

MINUTES of the meeting of the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group held on Tuesday 15th October 2019 at 7 p.m. in the Pavilion, Lay Avenue, Berinsfield.

PRESENT

Councillor S. Scott-Ely	
Councillor P. Bridge	
Councillor I. Bunyan	
Councillor S. Crawford	
Councillor B. Fearneyhough	
Councillor Ms. A. Jones	
Mr. K. Chrisp	Resident
Mr. C. Prahacs	Resident
Mr. D. Welsh	Resident
Mrs. C. Wade	Manager, Berinsfield Information & Volunteer Centre
District Cllr Robin Bennett	Attended, but left following item 4.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs. R. Stockford and Mrs. J. Logan, SOHA Housing.
2. Declarations of Interest.
  - a) Councillor Scott-Ely declared his interest as owner of Site BER24, Queenford Lakes Watersports Centre and as a Trustee of Berinsfield Information and Volunteer Centre and Berinsfield Voluntary Day Centre.
  - b) Councillor Bridge declared his interest as a Trustee of Riverside Counselling Services Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity and long standing Member of Berinsfield Community Association.
  - c) Councillor Bunyan declared his interest as a Member of the Bar Committee at the Berinsfield Community Association.
  - d) Councillor Mrs. Jones declared her interest as a Youth Worker at the Berinsfield Youth Club.
3. The Chairman, Councillor Stuart Scott-Ely welcomed everyone to the meeting and as some new Members were present, everyone introduced themselves.
4. To receive the Minutes of the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2019. The Minutes of the meeting of the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2019 were approved by the Steering Group.
5. **Background to current status of Berinsfield's emerging Neighbourhood Development Plan and the South Oxfordshire District Council's emerging Local Plan.** District Councillor Robin Bennett informed the meeting about the current position with regard to the District Council's emerging Local Plan 2034. The District Councillors in post prior to the elections in May 2019 had agreed to the number of new houses detailed in the emerging Local Plan. The figure is quite high and this caused controversy with the new administration, therefore South Oxfordshire District Council's Cabinet voted on 3<sup>rd</sup> October to recommend withdrawal of the plan. On the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government, The Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick, MP, imposed a Holding Direction on South Oxfordshire District Council to stop them approving the Cabinet's recommendation to withdraw the Local Plan. The Holding Direction has been made under the provisions of Section 21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). This means that the emerging Local Plan has "no effect whilst the Direction is in force".

One of the proposals in the emerging Local Plan was for land in and around Berinsfield to be taken out of the green belt, but there is no clear picture on this at the present time.

District Councillor Robin Bennett also informed the meeting that Oxfordshire County Council had voted to proceed with the Housing and Infrastructure Fund worth £234m which includes a new bridge over the Thames at Culham.

District Councillor Robin Bennett referred to the Berinsfield Garden Village Scheme and said that this should provide some investment in the village. He said that the District Council should engage with the community about the Garden Village Scheme. The Garden Village scheme is closely linked to what happens with the emerging Local Plan 2034.

District Councillor Robin Bennett left the meeting at this point.

**6. Conference call with Mr. Neil Homer of O'Neill Homer, the appointed Neighbourhood Planning Consultant.** Neil Homer was informed that ten Members of the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group were in the room listening to his presentation.

Neil Homer informed the meeting that some of the challenges that face Neighbourhood Development Plan Groups are the unusual sites and being in the green belt and that the Berinsfield NDP Steering Group should be mindful of that.

Councillor Scott-Ely mentioned the Garden Village Scheme and asked Neil Homer how Berinsfield could move forward with the scheme. Neil Homer informed the meeting that he did not consider that South Oxfordshire District Council were looking at Berinsfield Parish Council as a partner in the Garden Village Scheme at the present time. He felt that South Oxfordshire District Council should be liaising much more closely with the Parish Council as they need the Parish Council's support for both the emerging Local Plan and the proposed Garden Village Scheme.

Neil Homer suggested that the Parish Council may wish to enlist the help of its M.P. Mr. John Howell who is the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Champion. It was suggested that Mr. Howell could be asked to chair a meeting between Berinsfield Parish Council/Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group and South Oxfordshire District Council. Councillor Scott-Ely informed Neil Homer that the Parish Council could contact Mr. John Howell M.P. to ask him if he would consider chairing such a meeting.

