

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Town Council held in the Community Hall, Bruton on Thursday 4th April 2019 at 7.30pm

Present: Councillors Karen Baker, Crawford, Hood, Jones, Pickering and Robinson.
In the Chair: Councillor Jones
In attendance: The Assistant Clerk
 Two representatives from Acorn Property Group
 51 members of the public

18/200 Declarations of Interests
 No Councillors had personal interests to declare.

18/201 Apologies for Absence
 Apologies were received from Councillors Anderton, Abi Baker, Brownlow, Haselgrove, Marsh and Sida.

18/202 Submitted Plans
 The Council considered and made observations on the following received planning application:

<u>Application No.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
19/03479/FUL	Acorn Property Group	Land OS9609 Brewham Road Bruton Somerset	Recommend Refusal (see below)

Proposal: Outline planning permission is sought for the development of up to 60 residential dwellings (Use Class C3), together with associated highways and drainage infrastructure, public open space and landscaping. Details of access are submitted for approval with all other matters (Layout, Scale, Appearance and Landscaping) reserved for later approval

Outcome: The Chairman explained that the current application only related to access arrangements and more general observations about the proposed development, and that other details of the proposals were reserved for future decision. The role of the Town Council is to make a recommendation to South Somerset District Council which is the Planning Authority.

Councillor Hood reported that the Transport Committee had discussed the proposed access arrangements at a meeting on 12th March and had recommended that the Town Council oppose the proposed development unless proper provision were made for the safety of pedestrians and highway safety more generally. [**Clerk's note:** *See Appendix below for the relevant passages taken from the draft minutes of the Transport Committee meeting*]. The Council's policy as set out in the Town Plan is to make Bruton a place where it feels easy and safe to walk around but because the proposed pedestrian access arrangements are unsafe residents are more likely to use their cars.

Before the Council discussed the proposals an opportunity was given to members of the public and Acorn representatives to comment. Members of the public amplified some of the points they had previously made at the meeting of the Transport Committee on 12th March including the following:

- Bruton has experienced a huge traffic increase in recent years and this has led to ever greater congestion and parking problems. The increased risk to pedestrians is a particular concern, especially with so many children walking through the town on their way to and from school, and further development would simply exacerbate these problems.
- Vehicles regularly travel along Brewham Road at speeds substantially higher than the 30mph speed limit and pose a real risk to pedestrians who have to walk in the roadway. That risk will increase in direct proportion to the rise in pedestrian and vehicular traffic resulting from the proposed development.
- Bends on Brewham Road mean that pedestrians emerging from Darkey Lane can only see and be seen by motor vehicles and their drivers at the last moment, so any increase in pedestrian and vehicular traffic resulting from the proposed development will further compromise road safety.
- Children emerging from Darkey Lane and Brue Close on their way to school are particularly at risk, especially if they are behaving as children will.
- Brewham Road's narrow carriageway already has difficulty accommodating large commercial and agricultural vehicles travelling to and from local farms and businesses. The proposed build-out or chicane near Darkey Lane will not help the situation.
- Large commercial and agricultural vehicles travelling between Brewham Road and Cuckoo Hill on the A359 have particular difficulty negotiating the junction. They are forced to straddle both lanes, they sometimes mount the roadside bank and on occasion they collide with street furniture. This represents a hazard to all who use Brewham Road but most especially pedestrians who have to share the carriageway with vehicles. The proposed development would greatly increase the number of pedestrians using this route and would therefore exacerbate the existing dangers.
- The proposed pseudo-pavement [where a continuous line is painted along the side of the carriageway a few feet out from the edge, to represent the kerb of a virtual footway] would further narrow the section of the roadway allocated to motor traffic and increase the danger to pedestrians by giving them an illusion of safety.
- The sweep analysis prepared for Acorn by Hydrock Engineering is of limited use because it traces the movement of a refuse truck which is both shorter and narrower than many of the commercial and agricultural vehicles and trailers which actually use Brewham Road.
- Some of Hydrock's data is apparently just generic or else carefully selected to support Acorn's proposals. It seems odd to use highways data from urban and industrial sites in the Midlands, the North, Scotland and Ireland in support of a proposed development in rural Somerset.

- The data used in support of the proposed development does not take into account the impact on the town of Acorn's new Cubis development of 50+ dwellings on Cuckoo Hill.
- Continued development is putting a strain on Bruton's infrastructure, especially its water supply, sewage system, drains and roads.
- The Surgery is oversubscribed which suggests that the town has reached its natural limit.
- If the proposed development were to be approved, recent housing development in Bruton would exceed by c.30% its allocation in the current South Somerset Local Plan.
- The style and density of the proposed development - which comprises mainly very small houses with very small gardens - is not in keeping with existing housing developments on the outskirts of Bruton.
- Acorn's commitment to build 12 'affordable' houses is commendable but developers have been known to renege on such commitments on the grounds that they have become unviable and this inevitably encourages scepticism.
- The existing levels of vehicle emissions represent a risk to health which would be aggravated by the increase in traffic associated with the development.
- The protection of green spaces is given a high priority in Bruton's Town Plan which is based on extensive community consultation.
- The development site is currently a haven for wildlife, including some rare and protected species of bats and hazel dormice. Their welfare would be severely compromised by the removal of hedges and the increase in artificial lighting associated with the development.

