

Willaston Residents' and Countryside Society (WR&CS)

Minutes of the Special Committee Meeting held on Monday 23rd April 2018
in the Methodist Chapel School Room

Committee Meeting

Present: (Officers): Chris Hampshire (Chair), Vicky Spraggon (Vice-Chair), Sarah Shannon (Secretary), Hilary Booth (Treasurer), Sue Unsworth (Publicity), Jane Townsend (Footpaths), Ceri Jones (Social Media)
(Committee Members): Annette Troake, Madeline Hughes, Lyn Jackson-Eves, Sandra Kettiros, David Compton, John Fisher, Roy Spraggon, Rob King, Fiona Ennys, Sheila Smith, Paul Janvier and Hilary Gould

In addition, there were 11 observers, the majority of whom left after item four, with five staying for the whole meeting.

1. Welcome

Chris welcomed the committee and village residents and thanked them for coming to an additional meeting. He explained that the meeting would cover two items – the draft response to the McCarthy and Stone planning application and an update on Christmas lights.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Stephen Bazeley, John Woodrow, Debs Jerrett, Barry Vowles, Hilary Morris, Helen Mayles and Myles Hogg.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4. Draft Response to McCarthy and Stone Planning Application

4.1 Background

Chris thanked Barry Vowles for the work that he had done to date on the draft response which had been circulated in advance to committee members and those residents that had said that they will be attending the meeting. He explained that residents will have the opportunity to offer additional points related to planning. There will then be a discussion by the committee at which residents will be asked to observe only. The aim is to agree the key principles, rather than the detail of the response.

Chris then suggested that there should be a sub-committee to agree the final wording of the response, which would be led by Barry. Hilary Booth suggested that Barry, Sarah and Chris should form the sub-committee. Jane also expressed an interest. Sarah confirmed that although she lives on Old Vicarage Road, her property is not adjacent to the Legion land and she does not therefore have any vested interest in the outcome of this application so there is no conflict of interest. Hilary Booth proposed and Paul Janvier seconded that a sub-committee consisting of Chris, Sarah, Jane and Barry should be formed to finalise the response and this was agreed by all present.

Chris then commented that we are in a unique situation due to the size, scale and impact of this application. Therefore, as a Society, we have taken additional steps as follows:

- We have tried to raise awareness, taking a neutral stance and publicising the application through Facebook, the website and noticeboards;
- We have encouraged residents to submit their own comments to CWaC (positive and negative);
- We have asked residents also to comment to us so that we have some understanding of people's views (but only a few responses have been received);
- We asked McCarthy and Stone to attend the last meeting to give us an update on the public response to date;
- We also asked residents if they wanted to speak at the 15-minute slot at our last meeting – only Glenn Ayres took up this invitation;
- We responded to a request for an EGM on this application by asking committee members if they wanted to hold one, but the majority did not feel it was necessary;

- Three officers met three members of the objection group to hear their comments and also to offer advice on planning matters;
- Two officers met the Planning Officer from the Council without prejudicing any discussions tonight to discuss the application and key areas of concern.

Chris finished by saying that this is our village and our future, so it is important that we respond correctly to this application, given the significant impact this development may have.

4.2. Opportunity for Residents to identify and additional points they would like us to consider

Stewart Wilkinson raised the issue of parking. He commented that given the proposed housing is for older people, approximately a third of the spaces should be accessible for people with disabilities. In addition, he suggested that there should be two extra large spaces for delivery vans and similar vehicles. He also commented that any reference to an increase in mobility scooters should be sensitively worded.

Jen Williams expressed concern that if units do not sell, they may be socially rented to other people, as has happened in Cannell Court. Chris commented that he was not sure whether this is a planning issue, as this is a more commercial perspective but said that the Council have the option to put a minimum age restriction on the property. Ruth Hampshire wondered if a covenant can be put on the building to guarantee a minimum age and also expressed concern about sub-letting. It was noted that Cannel Court went back to planning to reduce the minimum age. Sue commented that Renaissance in Neston is renting some units to Housing Associations if they are not being bought.

Iain Henrys said that he lives in Old Farm Close and expressed concerns about parking. He had spoken to the Planning Officer who had said that any development should be treated in the context of supplementary planning guidelines as flats/houses and not as sheltered accommodation. This therefore means that the parking provision should be for 60 spaces, rather than 32 (which is the figure for sheltered accommodation).

