

ALBURY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Albury Parish Council held on Monday 13th February 2008, at 7.30pm, in the Memorial Library

This meeting was held in closed session, due to the sensitive nature of the business to be discussed

Present: Cllr N Wenman (in the chair), Cllrs J Brockwell, J Chapman P Gellatly,
R Hogben, G Robinson, P von Radowitz
Michael Baxter, Albury Estate
The Clerk, Mrs J Cadman

1. Apologies for absence

Were received from Cllr Nicholson

2. Declarations of interest

Cllr Chapman declared a personal interest, as Postmistress of the Village Post Office and Shop.
All Councillors declared a personal interest, as residents of the Parish.

3. Opening Statement by the Chairman

Cllr Wenman advised Members that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss a number of ideas that had been put forward in relation to the development of the village, and to decide whether these ideas should be included in the Site Allocation programme.

The 'Grand Design' document devised by Cllr Hogben was a result of informal discussions between Cllrs Wenman, Hogben and Nicholson and Michael Baxter. A number of people had input to this. This was the basis of the idea that would be put to the Trustees and the purpose was to encourage people to come into the village and also to improve facilities – move village forward. Albury Estates indicated that they were happy to enter into discussions with PC on this.

Cllr Hogben presented the options that had been discussed:

- There is little opportunity for development can happen within settlement boundary. Albury House, a listed building, had been identified as a possible site for residential development in the Site Allocation programme.
- The post office had been under threat, which had been a driver for discussions with Albury Estates. If post office closed the current shop would not be commercially viable. I. Whilst this risk has gone for the time being, it could easily return in the future.
- The Post office is at most dangerous part of the street, and has no possibility of expanding. If brought along to village hall area, there would be parking and easy access. For the longer term, it was important to have a shop that could stand on its own merits. Cllr Chapman questioned the commercial viability of a shop regardless of where it was sited.
- The village hall car park is often full with local residents who own more than one car. Additional car parking could be created on the north side of the stream with a river side walk from the village hall to the back of the pub.
- The field in front of the church would make an excellent village green. There is a possibility of purchasing that from Albury Estates in exchange for the Recreation Ground, which is within settlement boundary and could be developed as commercial housing.
- The major benefit of the PC owning the field in front of church as village green, is that PC would have control over its use in the future. Otherwise it might become a housing development site in the future. There was an issue of access which would have to be resolved).
- Vicarage: PCC willing to sell house in Farley Green and use proceeds to develop new vicarage in Albury. The Estate had indicated that were willing to give a piece of land for

this. A possible area to east of Church.

- An area to the east of the church and just outside the settlement boundary had been identified as a possible site for affordable housing. There are also two '60's houses in the same area, which could be developed.

Clearly it would not be possible to come to firm conclusions at this meeting. The objective of this meeting was to get a consensus on a plan in principle and to agree on an action plan.

In order to be able to discuss these plans with, and seek the views of, Michael Baxter of Albury Estate, the meeting adjourned.

4. Open Forum

Michael Baxter:

Post Office: The village is changing and has changed significantly, and there is increasing pressure on the services that are available. The school was lost and we would not get it back, if the shop and post office went we would not get them back either. The Estate had purchased the shop and leased it to Mrs Chapman because she had wanted to see the shop retained, as it is an important part of the village and also a lot of the Estate's commercial tenants use the post office. If the post office was no longer there, it was more likely that the buildings would be more difficult to let.

Affordable Housing: there was a constant stream of people into the Estate office looking for a house to rent. If any houses in the parish came onto the market, the price would be in excess of £300,000, which made them inaccessible to people on ordinary wages. Most of the council houses on Westonfields were privately owned. The issue is: how to attract young people into the village.

There is general pressure on the south east of England to provide more housing. At some point the Government would insist on more housing, which would be pushed to the boroughs. Planning policy had stopped the organic growth of villages and they have started to atrophy. People who came into the village now, worked outside in order to earn enough money to afford to live here. Albury was in danger of becoming a dormitory village.

MB's view is that the current siting of the post office caused constraints on its viability, because of the difficulty of access over the busy road and the fact that there was no room to expand. Another factor to take into account was that the Church wanted a vicarage in the centre of Albury. With a growing congregation, the PCC want to extend the church to make a room for PCC meetings. If they were able to sell the house on Farley Green, there might be enough money left from the purchase of another to extend the church.

