

**NOTES OF PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS OPEN SPACE PROJECT
WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER 2018
7.00 P.M. IN THE MEMORIAL HALL**

Present (Parish Councillors) Chris Cudmore, David Mattick, David Sparkes, Simon Wolf, Vicki Taylor

In attendance: Anthea Brooks (Clerk to the Council) and 49 members of the public

Apologies: Vicki Trundle (Parish Councillor), Paula Freeland (Parish Councillor)

Background

Chris Cudmore gave a presentation on the Open Space Proposals from the Parish Council (PC) perspective and a copy is on the village website along with all the briefing papers provided prior to this meeting, as well as the minutes of all PC Meetings and related information.

These notes record the questions, answers and statements made during the subsequent discussions.

OPEN FORUM

Public Question: It has been said that the village suggested the appropriate use of the land to include allotments, children's play area and community area. How many people actually suggested that they would want allotments versus the other suggestions? Why are we focused entirely on the allotments which seem to give priority to the few and not the majority? There are more people with children who would make use of the play area than people who require allotments.

PC Answer: Part of this land is intended to be used for allotments, which is recognised as a solid argument to obtain the funding required. It is not the majority of the land anyway – we know we can get the S106 money for allotments and then the other projects can follow.

Public Question: How many people want allotments? What is the purpose of the Parish Council? The PC should be about supporting the majority of the village in making this village a better place to live.

PC Answer: How many people here have served on the PC and do these people believe this PC does a good job for the whole village? (*Show of hands and a general agreement that the PC does a good job from those people*). As a PC we represent the village and translate to a local level what is agreed nationally. This is particularly important for planning. The Government has recently changed its support to the developer – which is a fact and a possible threat. The Parish Council is here to represent views which are nationally translated through MDC to us. We have close liaison with MDC and County Councillors who regularly attend our meetings and routinely advise us on what is going on.

Public Question: Is the PC aligned to the voices of the village and does it reconcile the village differences?

PC Statement: First of all, before we do anything, we need to get the land. The local requirement appears to be for allotments. Therefore if we get the allotments the next step would be the provision of the play area

Public Question Can you explain why you have decided that this site is suitable? What other sites have you considered?

PC Answer: Various landowners have been asked to make land available but only the current offer is forthcoming after several years of trying. There are no other available options.

Public Question: How can you demonstrate that there is a need for allotments and that this is the number one priority for the village?

PC Answer: The appropriate numbers of Parishioners have asked for an allotment. The Open meeting indicated significant support for allotments and MDC are supportive of our project to provide allotments.

PC Statement: What is coming across to me is that people are not against us having the field, the main problem seems to be the allotments. As there are people who want allotments the PC has an obligation to provide them. They would be in the North West corner of the field which would not affect the householders.

Public Question: Why are people so against allotments when the benefits for people are so obvious. Why do people want to stop other people in the village being able to grow their own food? Why are you so against people being able to have their own allotments?

Public Statement: Before long allotments would look like 'Steptoe's Yard'.

PC Statement: An Allotment Association (AA) would be formed and rules and regulations established by the PC for the running of the allotments.

Public Question: If the PC can demonstrate demand for allotments why doesn't it make a compulsory hiring order for the Bellfield allotment area where there appears to be vacant plots? Also MDC could be asked for a lease of their land. Have they been approached?

PC Answer: The landowner of the Bellfield allotment area has not engaged with the PC. The apparently vacant plots are the ones he has reclaimed to return to agricultural purposes. There is no known suitable MDC land in the parish.

Public Answer: As a previous Chairman of the PC I can inform you that the PC cannot compulsorily purchase land. Only MDC and Somerset County Council (SCC) can do that.

Landowner Statement: What does not help is where people make statements without having all the facts. I want to do the right thing for the parish. You cannot suggest that allotments would not be looked after because you do not know. Should it fail then it is for the PC to look after this, if the land is sold to the PC. Assuming and suggesting that things will not be done properly is inappropriate and you should be careful what you say.