Glenn Ayres said that he lives in an adjacent property on Hooton Road. He commented that the section in the draft response on SOC 6 misses out Part C. He expressed the view that this part is relevant and potentially parts D and E are also relevant.

Ruth Hampshire questioned where the statistics on parking have come from and suggested that there is a difference between rural and urban accommodation which has not been recognised. Chris commented that the Planning Officer said that we need to challenge any data set used for statistics in our response if we are not happy with it.

Sonya Neary said that she lives in Old Vicarage Road. She commented that her parents live in similar accommodation in Neston where there are 45 flats and 22 parking spaces. They have never had a problem getting space. Those without cars did not normally use buses but used taxis. She expressed the view that parking is not as essential as people think. Glenn Ayres said there was a difference between urban and rural settings.

Sheila Shaw said that she lives in Old Farm Close and feels that she will be boxed in by this development and Cannel Court. She expressed the view that this is a high-density development on a small site. She also raised the issue of access as she felt that the corner is very dangerous. Chris commented that the Council will do a full transport assessment. It is believed that the regulations state that a tree with a preservation order cannot be removed to improve access.

Ruth Hampshire commented that there is insufficient lighting and no pavement on the side of the road that adjoins this site.

Sheila Shaw said that she understood that there has to be a development on the site but she felt that these proposals are thoughtless to the environment of the village. The status of McCarthy and Stone current relationship with the Royal British Legion was raised and Sarah explained that as we understand it, McCarthy and Stone are the preferred buyers of Royal British Legion site and will purchase it if they get planning permission. It is believed that currently they have not bought the site but have first option.

Sue asked if there could be some agreement that people don't rent the properties off. Vicky commented that as a committee we have to step back and not be concerned about hearsay of what the behaviour of some

people could be. Also, that at the last meeting, McCarthy and Stone confirmed that people could sell property on as long as the age criteria is met, it doesn't have to go back to the company.

Iain Henrys said that 39 years ago there was a plan to build a by-pass. People protested and the plan was knocked back. At the time there was a feeling that this would fundamentally damage the village. He expressed the belief that if this development goes ahead in its current form, it will have the same magnitude of effect on the character of the village.

Jane commented that she feels it is important that those buying have access to open spaces. She said that half the apartments look onto the car park or small areas of green space and she feels that there is nowhere for them to sit in the sun, although Chris pointed out there is an East and West garden section.

Ruth Hampshire commented that there is potential for flooding as wherever building takes place, you get run-off. Chris said that the Council will consult with United Utilities about drainage as part of the planning application process. Jen Williams commented that Cannel Court comes under both United Utilities and Welsh Water.

4.3 Committee Discussion and Agreement of Key Principles

Chris said that we would now go through the draft response paragraph by paragraph and asked residents attending to now observe only. If they wished to make further comments, they can respond after the meeting.

4.3.1 Opening three paragraphs

The opening paragraphs were accepted, other than a clarification of the third paragraph. As this was considered crucial, a rewording was proposed by Vicky, seconded by Jane as follows:

'Whilst the Society has no objection in principle to the development of the site as stated above, we do have some serious reservations and concerns with the detail of the application, and therefore unless it is modified, we must strongly object to the application as it stands.'

This was unanimously agreed.

4.3.2 Section 1 – McCarthy and Stone Statement of Community Involvement

No changes were suggested for this section

4.3.3 Section 2 – Loss of Public Amenity/Recreation Land

It was agreed that this section should be lower down in the response as it is less important than other areas of concern. It was also agreed that the sub-committee should look further into SOC 6 sections C, D and E to see if there are additional issues that should be raised.

Sarah commented that a resident had written to clarify that although the bowling green had been improved in recent years, it had not been well used and there had been little demand for it. In addition, he had said that this space was a private, not a public recreation space. Jane commented that it could potentially be a community facility, but Chris felt this is not relevant to our planning response as the current planning application is not retaining this area.

4.3.4 Section 3 – Scale and Density of the Proposed Apartment Complex

It was agreed that this section should be higher in the response as it is a key issue. There were no changes other than in the ultimate paragraph in which it was felt that the phrase 'some residents' should be clarified as 'a number of residents in Old Farm Close'.

4.3.5 Section 4 – Provision of Parking on the Site

It was agreed that this section should include the issue of disability parking spaces, as raised by Stewart Wilkinson and should incorporate Iain Henry's point on the rules for flats/housing, rather than sheltered housing.

