

West Buckland Parish Council

Notes for the Public Meeting held on 11th October 2023 at West Buckland Village Hall at 8pm with Collier Planning regarding the consultation for a proposed development on land at Silver Street, West Buckland.

Present. Cllr's C Silverlight (Chair), Ms S Drury, S Bellamy and J Nutt, Simon Collier (Collier Planning) and 41 members of the public.

In attendance: Mrs J Larcombe, Clerk to the Parish Council.

Proposal for the development: a residential development of up to twelve dwellings is proposed on land to the west of Silver Street, West Buckland. A consultation letter has been distributed to residents in the village. It would include six bungalows on the southern-most part of the site where it adjoins the existing bungalows on Orchard Gardens. Three of the twelve dwellings would be provided as affordable housing.

The planning application will be made in outline with all matters reserved, except for access which is proposed in detail at this stage. This means that the application will seek to establish the principle of developing the site for up to twelve dwellings and the proposed means of access. Other details such as appearance, landscaping, layout and scale will be determined at the reserved matters stage, following any grant of outline planning permission.

Site Location: the site comprises the southern section of the field immediately to the north of Orchard Gardens and is bounded by Silver Street to the east, existing residential development to the south and agricultural land to the north.



Cllr Charles Silverlight introduced himself as Chair of West Buckland Parish Council and then introduced Simon Collier of Collier Planning, the agent for the proposed development. He then introduced Cllr's Sarah Drury, Simon Bellamy and John Nutt and Jill Larcombe, Clerk to the Parish Council. Cllr Adrian Paul had sent his apologies.

Cllr Silverlight explained the meeting would be held under the auspices of a Parish Council meeting.

The meeting had been called following discussions at the Parish Council meeting on 26th September 2023 about the consultation for a proposed development on land at Silver Street, West Buckland. The purpose of this meeting was to give parishioners the opportunity to ask the agent, Simon Collier (Collier Planning), questions about the proposed development during the pre-application consultation stage.

Simon Collier explained he was a planning consultant working on behalf of the landowner to look at whether there are good planning reasons for development on this site. At this stage it is just a proposal. If it gets to the planning application stage Somerset Council (SC) will consider the planning application and anything relevant. The proposal is for up to twelve dwellings and the plan is to submit an outline application with an indicative plan for the layout. An outline application will establish whether an application for up to twelve dwellings has merit. The layout is indicative and could change. A detailed application would follow if the outline application were approved and there would be a consultation on the full details.

The reason for writing to people in the village was so they would hear about the proposal from the landowner and that the landowner could get the views of local people and take that into consideration. In the local plan the field is outside the settlement boundary but this plan is old (ten years old) and national guidance is that they should be reviewed every five years. Since the plan was produced national policy has changed and the local plan does not take account of this. One of the ways that national policy has changed is that it does seek to permit more housing in villages. One important consideration is housing need. There is a national housing crisis which has built up over years with a cumulative impact on young people not being able to get on the housing ladder. Phosphate levels have had an impact on the amount of housing that has been able to be built. Housing supply and need has worsened.

This application would have its own package for phosphate mitigation. The landowner owns land to the north which can provide mitigation so that the dwellings can be built and housing supply can be delivered. The site can contribute towards meeting the needs of the community. A scheme on this site could have housing merits. It would deliver housing and some affordable housing. It is known that there is a housing need in West Buckland. The development will have some bungalows which will free up some larger houses, which meets planning guidance. 10% biodiversity net gain can be achieved.

All of these points make the development worthy of being considered.

Cllr Silverlight invited questions.

1. ***Referring to the point about affordable housing Mr Collier was asked what is affordable?*** The last Housing Needs Survey (HNS) was carried out in West Buckland in 2018. SC hold a housing register which the people who meet the requirements for affordable housing are on. The scheme could deliver three to four affordable homes which couldn't be purchased on the open market. The affordable homes would be available to rent through a housing association to people who have demonstrated they can meet the criteria to need affordable housing. There can be also be shared ownership where a share of the dwelling can be purchased and the rest rented through a housing association.