The field opposite the church would, sometime in the next 100 years, go for affordable housing. The alternatives were to wait for that to happen, or to take the initiative and do something together that would benefit everyone. If the Estate were to build a new and bigger shop, they would need to find finance. This could be raised by using the land currently taken by the recreation ground, as it is within the settlement boundary, to build a small estate of commercial housing. The biggest problem with that site would be access. The field opposite the church would then become the recreation ground.

RH suggested access to the new recreation ground through Old Bakery Court, and a pedestrian crossing by the bus stop, which create instant traffic calming.

Comments from councillors:

Cllr Robinson: reminded the meeting that on a number of occasions in the past he had brought up the suggestion of using the field as the village green. He was not entirely sure about the idea of using the recreation ground as a swap. Overall agreed worth pursuing.

Cllr von Radowitz: Agreed worth pursuing and recalled that the village green idea had been discussed a number of times.

MB: Trustees could not give Council the village green free of charge, but it might be part of an integral package. He had not discussed this in any detail and no commercial calculations had yet been done. It might be that it was not possible to put enough houses on the recreation ground to fund the project.

Cllr Chapman: Agreed necessary to move forward if possible.

Cllr Gellatly: Very good idea. Need to be aware that the whole project will only work if it is possible to use the recreation ground as suggested.

Cllr Brockwell: Supported most of the scheme whole-heartedly. Reservation was putting the shop by the village hall. The benefit of the current shop was that it was at the road side – a new shop off road would have to be a magnet in order to get people to stop.

Agreed worth pursuing.

Need to consider:

1. Overall commerciality
2. Shop: location. Concern also about a bigger shop, although accepted that current shop not viable without post office.
3. Affordable housing: a needs analysis would need to be conducted.
4. Recreation ground: belongs to Council, can only be used as recreation ground, and for no other purpose, without permission of Estate.
5. The possibility of a potential developer of Albury House being involved.
6. The viability of the area around the hall as a retail area
7. Need to be sensitive to people who would not be happy with these proposals
8. Need to decide to what extent and when the public should be consulted.

MB: This is a 5 year plan at least. Some of the land in question is leased by other people, and it would take time to sort this out. As far as the car park was concerned, it was used by a good many people nowadays to park off the road, and the Estate may consider some sort of licensing process in order to raise some money for its upkeep.

Agreed that land to the east of church would be an unpopular choice for affordable housing with some local residents.

Recreation Ground: If PC sold it, with Estate's permission, then they would have the money to purchase the field. Or Estate could take it back, in exchange for the field. MB did not know, in this case, whether field would be gifted, as recreation ground was, or on a long lease, but appreciated that Council would want it protected.

Access from Albury House was a possibility. MB suggested that an alternative was to finish the road that GBC started in the 1940's, and have a one-way system with access from Church Lane to the side of Weston Lea. All agreed this was a good idea.

Building the other side of the river: not very viable, as problems with the flood plain, and crossing

the river.

GBC Site allocations: in very early stage. The only one identified in Albury is Albury House. Now was the opportunity to put new sites on the list. If potential new sites were on the list, it would be of great help to the process. However, this would bring the potential plan to public knowledge. It was generally agreed that sites should not be added to the list until a plan could be presented to the public.

Trustees: it was agreed that, to move forward, feedback was needed from the Trustees.

Shop: MB suggested that this might be sited at the top of the car park, removing the wall near the road and placing the shop there, close to the Library. This would attract passing trade as well as offering off street parking.

Agreed that nothing should go into public forum until have some feedback from Trustees. MB confirmed this would be 3 to 4 weeks.

Agreed to pursue, need to firm up outline plans, with a number of principles attached to them. Discuss with GBC, so they are aware of what is being considered. Also initial discussion about needs appraisal, so can understand process.

5. Summing Up

The Parish Council meeting was re-convened.

- *Agreed* that the Council should pursue the ideas outlined in the Grand Designs document with the objective of facilitating a vibrant community and avoiding Albury becoming a dormitory parish.
- *Agreed:* this discussion must remain confidential.
- *Recognised:* there will be many issues and it will take long time to finalise the plans

Stage 1:

1. Need feed-back from Albury Estate, to get agreement in principle.
2. Meet with GBC to get their feedback on this plan.
3. Meet with Surrey Community Action to discuss the production of a needs analysis for affordable housing.

A further meeting would be held once these actions had been completed. Agreed to invite GBC and Surrey Community Action to that meeting.

Stage 2:

Produce a detailed plan for possible consultation with the public once agreed with Albury Estate.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9pm.