

HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
held via Zoom on Monday 27th July 2020

Present: Cllrs Nigel Boreham, Andrea Davis, Neil Reeve (meeting chair), Janet Robinson (joining at item 20/60), Paul Sutton (vice-chair), Jo Windley and the Clerk Allison Ward

County and District Cllr Susan Barker (leaving during the public forum)

During the meeting there were 29 Zoom connections from members of the public

The vice-chairman opened the meeting and welcomed residents.

20/57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Robert Lodge sends apologies as he has a long-standing holiday commitment; this was accepted by the Parish Council.

20/58 APPOINTMENT OF A CHAIRMAN FOR THIS MEETING

Cllr Sutton confirmed as well as vice-chairman he is also the planning lead for the Parish Council and provides guidance and advice on all planning matters that this council considers. Cllr Sutton confirmed that given his involvement as the agent for a similar application in the parish, which is currently pending decision by Uttlesford, he felt it appropriate that he hands over the chair for this meeting to another Cllr. Cllr Sutton proposed that Cllr Reeve chairs tonight's meeting, Cllr Reeve accepted the chair, before the proposal was seconded by Cllr Boreham with all in agreement. Cllr Sutton concluded by stating that whilst he would take part in the Parish Council discussion, he intended to abstain from the vote at item 20/61 and 20/62.

Cllr Reeve takes the chair.

20/59 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FOR THIS MEETING - None

20/60 PUBLIC FORUM

Cllr Reeve opened the public forum by reminding residents that only the application on the agenda can be considered at this meeting and any comments must be relevant to planning policy and process.

Cllr Reeve confirmed the two outcomes required of the meeting,

1. For the Parish Council to take a position on the application; to support, object, or neither support/object.
2. To consider if the application should be decided by Uttlesford planning committee rather than planning officers.

Cllr Reeve confirmed the order of speaking,

1. County and District Cllr Susan Barker has asked to address the meeting.
2. Both the applicant and their agent were invited to address the meeting, both declined, in their absence Cllr Sutton agreed to provide a factual outline of the application.
3. The three residents who have confirmed they wish to speak will be invited to address the meeting.
4. Any additional comments or questions from residents not already covered.
5. The Clerk will conclude with a summary of points raised in the written statements received by the Parish Council. The Chairman will close the public forum and the Parish Council will consider the agenda items.

Cllr Robinson joins the meeting

County and District Cllr Barker re-iterated to the meeting that it is Uttlesford planning that makes the decisions on planning applications, or recommendations on applications which go to Planning Committee, and not Parish Councils. 95% of applications are decided by the Uttlesford planning officers with generally only those that are considered 'major', more than 10 dwellings or those that involve a District Cllr or employee of Uttlesford going to the committee for consideration. Parish Councils can ask for other applications to be considered by the planning committee if they can give a reason in planning why this should happen. Cllr Barker referred to the comments on the village Facebook page

Signed
 Neil Reeve (Chairman of the meeting)

relating to the previous Parish Council meeting and reminded residents that Uttlesford has a monitoring officer who is responsible for considering any complaints about the behaviour of Cllrs and any comments should be addressed to them. Finally, Cllr Barker reminded the meeting of Uttlesford's government target to provide 15,000-18,000 new homes in the District over the next 25 years.

Cllr Sutton confirmed the matters to be considered are the number of dwellings, access and layout with other matters being reserved (i.e. detailed appearance and landscaping). The site fronts School Lane and runs behind several properties on the north side of The Street, namely: Elm House, Maples, and part of Chapel Fields House. The site adjoins but is not in the conservation area, neither is the access, however the development of the site is likely to have an impact on the setting of several nearby listed buildings - Elm House, The Cottage, The Punchbowl and St Mary's Church. The proposed layout is for 5 large detached houses with double garages, in a cul-de-sac arrangement.

The first resident lives at Elm Cottage and confirmed they were fundamentally objecting. They raised the following points,

1. The site is outside the village development line and there is no reason to break that line.
2. The site abuts the conservation area and is totally out of keeping with the village heritage in this part of the village; the proposal fails to enhance the conservation area or heritage.
3. School Lane is an entry point to the village and is characterised by the views on approach which are dominated by the listed buildings including Elm Cottage; the development of modern housing will adversely change the character of the entry point.
4. School Lane is a narrow, protected lane, the site will generate additional car movement creating a health and safety risk.
5. There is no pavement currently or proposed in the application from the site to The Street.
6. Sustainability, the village has little infrastructure and no amenities. Any residents on the site will require cars to access all amenities.
7. Where is the balance, there is so much negative impact the only person gaining is the developer?

The second resident echoed the points raised so far and confirmed their objection to the application. They raised the following additional points,

1. The access is on a blind bend and this applies wherever it is along the highway frontage.
2. Insufficient lighting in this part of the village.
3. No infrastructure or public transport, you must drive everywhere which will add to the pollution.
4. Concern re water pressure and electricity, can they cope with the development?
5. A couple of days of heavy rain can result in local roads being flooded and residents being unable to get in/out of the village.
6. Expansion is creeping, where does this stop? Do we join up with Dunmow?
7. Loss of wildlife habitat including hedgerow, some of which are protected species.
8. In the past the Parish Council has objected to village expansion, there are currently three developments pending a decision, why is the Parish Council not objecting as it has done in the past?

