

# MINUTES OF PILTON PARISH COUNCIL

## FULL COUNCIL MEETING

### held at Pilton Village Hall

### Wednesday 30 April 2025

**Present:** Cllrs: K Sumner, N Hall, R Woodhouse, R Noble, C Connock, T Moulder, L Roberts, T Hollings, O Powell.

**In Attendance:** 21 members of the public, Gill Pettitt (Parish Clerk), Toni Hammick & Victoria Saucune, (Property Link Consultants), Cllr Sully (Somerset Council).

#### **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chair announced that there would be no questions at this stage. They would be taken under agenda item 200.

#### **196. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO CONSIDER THE REASONS GIVEN**

All Councillors present.

#### **197. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **198. DISPENSATIONS**

- a. No dispensation requests were received.

#### **199. PRESENTATION**

Toni Hammick, Planning Consultant, gave a presentation on a proposal for development. A pre-meeting was held with the Chair and Clerk to introduce the provider and the proposal at the beginning of March.

Proposal for 100% affordable housing field next to the old police house between the A361 and Top Street on 1.65 acres of land, alongside it runs a privately owned footpath. Demonstration of housing need was investigated by Somerset Council - there are 74 people on the housing waiting list (reduced from 116 on the list) with local connections that are actively seeking housing on the Homefinder register. Note that there are always more people in need of homes than are on the list. It will provide, currently, 27 homes. There are a larger number of 2-bedroom houses than are currently required on the register - this is to allow for growing families to be easily upgraded. The current plan allows for 20 1, 2, and 3-bed properties. Public open space on-site. Existing hedges will be retained and enhanced, and an attenuation / biodiverse pond installed. Access will be from the A361. Highways were satisfied that the proposed access to the site was in a safe location. The Chief Engineer has been contacted to enquire whether the existing 20mph restrictions can be extended to the development area. Houses face out to the A361 in keeping with the vernacular of the village. Those at the back of the design are around courtyards behind. The scheme includes adaptable houses for special needs.

3x1-bed, 4x1-bed flats, 11x2-bed, 6x3-bed and 4x4-bed.

Issues around the Public Right of Way are being investigated and cannot usefully be discussed at this stage.

The scheme meets most of the current, Mendip, Local Plan requirements. The area is designated as countryside, which must be 100% affordable homes.

The Consultants are working with an affordable housing provider. Previous affordable housing has not necessarily been brought to the local parish for discussion at this early stage. Priority can be given to local families. It will be professionally managed, and the green space maintained.

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**200. QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION**

Concerns were raised on various issues with contributions from Councillors and members of the public:

**The process**

The site will be delivered by a private developer for whom Property Link are the planning consultants instructed to take the proposal through the planning process. The affordable housing provider will be the owner of the site, who cannot be named now as the budget has not been approved. It is expected to be quite different from existing housing association managed estates.

The houses affordable housing provider will be the owner of the site. The expected provider has guaranteed to give the Parish Council the ability to participate in the allocation criteria. This is coming to the Parish Council at an unusually early stage for agreement in principle that there is a housing need. This meeting is to gain information from the parish on what is liked or not liked to be open and transparent.

Cllr Sully asked the meeting to be respectful and to listen to the proposal. The Chair and Clerk had met with the Planning Consultant and the expected provider at Cllr Sully's suggestion, to introduce the proposal. This is very unusual early engagement - usually there is no transparency, plans are pushed through with no consultation with the community. She has never seen a 100% affordable development; developers usually try to reduce the number of affordable dwellings. We do not have a 5yr housing supply which means that many developers are pushing through developments 'bullishly'

Question - if council votes against this, it cannot go ahead?

Consultants would hope to satisfy and get the support from the PC.

Councillor - Council may want to follow the process. But this could potentially be pushed through planning. We should consider housing need, but there is another scenario where we have to enter an awkward situation where we are being told it is going to happen.

Question - what do you need tonight from Council tonight?

Consultant - in order for it to go forward, we would need to know what the pluses and minuses are and how likely we are able to meet your expectations and the needs of the site. The housing needs are still being worked on. We had hoped, that with such a demand for affordable housing that the principle of the development would be acceptable. The number of properties, layout, access etc. is ongoing, I was hoping for interim support, acknowledging need.

**Site**

Question - why Pilton?

Consultant is working with 8 different villages at the moment, this is one site of many.

Question - very early in the process, embryonic, yet you are on version 'P' of the plan - that is 15 changes. Commercial real estate proposals of this type - the first proposal would be sufficient for this to be a profitable scheme. The developer was persuaded to enlarge the site.