4.3.6 Section 5 – Possible Addition Burden on Willaston Surgery

It was agreed that this section should be included as it was noted that many comments assume this will be an issue but our contact with the surgery has shown this should not be an issue. It was also noted that the surgery currently takes patients from out of the village. However, it was felt that this point should be near the end of the response.

4.3.7 Section 6 – Road Safety Issues

It was felt that we should draw attention to the survey done by the Council last year on Hooton Road and maybe include some of the data ourselves around the volumes of traffic. Chris commented that a Planning Officer came from the Council today to assess the impact of traffic access with the proposed development. Lyn wondered why the entrance/exit couldn't be moved but Chris explained that a number of trees have preservation orders so options are limited.

Fiona felt that it may be worth mentioning the Roften development as this is likely to increase the amount of traffic in the village.

There was a discussion as to whether there is a footpath between the proposed development and Old Farm Close – this needs to be checked.

4.3.8 Section 7 – Drainage and Run Off

It was agreed that this point should be included but near the end of the response.

4.3.9 Section 8 – Lack of Provision for Affordable Housing

John Fisher commented that young people have problems staying in the village. There was a brief discussion about what affordable housing was and it was noted that properties in Willaston are still difficult to afford, compared to other areas on the Wirral, where prices are cheaper.

It was agreed that this item should remain in the response but the bit about the Community Plan response should not be included.

4.3.10 Conclusion

This was agreed, but the main body of the response should follow the summary for prioritisation of issues.

4.4 Agreement of Next Steps

It was agreed that the sub-committee should develop a final draft based on discussion at the meeting, residents' comments at the meeting and any subsequent communications received. The final draft would then be emailed to all committee members and a vote to agree its submission (or not) should take place.

Chris also emphasised that individuals can make their own submissions to the Council and encouraged members and residents to do so. Organisation representatives were also asked to encourage their members to make a response.

5. Willaston Christmas Lights

Chris thanked Ceri for leading on the Christmas Lights and commented that she is doing a superb job, with Paul's support.

Ceri passed around a summary sheet. A first meeting had been held at the Nag's Head with fourteen people attending. Further investigations have also taken place, including conversations with potential suppliers.

Ceri explained that CWaC have responsibility for the tree. They have done a tree survey and are recommending that some work is undertaken to shape the tree, shortening the growing tips of branches and removing any dead branches. However, they cannot cut the top or bottom branches off as this could well damage the tree. CWaC will pick up the cost of this tree remedial work, along with the cost of removing the existing lights, either through their own funds or through Myles' Councillors' budget.

Ceri then explained that hiring new lights had initially been the preferred option of the group as there is a reduced initial cost. However, following feedback, it was felt that this approach would not be the most beneficial in the longer term. Three suppliers have been considered for purchase of lights and a recommended supplier – Lite Ltd – has been identified. The optimum proposal is to purchase 1,600 bulbs which costs £14,429 (excluding VAT). If this cannot be achieved, then 1,200 bulbs is the minimum specification which costs £11,560 (excluding VAT). These lights would be guaranteed for five years but the electrical installer has suggested they should last considerably longer than this.

Committee members asked why CWaC could not buy the lights and Ceri explained that they only fund Ellesmere Port and Chester lights now. Generally, local communities that have lights fund themselves, either through town/parish council rates or by raising the funds in another way. Jane suggested that the Special Expenses in the Council Tax cover Christmas lights. Vicky confirmed that this was the case in the past but it is not included in the budget statements now.

Ceri confirmed that the intention is to put lights on the tree this Christmas but if necessary the funds raised will be rolled over until sufficient money is available. Any communication would make it clear that if insufficient money was raised in time, there would be no tree lights this year but fundraising would continue for lights in the future. Ceri proposed that the sub group should fundraise in order to purchase new lights. The aim should be to raise £14,429 but this can be scaled down to £11,560 if required. Vicky seconded this proposal and everyone agreed.

Sarah proposed that Ceri should be given a budget of £200 to cover initial costs of fundraising. This was seconded by Roy and agreed by all present.

Chris thanked Ceri for taking this work on.

6. Any Other Business

Sarah asked organisation representatives to take copies of the WINDS survey and to encourage members to fill it in.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 9.20pm.

Dates for future Committee Meetings:

Monday 21st May 2018
Monday 16th July 2018
Monday 17th Sept 2018
Monday 19th Nov 2018

AGM: Friday 26th October 2018