Public Statement: We need a playground which meets children's needs – the present one is not suitable. If there is a good AA which is well run then the allotments will be fine. If allotment holders do not use their piece of land appropriately then they are out. This is wonderful countryside here and we should do something beautiful with this piece of land. Maybe an area could be set aside for the elderly and disabled residents who could enjoy the allotments or garden. The children could also get involved by learning how to grow things, setting up bug hotels etc.

PC Statement: There will be a 2 metre fence, and the proposal could be to establish a hedge on the south side, so householders won't have visibility into the allotments which are approximately 80 metres away from the houses.

Public Statement: I still think it is a disproportionate use of the land for the few people who want an allotment.

Public Question: if the field is fenced what about walkers who walk across the field. There would need to be a gate and what about parking for the Village Fair?

Landowner Answer: We allow it to happen not because you are entitled to use what is a private field but only because of the public right of way which runs across it. The reason for the fence will be to demark where the different areas are and the footpath will still be a right of way. We are not going to leave the field as it is for ever. It is not a public open space it is a private field with a public right of way through it, technically people should stay on the footpath. We are perfectly within our rights to do whatever we want to do with it.

Public Question: Sell it?

Landowner Answer: Never say never but we would prefer the land to go to the village. The opportunity has arisen by chance and we would like to do something for the village. We are not confined over what the land is used for, I do not think that there is a problem with allotments. This creates an opportunity to buy land for the village which the PC are interested in so that the villagers can use it. There is enough land there to make a good mixture of everything which is required. We love the village and we want to invest in the land.

Public Statement: There are a group of people who live along the back of the Hedgerows who are not comfortable about allotments

Public Statement: NIMBY

Landowner Statement: It is not entirely at the back of your gardens. There is a car park and one or two have an extension to their gardens. I could install private allotments on the land tomorrow but I would rather sell a portion to the PC for the betterment of the village. Personally I think once you have the land then all options are open going forward. However the field could change tomorrow if something else was done with it. We do not know the future of it and personally I feel the best way to protect some of it is for the PC to own it. There is always a risk of other things being done there and I think it is a great opportunity for the village.

Public Question: Have you undertaken a cost benefit analysis for this proposal?

Answer: There is no requirement for a cost benefit analysis

Public Question: The creation of allotments will only benefit a very small number of people yet this open space is used by a great deal of villagers every day

PC Answer: To reiterate once again, this is not an open space for villagers to use, it is private land. The landowner has emphasised this already. The open space created by the land purchase will be available to all parishioners.

PC Statement: The AA will be responsible for the allotments under the jurisdiction of the Parish Council similar to the way the Recreation Field is run, which is leased by the PC to the Recreation Field Management Committee for a nominal rent. The PC would logically want to extend the recreational type activities under the guidance of the Recreation Field Management Committee

PC Statement: 18 people wanted additional playground space. 8 people wanted allotments/community gardens/orchard. We cannot deliver the playground enhancement without land. We have a duty to provide allotments if people want them in the parish and it is one of the things you can do under the S106. You cannot just buy land without having a

project to develop something and complete that project within the money that is being offered to you. There has to be a project and there is a duty on us to provide allotments. The PC does not understand why you would not want well run allotments. If you are concerned about them not being well run then please come and join the AA and make sure they are well run or be there in the first place to help organise it. If it helps to clarify why we have taken this route, MDC are happy with our approach. They have pressure on their budget to do things like enhancement of the Glastonbury playground and they would love to take that £15k and use it elsewhere. We have put a marker down and they have agreed to it. If we do not follow through they will take the funding away from us. We are coming to the end of the financial year and if we have not agreed the project on the S106 money the likelihood is that MDC will look elsewhere to spend it.

Public Statement: The ratio of people wanting allotments and people wanting the playground against the amount of land available seems reasonable.