The third resident lives opposite the Parsonage Meadow site and confirmed they had spoken in objection to that site at the previous Parish Council meeting; they also object to this application. They confirmed they are not against any development but are against unsustainable development of unaffordable housing. They raised the following points,

1. Both the School Lane and Parsonage Meadows applications are opportunistic, timed to take advantage of the withdrawal by Uttlesford of the local plan.
2. Both applications assert they would assist in meeting local housing need referencing the lack of a 5-year supply in Uttlesford. Neither references the 2016 village housing needs survey which formed the basis of the application for 4 affordable homes next to Boreham Court; once built they will meet the villages (local) housing need.
3. The responses on the Uttlesford website in objection to the Parsonage Meadow site include that the site is not sustainable, the same applies to the site at School Lane. Both are too small to have any quantifiable benefit to local services; there are still no shops or services in the village and local services such as schools and doctors are still oversubscribed. Both developments will be detrimental to the rural environment bringing amongst other things increased traffic to narrow local roads.
4. The responses on the Uttlesford website in support of the Parsonage Meadow site include controlled expansion allowing the village to survive and thrive, benefits from new blood and additional families, allow those working locally to move closer to work, allow children who had grown up here to remain in the village, allow mix of socio economic groups to live in the village. The responses did not refer to the villages housing needs survey or the development of affordable housing in the village. None recognised that once built the affordable housing would

meet the villages identified housing need, or that additional families would live in those houses, or that those houses would be affordable to those working locally and who had grown up here.

5. To make the sites viable for development the proposed houses will have to be large with at least 4 bedrooms. Based on Uttlesford own data, large 4 bed houses in High Easter are unaffordable to the average Uttlesford resident. The village does not need any more unaffordable executive houses.
6. It is timely to consider the future and whether there is a need for the village to grow – sustainably - to allow it to survive and thrive. The Parish Council has been criticised for not representing the views of villagers. I would suggest that by consulting villagers about development in a way that all can contribute, the Parish Council can overcome these criticisms. The Council would have the results of the consultation against which to have an objective discussion about future planning applications. Whatever the view on developments, above all, High Easter residents want to be properly consulted about what happens to their village.

Cllr Reeve responded to the last point and suggested that at the next Parish Council meeting consideration is given to the point raised. The chair invited residents who had not registered in advance if they had any questions or points they wished to make.

A resident commented that if the current application is progressed, it would no doubt lead to further applications which would be the start of High Easter becoming a town.

A resident suggested sustainability is key and the principles of housing should be reviewed in a sensible manner considering people's needs. Sustainable, green housing with a good housing mix e.g. bungalows, 2 and 3 beds can be done.

A resident commented that producing a neighbourhood plan had come up in the past and the Parish Council had refused to take it forward. Cllr Sutton responded, when this was last considered the Uttlesford emerging local plan had identified High Easter as a type B village which meant no development, therefore there was no need for a plan. To produce a neighbourhood plan that is accepted as part of the planning process is extremely time consuming, costly and will need residents to contribute and engage.

A resident commented on how effective the Parish Council has been at helping with the issues re the property Homely and insisting that any proposed development should not compromise the setting and respect the heritage. Elm House is one of the most attractive properties in the historic setting and the Parish Council should use the same persuasion to ensure this setting is protected. Cllr Reeve thanked the resident for acknowledging the Parish Councils efforts with Homely which has included many hours of investigation and conversations.

The Clerk confirmed there had been one letter of correspondence from a planning consultant on behalf of the residents at School House. The response objected to the application for following reasons,

1. The village has limited services and facilities and development of the site would encourage unsustainable modes of transport and not conform to the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.
2. There would be an adverse impact on the setting of the conservation area and several listed buildings situated within it. The development would not merge well with the existing development along School Lane and the applicant has not undertaken a suitable heritage impact assessment to inform proposals.
3. The proposed access would not be safe and suitable and would unacceptably impact on highway safety.
4. The adverse impact on the character and historic significance of the protected lane.

Cllr Reeve asked for any final comments before making a closing statement confirming he had read the responses from 10-15 residents which had already been submitted to Uttlesford all of which are in objection.

20/61 To consider PLANNING APPLICATION UTT/20/1648/OP

Cllr Davis asked for clarity on the ownership of the land directly adjacent to the highway along School Lane, there are some parts particularly the boundary of Elm Cottage where the hedge covers any verge. Cllr Sutton confirmed the verge is likely to be owned by highways and they have the right to cut back vegetation if there is a safety issue or requirement. The consideration for the access is the visibility splays and if you look at the plans you can see the 43m requirement on either side of the access it feasible, it extends some 10m along the side of Elm Cottage.

Cllr Windley asked for clarification on the protection afforded to a protected lane given the current landscape is a significant factor. Cllr Sutton confirmed School Lane is a protected lane and any proposed development would have to demonstrate that it outweighs the harm caused to the lane and landscape.