In response to these observations Acorn Property Group representatives made a number of points:

- Acorn takes pride in communicating with local communities and listening to what they have to say and it will do all it can to address the concerns raised.
- Development applications which focus attention on pre-existing highways problems - in this case the risks and dangers faced by pedestrians on Brewham Road - often galvanize Highways Authorities into taking remedial action.
- The small size of houses and gardens in the proposed development reflects the local demand for housing within the reach of local families. There has been very little such development in Bruton in recent years and modestly-priced housing is in very short supply in the town.
- Because of the shortfall in the South Somerset five-year housing land supply the Local Plan policies are not applicable and national planning policies apply instead.

In the Council debate which followed Councillors reflected on these contributions from members of the public and Acorn representatives and added further observations including the following:

- If the width of the Brewham Road carriageway were in effect reduced by the installation of a pseudo-pavement the road would not comply with current highway standards, and according to a local haulier an HGV would not be able to travel along it safely.
- The proposed surfacing of the northern section of Darkey Lane could have the unintended consequence of encouraging vehicles onto it, thereby endangering pedestrians.
- Although the development would be within easy walking distance of the town centre it would not be within **safe** walking distance and most residents would still use their cars. The town centre could not support the extra traffic and parking.
- This problem would become more serious over time as the young children of first-time buyers get older and start attending one of the schools on Cole Road; the proposed development might prove to be less sustainable in practice than it appears to be in theory.
- Although responsibility for the shortfall in the five-year land supply in South Somerset lies with urban rather than rural centres, outright opposition to all development in Bruton

would be impolitic. Positive engagement with developers and the Planning Authority is more likely to secure better outcomes for the town.

- The Town Council's submission to the Local Plan Review identified the proposed site as suitable for a **low**-density housing development, consistent with its semi-rural location, but the housing density in the proposal - 38 dwellings/ha. - is substantially **higher** than the national average (31/ha.) let alone the South Somerset average (28/ha).
- Acorn's commitment that at least a third of the dwellings would be modestly priced is most welcome but we would want a guarantee that this proportion would not subsequently be revised downwards on the grounds that it was no longer viable.
- In terms of sustainability it is likely that local businesses would welcome additional customers and the Primary School is currently undersubscribed.

Following the Council debate three resolutions were moved:

- 1. It was proposed and seconded that the Council accept the recommendation of its Transport Committee and oppose the proposed development unless proper provision is made for the safety of pedestrians and for highway safety more generally.**

Resolved 6-0-0
[For-against-abstain]

- 2. It was proposed and seconded that the Council recommend refusal as the potential scale and density of the proposed development would have a detrimental impact on the character, biodiversity and appearance of the area.**

Resolved 3-0-3

- 3. It was proposed and seconded that the Council be afforded an early opportunity to consider details of the proposed Layout, Scale, Appearance and Landscaping which have been reserved for later approval.**

Resolved 6-0-0

Patrick Pender-Cudlip
Assistant Clerk

Appendix

Extract from the draft minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee on 12th March, 2019

At the start of the meeting members of the public explained their concerns about the impact of the proposed Brewham Road housing development on highway safety, especially for pedestrians:

- *Brewham Road is dangerous for pedestrians because 'blind' bends restrict visibility. The proposed development would substantially increase traffic flows and therefore increase the dangers faced by pedestrians.*

- *Human nature being what it is, many people walking into town from the north-eastern parts of the proposed development are likely to walk straight out onto Brewham Road rather than taking the longer albeit safer route via Darkey Lane, and therefore even more pedestrians will be put at risk.*
- *The proposed pseudo footway (marked by a white line in the road) along Brewham Road between Darkey Lane and Quaperlake Street is dangerous because it restricts the carriageway and gives pedestrians an illusion of safety.*
- *The proposed ‘traffic-calming’ build-out on the south side of Brewham Road near Darkey Lane would force west-bound traffic (and especially agricultural and heavy goods vehicles) into the path of vehicles emerging from Brue Avenue/Close and turning left...*

... Members [of the Committee] echoed and amplified the concerns expressed by members of the public (see above) and made some further observations:

- *Pedestrians walking along Brewham Road between Darkey Lane and Quaperlake Street are at risk and a pseudo footway would not make them safe.*
- *In any case Highways does not consider pseudo footways safe as it explained when it was asked to consider installing one on Shute Lane.*
- *The ‘blind’ bend on Brewham Road near Darkey Lane is dangerous enough as it is and the proposed build-out would not make it safer, as it would throw west-bound traffic to the opposite side of the road at the blind junction with Brue Avenue.*
- *The proposals do not sit well with the Town Plan and Town Council policy which aim to make Bruton a place where it feels easy and safe to walk around.*

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee recommend the Council to oppose the Proposed development unless proper provision is made for the safety of pedestrians and highway safety more generally.

Resolved 5-0-0