Public Question/Statement: The landowner who owns the Bellfield allotments wants the land back. It has been mentioned about the number of people who expressed an interest in allotments but there has been no mechanism for actually asking the whole parish who is interested in acquiring an allotment. The legal minimum of people asking for an allotment is 6 but this does not take account of the fact that families may use an allotment – not just one person. There can be sharing and swapping of vegetables and the establishment of a community spirit. There could be a lot more people interested in having an allotment who have not yet expressed an interest and this should be addressed by the PC.

PC Answer: The PC have not undertaken a formal request for numbers of people who are interested in having an allotment and this looks as though it is something we should be taking forward

Public Question: If more people want allotments than the space available how would they be allocated?

Public Answer: The AA would do this as part of their rules and regulations. What is wrong with first come, first served?

Public Statement: I would certainly like an allotment and I can see that the way forward to achieving the play space is to go ahead with the allotments which will achieve this.

Public Question/Statement: There needs to be a mechanism for costing by the time the land is purchased and provision of disabled access, installation of water, suitable pathways and fencing.

PC Answer: This is a PC problem. The PC consider that they have enough for the costings which have already been done, although this was originally looked at in January and will need revisiting.

PC Statement: We have a good community spirit in the village and we have already had offers to carry out some of the work on a voluntary basis. Some of the people who want allotments have offered to do things. I have been leading on this project and believe we have enough funding to bring it in.

PC Statement: At this point we still do not know whether we have the land and the money to cover it.

Landowner Statement: We are keen to make this happen and want it to work for an affordable amount, we are not here to make a profit.

Public Question: Do the allotments have to be allocated to people who live in the village?

PC Answer: It depends what the AA decides, but the bid to Mendip states that it is for parishioners use.

Public Statement: With reference to additional play equipment, an application was made a couple of years ago for £27,000 for the pump track.

Public Question/Statement: The current play area is not fit for purpose for multiple ages. Everyone agrees that the play area needs some renovation. If you had money and you could invest it in improving the play area based on the number of people who suggested this, would you direct the cash towards this?

PC Answer: We have already debated this and the best use of the money was agreed to be to buy land. It is relatively easy to get grants to improve play equipment but without the land you cannot do anything. It would be intended to include equipment for adults as well.

Public Question: Any new allotment site would need to be accessible to all, including wheelchair users. This would mean clearly marked out car parking spaces, accessible gates and a 1.7 metre path to the allotment site and within it. Has this been costed into your proposal?

PC Answer: Not in detail at this stage. The costings are being revisited to ensure this is included. There are grants available for this.

Public Question: Have you created a long term financial model for the allotments which includes maintenance of the communal shed and fences, insurance, legal fees, administration etc. Have you determined the level of rent that will need to be applied to cover these costs?

PC Answer: No, the PC have not gone into detail at this stage. It is part of the business plan which is currently in draft and this now needs to be finalised.

Public Statement: You need a business proposal before you can go ahead with a project. You need to look at the costs, maintenance etc, before you actually take a decision to go ahead.

PC Answer: We have not actually made the decision to go ahead and we will be taking advice on this. The allotment holders will pay rent and this will cover the insurance charges.

Public Question: Have you conducted an ecological survey of the site? Have you undertaken a soil survey? The National Association of Allotments recommends both activities are done before the attempted creation of allotments.

PC Answer: At the moment it is not our land to do that with. However it has been in agricultural use for generations but a soil survey is a good idea and will be planned into the project.

Public Statement: This meeting should be about the whole area which the PC is hoping to purchase but has been taken over by a small group who are against the provision of allotments.

PC Statement: The following queries were received by email from a local resident who was not able to be present this evening; the PC answer accompanies them.

Question: We have grave concerns over the allotments and it is not fair on local home owners who will have to look over polytunnels and rain butts as well as an invasion of privacy.

Answer: I would point out that there is no right to a view. It is appreciated that people with a nice view do not want it taken away but they need to remember that it is not a right. Also the field is an agricultural field and, regardless of whether we sell part of the field or not, it will not be remaining as an open space where people can roam freely. There is a footpath across it and this will be maintained but the rest of the field will be used which will mean the public are restricted to the footpath only.