2. **Mr Collier was asked about the issues with the local plan being ten years old.** He explained that Somerset Council will have to produce a new plan sometime in the future. The current plan was produced by Taunton Deane Borough Council who then became part of Somerset West and Taunton Council. They are now part of the new Somerset Council. There has been a lot of change hence the delay.
3. **While being aware of the issue with the Local Plan (Core Strategy 2011 – 2028) it is still current and not out of date.**
4. **This proposal could lead to more development on land to the north down to the A38. How much is needed for phosphate mitigation?** This proposal is just for up to twelve houses. Mr Collier said he had no knowledge of anything beyond that. twelve is in scale with the size of the village. If the proposal was for a larger number, it probably wouldn't get permission. If the proposal was only for two dwellings it wouldn't have affordable housing. There are no plans to go beyond the site. The remainder of the field will be for landscaping and biodiversity etc. The phosphate mitigation proposal is to be followed for five years and the field will not be able to be used for agriculture. After five years if no other mitigation is identified trees will be planted. **Consent doesn't lock planning status?** No, trees will be planted.
5. **A member of the public said they would like to see a proposal to use some of the other land to widen Silver Street and create another entrance for the development.** Mr Collier explained the plans for the entrance had been formulated by traffic consultants and this plan will be scrutinised by SC Highways. The proposal is to widen Silver Street to 4.8 metres at the point of access. This would be wide enough for a car and lorry to pass. The entrance would be a passing bay itself. It would be quite a significant amount of work to widen the lane and doing that would change the landscape character of the road and a lot of hedgerow would be lost.
6. **The planning application hasn't been submitted. If outline permission is granted there could be a stipulation on the number of bungalows. There was concern that the village primary school is already full and if houses are built there would be more children.**
7. **Referring to the local plan Mr Collier was asked what made him think they had immunity to it.** Traffic consultants have worked on the access and on the amount of traffic that would be generated. It is surprising how little traffic would be generated. The peak time would be between 8 am to 9am and 5pm to 6pm with 1 traffic movement every 5 minutes. 4 of these would be to the A38 and 1 through the village to the M5.
8. **A member of the public commented that there isn't good access through the village now.** Mr Collier said there would not be a noticeable difference. **The member of the public disagreed and said a large bungalow would have a number of people wanting to travel.**
9. **It would be good if a montage could show the effect of landscaping. It is disappointing that the outline application doesn't show what the proposal would deliver to the village. There are road safety concerns because people will have to step out into the highway when they leave the development.** Mr Collier explained that a landscape consultant had looked at the visual impact and the impact on the Church. The development would be lower than existing houses. He agreed to take the point away about the montage.

10. ***Why is it an outline application?*** This is simply a result of the impact of the system. There is a considerable cost to submit a full application and it might be refused. An indicative plan gives an idea of how it would be laid out. The dwellings could be smaller. This plan is the worst case scenario. A footway could be provided for a certain length. The development would not be uncharacteristic of the local village.
11. ***A member of the public referred to phosphates and said the way he understood the problem on the Somerset Levels is that the sewerage system cannot cope and needs updating. The adjoining site to the proposed development is uphill from the site and he cannot see how this would work. Sewage is going down a pipe. Two acres is minimal for mitigation. He asked about planting trees to offset phosphate and was told the tree roots have an impact. The member of the public said if sewage was in a pipe, then planting trees above would have no impact.*** Mr Collier explained he was not an expert on phosphate mitigation and didn't want to comment. Housing generates more wastewater. The main problem for phosphates is farming. ***This was contested saying 25,000 houses have been built in the recent past generating sewage.*** Mr Collier said SC are working on their parameters. He is not an expert on phosphates, the parameters are set and have to be achieved. Cllr Silverlight said the point could be made if an application is submitted.
12. ***A member of the public said they could understand that there is a housing crisis but they don't understand why this development is needed when there is the development at Rumwell and other large sites in Wellington. They were concerned about road safety as the development includes old people's bungalows and children from the houses will be walking to the bus and Silver Street is often a bottleneck.***
13. ***A member of the public referred to the widening of a section of Silver Street for the entrance and pointed out that just past the entrance the road will still be a single track road and there is no where for pedestrians to get out of the way of traffic when walking to the A38 for the bus.***
14. ***Why do houses have to be built on this site when there are sites in Wellington. When there is an accident on the M5 it creates a bottleneck in the village. There is a lot of development around Taunton and Wellington. There are no facilities in West Buckland.*** Mr Collier explained that national policy is changing. There is lots of development planned in Wellington and Taunton but a lot is being held up by the phosphates issue and a lot less has been built than anticipated. National policy is always a material consideration. The local plan is old and it planned for large urban extensions to be built and these take a long time to come to fruition. National planning policy is now for a range of site sizes and encourages sites in villages where development can sustain things such as schools and businesses.
15. ***25,000 houses have been built between Taunton and Bridgwater. Developers do not need to build on sites in small villages. The school is overrun already, not by local children but by children driven into the village from all around and this is creating a considerable traffic problem. There is a lack of facilities such as dentists and doctors. Mr Collier was thanked for coming to the meeting, it had been helpful.***

