

Little Hadham Parish Council

Bury Green Farm

Issues and questions arising from public meeting (18 October 2004) to consider East Herts Council's draft development brief for Bury Green Farm, including questions tabled at the meeting by the Parish Council.

Summary

The extent of interest and concern was indicated by a high turnout of approximately 50 residents and the presence of the Herts and Essex Observer

Although no formal attempt was made to gauge opinion, broad conclusions were:

- Some residents wanted no housing development at all
- Others would prefer limited housing in preference to the uncertainties of industrial development
- Many were suspicious that a limited housing scheme could lead to bigger residential development in the future
- Those who would accept some housing wanted reassurance that this would not be the 'thin end of the wedge'
- Most agreed that steps should be taken to address practical issues like volume of traffic, access and water/sewage
- Some reassurance that East Herts Council (EHC) and Romehold would take residents' views into account would be welcomed

1. Scale of development

- Residents wanted the brief amended to include the number of houses that would be allowed. The understanding was that 'five or six' market-price houses plus 'two or three' low-cost homes were being considered.
- Several residents supported the view that this could be the 'thin end of the wedge' and that a planning application based on the brief could lead to subsequent applications for major housing development
- Some residents felt that Romehold's investment in the site could only be justified on the basis of large scale housing development (the meeting was told that Martin Roat of Romehold maintained that letting the site for light industrial use would yield a higher return than housing)
- Cllr Mike Tindale said that the purpose of the brief was to provide a framework to limit any further development
- Tim Hagyard at EHC had dismissed the suggestion in the local press that the site could accommodate '200 houses' (email attached)
- Clarity would be useful on how the housing/re-development proposal helped to 'sustain' Bury Green? Why did it need 'sustaining' - ie what were its 'housing and employment' needs (p13 and 15)?
- How would EHC ensure that this application would be considered in a long term context (p12)?
- Services such as refuse collection, post, education and health would be put under pressure with new housing
- What assurances would be offered by EHC and Romehold that no future development - in addition to the limited housing indicated - would be allowed on the built part of the site or on the associated farmland?

2. Status and 'legality' of development brief

- The meeting was reminded that the brief was not a planning application
- Cedric Thomas, who lives in Bishop's Stortford, maintained that the brief was premature. The review of the Local Plan would not be published until December 2004 and adopted until 2007. The designation of Bury Green Farm as a Major Developed Site (MDS) could only become effective in 2 ½ years time.
He claimed the brief was in contravention of East Herts planning regulations (see his attached paper) and the matter should be referred to the planning Ombudsman. There was no case for housing under the local Housing Needs Survey.
He thought the brief should be rejected by the Parish Council.
- Concern was expressed that EHC appeared to be 'promoting' re-development of the site despite the fact that the larger element would be market-price housing rather than low-cost homes for local people
- Some residents supported the view that no houses should be built
- One parishioner recommended that attention should be focused on section 6 (p 17) of the brief (parameters), which formed the nub of the issue
- Was this development influenced by EHC's need to meet the EERA's housing targets?
- The Parish Council should clarify whether the brief conformed to EHC's planning provisions (see comments above)

3. Houses versus industrial use

- The meeting was told that it was understood if Romehold failed to gain permission for limited housing, it would be able to let the site for light industrial use under its existing permissions
- Cllr Tindale said he understood that the site's greatest commercial potential lay in the fact that it held a licence for animal testing
- No particular views were expressed on the consequences of housing being turned down except that any industrial use would presumably be covered by planning rules

4. Traffic

- A major concern was increased traffic from new houses, worsening the current problem of rat-running caused by the bottleneck at the A120 lights in Little Hadham. One estimate was that as many as 100 cars an hour use Bury Green as a rat-run
- Concern was also expressed about the volume, danger and noise from construction traffic during re-development. Millfield Lane, and Millfielfd Cottage, a listed building, were especially vulnerable unless a road diversion could be achieved. Development could pose a threat to Bury Green Farmhouse, also listed
- Any changes to roads would require permission from Lord Salisbury
- Pedestrians and horse riders would also be at risk from increased traffic. The exercising on the roads of polo ponies stabled at Bury Green Farm had recently added to the risk
- There was general agreement that a detailed traffic survey of the Bury Green area was needed
- One suggestion was that traffic could be encouraged to keep to primary routes (ie to avoid rat-running) by restricting use of local roads to certain hours of the day
- How would the site and related traffic be affected by a future Little Hadham by-pass?

5. Access

- Clarity was needed around access to the site and which entrances would be earmarked for residential and commercial use (it was believed there are up to four entrances in total)
- One suggestion was that owners of new low-cost homes could access via the main entrance

6. Affordable homes

- Confirmation of the number of affordable homes was needed and whether they would conform to Local Plan criteria (p16 of brief)
- Why were affordable homes suggested for The Grove and not made an integral part of any new residential development?
- Concern was expressed that if affordable homes were not occupied by people working in the Little Hadham area, their presence could mean more cars, possibly up to three per household
- Mention was made of the fact that 50 or 60 key worker flats were being provided in Bishop's Stortford

7. Animal testing

- If this facility was retained, how saleable would market-price houses be if sited virtually adjoining?
- Had EHDC or the developer sought professional advice on this point?
- What would happen to the site if (a) no interest was expressed by potential buyers prior to construction; (b) the houses did not sell after construction?
- One parishioner said he understood that a layer of top soil would have to be removed to decontaminate the land if the animal testing site was redesignated
- Why had EHC indicated a preference for continued use as an animal testing site?
- What security of tenure did the owners of the animal testing business have?
- Cllr Tindale thought EHC's 'preference' was based on the fact that continued use for animal testing minimised traffic (the site under GSK employed 90 people)

8. Water and sewage

- Residents were aware that GSK had a major sewage treatment plant but were concerned about the impact that new housing could have – some existing houses relied on septic tanks
- What estimates had been made about the impact on water supplies and drainage?
- Would re-development contribute adversely to flooding in Little Hadham, since the site was above the level of the Ash?

9. Millennium Wood

- The future of the wood, and its upkeep, should be included in any revised brief

End (19 Oct 2004)