Question: The allotments will create more traffic coming in and out of the Recreation Field car park. It will affect the local house prices.

Answer: As the allotments are to be allocated to village residents the use of cars is likely to be limited. It is very unlikely that the local house prices will be affected, indeed it is more likely that the allotments will be viewed as an asset and will increase the value of houses. Allotments will be an asset to the village.

Question: I know that villagers have been asking for allotments, but how many can you put in such a small space? Clearly this will only benefit a few people, not the whole village. You only need to look behind Hillscroft to see what allotments can look like.

Question: How do you intend to manage the standard of the allotment?

Answer: As per the presentation, it is intended that there will be six allotments which can be divided into halves and quarters. The land behind Hillscroft is private and uncontrolled and as stated previously the AA will have rules and regulations, approved by the PC, to make sure that the area is kept tidy and the allotments are used appropriately.

Question: There is a petition from local residents that overlook the area – please listen to them. Surely there is a conflict of interest because the land owner is on the PC?

Answer: The question of the conflict of interest has been dealt with extensively. MDC have been involved in the investigation and it has been proven that our Code of Conduct was followed at all times.

Public Statement: You mentioned a hedge on the south side. I think it would be wise to include the west side as well because of the wind which cuts across the field from that corner.

PC Answer: The PC will consider this.

Public Question: What security measures are you intending to put in place?

PC Answer: The AA will propose security measures. The issue is routinely addressed by the Recreation Field team with their pavilion and tools.

Public Statement: There are a group of us who will always be worried about these allotments. The problem is we were not consulted from the beginning. If there had been a presentation like this right at the first stage things might have been different.

PC Answer/Statement: Meetings are always open for the public to attend and minutes and agendas are posted on the noticeboards and on the village website. Everything was done by due process and the presentation has happened now before the land has been bought. All villagers have every opportunity to go to PC meetings and read the noticeboards/website.

PC Statement: The information was widely available throughout the village and a consultation process was held.

Public Statement: We live in Apple Meadow View. The field behind the houses in Apple Meadow View is owned by the builder/developer who has now put up three agricultural buildings. Planning approval is not required for this type of building. We would be grateful if allotments were put behind our houses as it means the land can be preserved.

PC Statement/Question: This is why the PC is trying to buy the land to preserve it. What other things could we do with this land that has not already been said?

Public Statement: I think it should be kept as open parkland for walkers and the public to enjoy.

PC Statement: I will reiterate again that this is not public land it is privately owned. The only entitlement for the public is for the use of the footpath.

Public Statement: The Recreation Field Management Committee have already looked at ways of extending the children's play area. Unfortunately this is likely to be an expensive project but as a group we will get there. You give us the land we will do something with it. Unfortunately extending the current children's play area is not possible as it is not a safe area to site play equipment because there are high voltage power lines running down the hedge line.

SUMMING UP

There seems to be a general consensus that if the PC acquires the field for the village this is a good thing. If part of it is used for allotments there are concerns and the PC recognises this. We will see what can be done to mitigate these. However if we do not provide the allotments the opportunity is likely to be lost.

We will not be having a referendum as this project is not being decided on numbers. There are various reasons to justify providing allotments not just based on numbers.

Follow-up actions will be discussed at the next PC meeting on 19 November and as usual you are welcome to come along and see what is being proposed and that we are doing this for the benefit of the village, not the majority.

If we proceed, before doing anything else we will want to have a formal offer from the owners of Manor Farm. We cannot do much more until this is received and then we can start to look at what other things need to be done including those you have mentioned.

On communication I would say that the Webmaster spends a lot of time updating the village website. The PC minutes and agendas and notices are on there. Minutes and notices are also on the two noticeboards and also on Facebook. Please keep in touch with your community and your local Parish Councillor. If anyone is new to the village there is a Welcome Booklet available which is also on the village website. Please get involved and care for your village. The PC spend a lot of time discussing what is best for the village but that does not mean that the PC gets it right every time.

Thank you for coming.