

WAWP

Report and recommendation to the West Alvington Parish Council meeting on Thursday 3rd April 2014.

Please see our draft response to the Hortons following a meeting with them, the architects and potential developers on 11th March. We were asked to respond to the plans we saw on that occasion by 21st March so had no opportunity to discuss our views with you prior to that. We have made clear that the response below is, therefore, representative of the views of the working party alone.

As of 31st March we have received no response from the Hortons nor their agents. This is consistent with our experience of the so-called consultation process to date. We have received no positive response to any of the issues we have raised and suggestions that we have made. The plans we will show you at the meeting are, in essence, simply a further developed representation of what we saw in December last year.

We now understand that it is the intention of the developers to submit a formal planning application within days or weeks. On this basis we believe it is appropriate for the Parish Council to make clear its collective view and we offer, on our unanimous recommendation the following motion to be proposed and seconded by Sally and Robin:

**“West Alvington Parish Council continues to support the possibility of a development on the ‘Homefield’ site for the building of affordable homes for local people and further enhancements to the village.**

**However, the Council do not support the proposed site and layout as presented at this meeting and would not support a formal planning application on this basis. As the reports of the West Alvington Working Party, with the agreement of the Parish Council, have consistently suggested, we regard these proposals as Dangerous, Divisive and Incoherent and note the absence of any direct enhancements to the village.**

**We note with regret the failure of the consultative process to date in that no positive response has been made to any of the issues and positive suggestions we have made.”**

Draft response following meeting on 11th March.

Dear Carol and David,

Introduction.

We are choosing to direct this response to you, primarily, as our neighbouring parishioners. You are the initiators of the Homefield proposed development and identified on the drawings we now have as principal clients to Lethbridge Associates.

We have heard you say, in prior conversation, that you intend to remain resident in the Parish and, indeed, hope that your children might, too. So, as well as initiating the development proposal, it will always be seen as your legacy to the parish.

While we understand that there is pressure to move forwards to a planning application, with that process measured in months, we are aware of our responsibility to consider the implications of your proposals for generations to come, as we understand you will be, too.

We appreciate that the points we have been making consistently since our first meeting with your proposed developers and architects in December have been acknowledged verbally. We note, however, that the plans we were shown last week remain, in essence, the same as those we saw on that occasion. Certainly we now have more detail, but the so-called evolution in the design is characterised rather more by stasis than adaptation. Indeed, the latest string of e-mails regarding the proposal we have so far made for safe pedestrian access suggests that you and your team of advisers continue to engage in confrontation rather than consultation. We will, therefore, inevitably be repetitive in this response, although trying to pick up some of the arguments presented at the meeting.

## 1. Accessibility and Safety.

We are surprised that we apparently have to continue to argue for safe and practical access, especially for pedestrians, to the site. We would assume that you, along with your architects and developers, would join with us in searching for the best possible access to the site, especially given the dangers of the main road through the village. As initiators and developers of the site we believe you all have a duty of care to consider in this matter, as we certainly feel as parishioners and councillors.

Clearly we make this assumption incorrectly given the number and range of arguments you all presented last week. We were momentarily gratified to see that Mathew Gardner had made some alternative proposals but, unfortunately, these were swiftly followed by the feeble argument that “someone else has got away with it”, compounded in this case by getting his facts wrong.

We intend, in this response, to pick up on just two of the arguments you presented at the meeting and in this subsequent mail trail. We will continue to argue for safe access as a key priority.

### 1.1. Financial viability.

One of the critical arguments you presented is that developing, for instance, pedestrian access as suggested during our site visit by Tony Head would cost a sufficient sum to jeopardise the financial viability of the development. Indeed, the formulation of estimates presented as a ‘viability assessment’ has led to Debbie Holloway’s conclusion that “around 50% affordable housing on this departure site would be compromised if this footpath was to be included”, clearly the outcome you have been seeking.

We understand that financial considerations are significant, but cannot quite reconcile the notion that safe access could be traded off or compromised by a need to maintain margins both for landowners and developers. While the price negotiated and agreed for the land was described as a fixed cost as the basis for these viability calculations, it is clearly a large and variable cost at this stage in the process. The commercial value of the land is entirely predicated on accessibility. Similarly, the estimates you will have used for the market price of the open market properties is just that, an estimate. This is an extremely

attractive location for much sought after properties in a market enjoying buoyant pricing, so your estimates are certainly within a range of variation that could absorb the costs you have so far identified, themselves estimates at this stage.

