that Sedgefield had a tradition going back over the last 20 years of builders going out of business and this was reflected in the concerns raised by his fellow Cllrs.

Cllr Ian Sutherland asked if there would be any provision for cycle paths/lanes in the development. Mr Westwick could not give an answer but would find this out and report back to the Council. Cllr Ian Sutherland also asked if there was any provision for a childrens play area within the development. Mr Murphy stated that the Diocese application was in outline format at the moment but a childrens play area could be something that could feature. With regard to the Iron Age Village found on the site of the proposed Diocese development Cllr Sutherland asked if this would restrict building or if the site would be ploughed up. Mr Murphy confirmed that a findings report had been submitted to the DCC Archaeologist with a recommendation the site be excavated and recorded. DCC have stated they have two options to either keep everything from the site or to loose everything from the site. The Diocese have given DCC an option to leave this area as an open space.

Cllr Chris Lines stated that The Sedgefield Plan is currently out to Regulation 14 Statutory Consultation and within that Plan was a built up area boundary. Cllr Lines asked the presenters for their views on this concept and any discussions they may have had with DCC

regarding it. Mr Westwick confirmed he was aware of the boundary proposal in The Sedgefield Plan. DCC currently do not have a Local Plan. Story believe the proposal being presented is a sensible site for the Town which does not allow for any urban sprawl and has a natural boundary around it. Story would recommend that the built up area boundary in The Sedgefield Plan is increased in order to protect the rest of the Town.

Cllr Dudley Waters sought clarification regarding the composition of housing and the achievement of the affordable housing. Mr Westwick confirmed that the Story application comprised of 6 x 2 bedroomed houses, 20 x 3 bedroomed houses, 49 x 4 bedroomed houses and 10 x 5 bedroomed houses. The 10% of affordable housing would comprise of 6 of the 2 bedroomed houses and 3 of the 3 bedroomed houses. Mr Murphy confirmed that it was difficult to define their exact composition of affordable housing as the application was in outline. Ms Rosul stated that in some developments there are stipulations that some of the affordable housing allocation must be rented, however, Story would prefer to instead sell at a reduced value. Cllr Waters asked if it would be possible for preference to be given to local people. It was agreed to consider this.

Cllr Allan Blakemore expressed his strong objection to the developers stating that there are no local policies in place. He stated there are a number of saved policies in place albeit some are out of date but they are still saved and cannot be ignored. Developers should also not ignore the fact their proposals contradict the emerging Neighbourhood Plan in a number of ways. The Neighbourhood Planning Group have consulted with the people of Sedgefield who have consistently said they would accept up to 300 dwellings over the entire planning period something which is being ignored by developers. In addition, the consultation also showed that people wanted building to be sympathetic to their needs and the proposals being presented appeared to dictate what the developers are going to build and to do this all in one location again something the community have opposed. Mr Westwick confirmed that the proposals are not in conformity with the Neighbourhood Plan in terms of numbers and locations but they do conform to the proposals of DCC.

Cllr Gloria Wills questioned the allocation of parking spaces to each property and if this was in compliance with the appropriate Lifetime Standard. Ms Rosul replied that Story deliver better than the required standard giving an example of a development at Shotley Bridge where 2 parking spaces are provided for 3 bedroomed houses instead of the 1 required.

Mrs Julia Bowles asked if the road off the roundabout was purely a DCC Highways requirement which would effectively put a main road right through a housing estate. Ms

Rosul confirmed that Story require a spur off the roundabout in order to get into the site. Cllr Gloria Wills asked if the Storey site could be a standalone site. Ms Rosul stated that in theory the site could be a stand-alone site, however, they didn't think that would be acceptable to DCC.

Cllr Allan Blakemore sought clarification as to who would pay for the road. Ms Rosul stated that Story and the Diocese would need to pay for this road. Cllr Blakemore asked if one contractor would build the road in entirety through both developments. Ms Rosul said this was possible but not necessarily the case. Ms Rosul said having one contractor would make sense but that one developer could not tell the other what to do or who to employ. There would be a complete road design with mirrored conditions that would need to be discharged before the road could be put in place. Cllr Gloria Wills expressed her concerns that there was the possibility the road may not be built in sync and that a dead end would be created.

Mrs Bowles asked if there was any guarantee that once the set number of dwellings had been built on each site that no additional dwellings could be built. Mr Westwick replied that the applications were for a fixed number and the developers would need to stick to those. Cllr Ian Sutherland queried the nearby field and asked if this could form part of a future extension to the development. Ms Rosul confirmed that the owner of this field has been approached but does not want to sell or develop the area even though Story would like this area.

Mrs Julie Archer commented that there are a significant number of houses up for sale already in the Town and surrounding area. Often executive type housing lingers for some considerable time on the housing market. Mrs Archer asked how this situation would affect the proposals being presented and impact upon the housing stock already in the Town. Mr Westwick stated the developments being proposed for Sedgefield were as a result of the belief the sites were very marketable. Mrs Archer asked what effect the new houses would have on sustainability and prices of houses already in the Town. Mr Westwick replied that research has shown additional development does not necessarily reduce prices and in some instances there is evidence that additional housing can pull up other prices.

County Cllr Rachel Lumsdon had submitted her apologies for the meeting but had asked the Clerk to ask on her behalf how Story had determined the architecture, design and fit of the housing being proposed. Mr Westwick replied that the houses would represent the Story product which is traditional style houses. Cllr Blakemore stated that he feels Story have

designed an estate that they think is marketable rather than what fits with the Town. Ms Rosul replied that Story have tried to use stone and render to look in keeping with the rest of the Town. They have looked at other houses in the Town and there are already a significant number of distinct designs. Story believe they have a style which is rustic, traditional brick in keeping with Sedgefield. The Diocese application will have a house design code to ensure there is a design palate across both sites.

Cllr Dudley Waters asked for clarification regarding DCC's County Durham Plan. Mr Westwick confirmed that DCC launched a judicial review on 15th May 2015 challenging the Inspector's Interim findings. A response will be expected within 21 days stating if the findings will be contested, not contested or contested in part. Mr Westwick confirmed the revised Story application had been submitted to DCC on 19th May 2015 and the Diocese application had been submitted a week earlier. Their hope is that these plans will go to Planning Committee in the Summer 2015. Cllr Tim Jeanes expressed disappointment that the developers were not here to listen to the views of Cllrs and the public. Mr Westwick replied that the purpose of the presentation was to update Cllrs and inform them of the new plans and the current position

Cllr Mel Carr expressed his concerns regarding the potential increase of throughput traffic through the village by the creation of such a large road. Mr Westwick stated that DCC are stating the spur off the roundabout must be put in as part of this application. Ms Rosul stated the capacity of Stockton Road would not allow one road to service 300 units due to highways safety issues.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 7.09pm.