- 16. If this development was built it would need 100 such sites instead of large sites and that is not viable. This is a commercial possibility for the landowner who has inherited the land, it is not about building houses to meet a need in West Buckland. What about the third field they own? After five years the second field could be built on and the third field used for mitigation.** Mr Collier referred to planning policy and suitability of approach. Everyone has their own views, he was just explaining the system. Proposals have to work within and what the proposals will be considered against. He feels the application will have merits to be considered and has no detail beyond this proposal. The third field is remote from the village and he cannot see the benefit of developing it. A proposal on the third would not be comparable as it would be remote from the village. **Residents were encouraged to make their views known.**
17. **Concern was raised about the wildlife on the site.** An ecological survey has to be produced which needs to focus on protected species. Any scheme can then be devised around the report. Not all of the wildlife using the field is a protected species. There is 10% biodiversity net gain in the plans
18. **Will there be measures in the plans to mitigate flooding?** Mr Collier said the topography is that it would drain away from the village. **He was told the field floods.** Mr Collier explained there would be an attenuation basin for storm water to drain into before being slowly released. **This will need to be looked at and verified as it floods at Willowbrook Nurseries and the Blackbird.**
19. **It was questioned whether the owner already had planning permission for buildings in Silver Street.** This is a different scenario as permission has been granted to convert existing buildings.
20. **The need for the road to be widened could be understood because Silver Street is used as a rat run but if the road is widened it will encourage more traffic. Do we need more houses when properties are not selling in the village?** Mr Collier explained they were only proposing widening the road around the access and he doesn't feel that will make it more of a rat run. There is lots of evidence to support housing need. Houses not selling is not a barometer for housing need.
21. **It would be easier for lorries to pass if there was extra passing space and it would allow a better through flow. Lorries are not obeying the 7.5 tonne limit on Sawyers Hill and motorists do not obey the speed limits. Would there be a benefit to the village if affordable houses are provided for local people and bungalows are built for older people to downsize into and would it sustain local services? It was felt that it would not bring anything to benefit the existing village.**
22. **Will the affordable housing be for local people to rent?** There are people in the village who it would be offered too first.
23. **Referring to topography and wildlife someone pointed out that wildlife was very active in the field on which development was planned and wildlife habitat would be destroyed. Mr Collier was asked whether the public would have sight of the assessments that would be produced.** It was explained that the assessments will accompany the planning application if it is submitted and all the documents, including the ecological survey, will be on the SC website planning portal. Cllr Silverlight encouraged making that point to SC if an application is submitted.

- 24. People in the village are already renting and they won't get any benefit. People with local connection might not be able to live there.** Local connection benefits were explained.
- 25. There are a lot of ifs, what are the trigger points and time scale?** Mr Collier said nothing had been decided and it isn't his decision, he is just the planning consultant. He thinks an outline application will be submitted and it could be soon as there is no reason to delay.
- 26. How can covering 50% of the site in concrete be compensated by biodiversity?** Ecologists assess what would that land provide and what would be lost to potential biodiversity. Loss of hedgerow will be replaced and more will be replaced than lost. Biodiversity will be replaced in other parts of the field by a more biodiverse effect ie wildflower meadows and the attenuation basin being used for something. **It was pointed out that a new hedge will not provide biodiversity for a long time. This is the way that development works, it is all about opinions so why bother about objecting?**
- 27. It is all about money, not about biodiversity. Has the land already been sold for development?** It has not been sold yet.
- 28. Mr Collier was asked if he had heard anything unexpected or that he wasn't expecting to hear?** He said that he hadn't. He had been unable to answer questions on biodiversity because he is a planning consultant only. Written comments have been received as part of the consultation.
- 29. Out of interest if the application is approved and all the dwellings are built at the same time how long will it take? How long will construction take and will the affordable houses be built last?** Mr Collier said he expected them all to be built together. There would be stipulations around the building of the affordable housing. A larger site would be more impacted by market conditions.
- 30. Usually dwellings built in a village are larger and worth more money.**
- 31. If the local plan is updated would it encourage development to the north of the site?** Mr Collier didn't think so.
- 32.** Someone commented that they had found about the meeting by chance. They felt more people would have attended if it had been better advertised. A mail drop would be helpful. It was explained that a mail drop would be very expensive and people were asked to spread the word. When/if the application is submitted it will be well advertised on the parish website, Facebook pages and notice boards.

Cllr Silverlight said it had been an extremely useful meeting and Mr Collier was in no doubt of the views of the village. He encouraged people to make a comment to SC if an application is submitted. The more comments that are made then the more likely it is that the application will be decided by the planning committee. Mr Collier was thanked for attending.

The meeting closed at 9.35pm