We regret that you now seem to be much more exercised by trying to avoid any changes to your long standing plans than listen to and respond constructively to our concerns and positive suggestions.

## 1.2. Vehicle versus pedestrian access.

At a later stage in your arguments about accessibility, you suggested that as a consequence of the gradients involved in the site development, most residents would resort to using their cars.

You will appreciate that one of the most cited concerns of parishioners about this site is the inevitable increase in traffic through the village. On that basis this is hardly a helpful argument. We also note that the National framework for planning stresses the selection of sites based on grounds of sustainability, specifically concerned with pedestrian access and availability of public transport.

Surely we must all agree that practical and safe access for pedestrians, including those with disabilities and parents with children, has to be a major concern in these relatively enlightened times.

## 2. Provision of affordable housing for local people.

We were pleased to hear that the proposed developers of the site are also working to targets for the provision of affordable homes. It seems that there is a consensus amongst us that the provision of eight affordable homes is the minimum basis for the site proposal and development. We have consistently maintained that this number is critical rather than any specific percentage compared with open market houses. In relation to the financial viability issues mentioned above, we continue to recognise the possibility that you might want to increase the number of open market houses rather than countenance any decrease in the scale of affordable housing.

### 2.1. Relation of affordable to open market houses.

As well as emphasising the base number of affordable homes, we have argued for a site design which deliberately limits, through location and design, the distinctions between affordable and open market houses in order to promote a sense of community within the development. While it is difficult to judge, at this stage, the degree of distinction based on design and build, we note that you continue to propose that the affordable homes are located together at the north end of the site.

While we appreciate that the housing association would not want to manage a mix of affordable and open market houses in a terrace or semi-detached arrangement, we see no reasonable grounds on which the blocks of affordable homes could not be further separated and distributed, for instance with one block taking up the south west corner of the site.

Such a location would also enhance, in our view, the possibility of a lower access to the footpath. This could be a considerable advantage in terms of safe access to the village school for children who are perhaps most likely to occupy the affordable units.

### 3. Coherence of the site within village boundaries.

We were pleased to see that considerable care is being shown in proposing clear boundaries around the site defined by Devon banks and hedges. On the other hand we were disappointed to note that the visual impact work undertaken so far has not included views of the site from the footpath which crosses Horton land to the south of the village.

At the December meeting we demonstrated, through both ground based and aerial photographs, the distinctive features of the existing village boundaries and the way in which the village is developed as a series of rectangles on an east west axis.

We continue to question the decision you have made to expand the proposed site across open fields to the east rather than further down the slope towards the clearly existing boundary line to the south.

We understand from your arguments presented last week that:

- a. you do not want to engage in large scale alterations to the site at this stage
- b. the Hortons wish to maintain this southern portion as agricultural land over which their private drive can run at angles suited to large farm vehicles
- c. that the slope of the land increases towards the south, potentially necessitating more groundworks.

We continue to believe that there is a considerable issue in your present choice of site, that it will lead to an incoherent mix of boundaries as seen from the south and across the south eastern field system.

We would like you to re-consider this decision both on grounds of planning coherence and also to create the possibility of fulfilling the parish request for a direct contribution to village amenities. For instance, we could imagine that this area could be developed for allotments or a communal orchard, accessed from the existing lane.

Alternatively, if you are still looking for financial gains to offset the costs of safe access, we could envisage further building for the open market on this land. This could, again, be accessed from the lane for, perhaps, one or two units.

### 4. Design and build for sustainability

We note that so far you have made no reference to this request for a site which sets standards for design and build which would justify the sacrifice of such a wonderful south facing slope of land within sight of the estuary in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As our interest continues to be for affordable housing for local people, we include a high regard for sustainable design and build to reduce the total cost of ownership as much as possible.

## Summary.

We look forward to any further response to these points which are, now, well rehearsed. As you know, we will be presenting your current proposals, recognising that they are still in a state of development, at the parish council meeting scheduled for 3rd April.

We obviously hope that you might be persuaded to actually adapt your proposals in light of the comments we continue to make rather than argue against them. This is to invoke the spirit of consultation suggested by the pre-application process rather than maintain a process of confrontation and defensiveness.

We continue to be open to constructive consultation.

Sally, Tony, Andrew and Robin.

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