Councillor Scott-Ely asked Neil Homer what he felt the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group's next step should be. Neil Homer said it would be helpful to re-visit some of the underlying assumptions being made by the District Council, the Garden Village Scheme and the regeneration programme. Neil Homer considered the way the District Council had allocated the housing in relation to the regeneration programme was odd. He felt that some elements of the allocation were driven more by a need to meet a housing target rather than a genuine regeneration scheme. Councillor Scott-Ely explained to Neil Homer that originally the District Council had hoped to purchase the Mount Farm land for the housing and to re-sell it to developers with any uplift in value being used exclusively to carry out the promised regeneration scheme. The allocation of 1700 new houses had been reached in consultation with village residents. The District Council had informed residents that 1700 houses would need to be built in order to be able to fund the facilities the community required. Neil Homer considered that the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group should re-visit the allocation of 1700 houses.

Neil Homer believes that South Oxfordshire District Council had only looked at one option which was to put all the houses on one green field site. He thinks there are other options which might potentially be more suitable by using previously developed sites in and around the village based on those identified in the existing Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Mr. Prahacs, Resident and Member of the Steering Group, asked if there was an alternative method of achieving the housing and what number might be sufficient. Neil Homer replied that he did not know if the number, size and distribution of the sites that have been identified in the draft

Neighbourhood Development Plan could provide enough value and there was a clear lack of infrastructure. He suggested looking at the sites afresh to see if they stack up and to explore that option alongside the Mount Farm proposal from South Oxfordshire District Council. Neil Homer considered that the sites in the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan would fit in with the character of the village much better than having 1700 houses on one site, which he felt could result in there effectively being two villages (old and new) and although the existing village might get some benefits, it might be far less than expected.

Councillor Crawford asked Neil Homer if the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group should wait for the emerging Local Plan or whether it should proceed with the preparation of a new plan. Neil Homer stated that there is still the problem of the village being in the green belt.

It was AGREED to recommend that :-

a) Berinsfield Parish Council should approach Mr. John Howell, M.P. to ask if he would chair a meeting between Berinsfield Parish Council/Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group and South Oxfordshire District Council to explore how mutual benefit might be realised with regard to the Garden Village Scheme and the emerging Local Plan.

b) Subject to Mr. John Howell's response, Berinsfield Parish Council should write to the Chief Executive of South Oxfordshire District Council to ask his Council to engage with the Parish Council with regard to the Garden Village Scheme.

c) Re-visit the allocation of 1700 houses.

The Chairman, Councillor Scott-Ely thanked Neil Homer for participating in the conference call.

## 7. **Update and review of sites.**

a) Community Hub. A short discussion took place about the organisations that might be based in a community hub and the fact that a stand-alone community hub building would be expensive to maintain and staff. A suggestion was made that the community hub could be attached to a commercial building, possibly the new Sports Centre, that would already be staffed and services could be shared to keep costs down.

b) Review of sites in existing Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan.

i) Abbey Woods Academy/Mount Farm CEC and Pre-School. The Steering Group considered that the school should be the first piece of major infrastructure that should be moved to a green field site near to the Burial Ground off Fane Drive and that the existing school site should be redeveloped to construct the new Sports Centre, the new Community Hub incorporating the Library

ii) Abbey Sports Centre site. The Steering Group considered that this site could then be used to provide new shops, the new Health Centre and possibly relocate the Dental Surgery.

iii) Berinsfield Community Association premises. The Steering Group considered that discussions should take place with the Berinsfield Community Association Trustees/Committee to establish if there is any interest in the Club moving from its existing site and moving to a brand new building within the village. The BCA could then potentially release value from its historic site by selling it for housing.

iv) Shops and Public House. The owner of the shops and public house has indicated that he is open minded about re-developing the site. The top shops could potentially be relocated to the site of the old Sports Centre together with the new Health

Centre and the area could potentially be better used to expand Berinscourt or provide supported living accommodation.

It was agreed that discussion about the sites should be continued at the next meeting.

8. Ongoing engagement with the local community. The Chairman, Councillor Scott-Ely informed the meeting that Mrs. Jackie Logan, the Community Engagement Officer from SOHA Housing handled the Steering Group's communications and publicity. She produces posters which are distributed around the village and puts details of the meetings on social media.

9. Date of next meeting – 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 at 7 p.m. at the Pavilion, Lay Avenue, Berinsfield.