Signed
Neil Reeve (Chairman of the meeting)

Cllr Robinson asked how closely the policies in the Local Plan 2005 in relation to the additional traffic would be applied. Cllr Reeve confirmed the Local Plan 2005 is the current Plan and has weight. Policy GEN1(b) states development must encourage movement other than by car. Cllr Sutton continued that whilst the Local Plan is the starting point, the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 is also relevant as a 5-year housing supply cannot be demonstrated, this sets a precedent in support of sustainable development. To date we have not seen responses from other statutory consultees including Essex Highways or Heritage and so are unclear on what view they will take.

Cllr Boreham asked if there was an option for more houses on the site, e.g. could it be 10 smaller affordable houses. Cllr Reeve commented that at this stage the Parish Council can only evaluate the site as presented, what it cannot do is suggest something different including mix. Cllr Reeve continued that the lack of a 5-year housing supply in Uttlesford is an issue that will need to be taken into account. Cllr Davis added, if there is a need for housing in that setting, one/two houses would be more acceptable than what we are looking at.

Cllr Reeve commented on heritage and the poor statement submitted by the applicant, which he was surprised Uttlesford had accepted. Cllr Sutton agreed and added the lack of information means it is not possible to make a decision on the heritage impact.

Cllrs commented on the lack of a natural boundary on the north and east sides, unless there is suitable screening the view is it will 'stick out like a sore thumb'.

Layout is a consideration and Cllr Sutton noted that plot 5 is about 10m from Elm Cottage, the bare minimum you would have in an urban setting. The plot would overlook Elm Cottage and result in loss of amenity.

Cllr Reeve noted that the linear layout in the historic centre is characteristic of many Essex villages. The proposed cul-de-sac design is inconsistent with development in this part of the village and not in keeping with the linear layout of St Marys Bungalows opposite the site.

Cllrs considered the access to the site and noted that technically the visibility splays could be achieved and is likely to be acceptable to Highways. Whilst the Parish Council has concerns with the access, Cllr Sutton suggested the Parish Council reserves final judgement on the access until Highways have commented.

Cllr Reeve asked Cllrs if they had any positive points in favour of the application. Cllr Davis responded with a view that High Easter has a part to play in taking some additional housing, acknowledging the housing target required in Uttlesford. This does not mean we take every development as it comes up but need to look at where is appropriate or most sustainable over the next 25 years. Cllr Sutton added that it is encouraging to see residents interested in producing a Neighbourhood Plan. Previously when the Parish Council tried to produce a Village Design Statement (predecessor of the Neighbourhood Plan) it failed to progress due to lack of interest. Given where Uttlesford are with the Local Plan it may be the right time to reconsider but it requires a lot of commitment, time and individuals from the community to get involved, it is not for the Parish Council alone to produce.

Cllr Reeve proposed that the Parish Council objects to this application in line with the following policy,

- ENV 2 and ENV 9 - Heritage, lack of a proportionate heritage statement. The access and layout of the site would change the appearance of what is currently open countryside and would fail to contribute to the character and appearance of this part of the village.
- ENV 9 - Harm to the character of the protected lane.
- GEN 2- The layout of in the form of a cul-de-sac, urban style, directly opposite a row of bungalows would introduce a new, uncharacteristic built form which is not present in this part of the village. Plots 4 and 5 would directly overlook the rear gardens of adjoining properties, resulting in a loss of privacy.
- GEN 1 - Access would compromise highway safety.
- The application fails to provide sufficient evidence to support why this site is sustainable.

This was seconded by Cllr Robinson; the vote was 5 in favour of objecting and 1 abstain.

Before closing this agenda item Cllr Reeve responded to a point raised by a resident in the public forum on why the Parish Council is not objecting to the three current applications for 4 or 5 new dwellings as it has done in the past. Cllr Reeve confirmed the last developments on this scale were Old Vicarage Close and Boreham Court some 20+ years ago, there have not been any recent development sites which are comparable to those currently pending a decision. One of the pending sites is the affordable housing site being developed by Hastoe, this is a scheme the Parish Council

initiated and has been actively promoting as a positive contribution to the village. Anyone can apply for development on land and the planning system is designed to allow views to be expressed and decisions made.

20/62 To consider whether to call in PLANNING APPLICATION UTT/20/1648/OP

Cllr Boreham proposed that the application be called in to be considered by the Planning Committee should officers recommend approval, this was seconded by Cllr Windley; the vote was 5 in favour with 1 abstain, The reasons for this request being the sensitivity of the site, impact of layout on historic setting (ENV2), protected lane (ENV9), and outside development limits (S7).

Before closing the meeting, the chair asked those residents remaining if there were any other points they wished to raise in relation to the application.

A resident asked for guidance on responding to the application. Cllr Reeve encouraged residents to make their own responses direct to Uttlesford and to ensure this focuses on planning matters and policy. The Planning Consultant response submitted on behalf of the School House residents is a good factual summary of the planning issues relevant to this application. Residents are further encouraged to focus on one or two elements that are significant to them.

Cllr Reeve closed the meeting at 9.30pm.