Consultant - as responses come back from consultants, we have had to fund more and more work, there is an incline meaning retaining walls to consider; facing out meant pavements had to be put in. We have amended to meet criteria - that it is viable and that it meets consultant requirements. The reason for coming to the parish to get as much information as possible.

Question - initial proposal when assessed, needed financial gilding to meet the changes - so the increase in numbers is actually to cover costs.

Consultant - disagree - a lot of things to weigh up. Identify the site is viable. Look at policy, what the site needs - there are 12 or more professional reports with climate change etc. requirements are changing, and the viability is affected with each report. 16 properties would not be viable. Affordable housing is not hugely profitable.

## Housing Need

Question - housing need should have been researched before coming to Council.

Consultant - the need had been researched extensively, the Council will provide a housing needs survey to demonstrate the needs identified on the list. It was brought at this early stage to begin the consultation process with the Parish Council. There remains a lot more work to do at this stage for example the footpath and housing needs, the final drawings. The housing need figures were checked in February and March.

Question - we have quite a lot of affordable housing, perhaps what is needed is starter homes.

Question - Rural site exemption applies. Mendip guidance advises that there has to be a discussion about housing need, which hasn't happened yet - a survey distributed to every household in the parish, then the land is located. Is this jumping stages?

Consultant - the initial research had been done, however the Mendip Guidance is acknowledged by the Local Planning Authority to be out of date. A full survey will be taken later.

Question - The density of the housing in a rural area feels quite dense. There are about 400 homes in Pilton and over 50 affordable homes.

Question - who is included in the housing need survey - does it include only people who are born, bred and live in the area? Council needs to understand the association of those on the list to the parish.

Consultant - has been told that many of these people have been born here and want to move back. However, if the housing need is checked, the number in need is usually greater than those on the list.

Question - Of current affordable housing sites, one was allocated broadly, the other sites are for Pilton people. Members present at the meeting are not convinced by the housing need figure of 74 on the list.

Consultant - Housing Needs Surveys - bring up that many wish to stay in the area they were brought up. We have been told that there are people with local connection that wish to live here. A questionnaire has not been given to them yet, asking their reasons.

Consultant - most villages they have worked with have not chosen to run their own housing needs survey but relied upon the Council to do the survey. If the Council didn't do the survey, the developer has paid for the survey. The Council is not doing it as regularly as they used to, (two yearly). Cost would be £3,000 - £5,000. The Council would work with you on that.

Councillor - People want a community-led survey - Parish Council may be able to do it with Somerset Council support.

Question - it seems back to front. We need affordable housing - but that's not how this situation happened - it has changed 16 times.

Consultant - development sites always have many iterations of the plans. Somerset Council called for sites - the land has to meet certain criteria. Initially the site has to be available that the owner wants to sell. It is a normal process.

## Density

Councillor - Are there enough parking places?

Consultant - There are spaces allocated to houses, plus visitor parking.

Councillor - scale of it is quite large. There is a limit on community-led exception sites should not have more than 5% of the size of the existing settlement. This could mean, if there are 400 properties in the parish, that there should not be more than about 20 properties.

Consultant - this is used as guidance - if housing needs seem to require more housing, it will be balanced against the guidance. But this is the sort of information that the Consultant needs to know from the Parish. The Consultants were encouraged to meet the unmet need -

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if Council feels the density is more important than the unmet need then the plan can be adjusted.

### **Accessibility and danger of main road**

Councillor - there is no pavement for people leaving the site. People will not take the long route - they will walk along the main road. It is a very dangerous place to put housing.

Consultant - the whole village is affected by the A361. This site was available, there were no other sites available.

Councillor - it is for the community to find the sites.

Question - How long have you been working on this? Local connection data is key.

Questioner will agree there is a need if they can be convinced that it is local people on the list. Trying to shoe-horn houses on this site - surprised that highways said there are no issues.

Consultant - I can share the report.

Question - my information is that they are waiting for you to submit plans before they comment fully.

Consultant - We paid for a pre application. Met the officer in summer '24. The report was written at the end of last year - a very full report. When received, the layout was changed on the basis of it. They had given highways the access and visibility displays - highways had no objection in principle to. The final application will be consulted with highways.

Highways did not consider the number of properties in their response to the pre application, they were looking at access, they did advise that there was no pavement. They did not state whether it was standard advice.

Question - In Pilton children can walk safely around the parish. On the A361 these people will be cut off from the rest of the village. Lack of social cohesion because of physical difficulty of moving about. There could be resentment of this development. Of course people want to live in Pilton but that is not the right site.

Consultant - there is a PROW along this site. The A361 does not need to be used to go through this site to access the village. There is a path in front of the houses, a new path can be put and a pavement along the side of the road.

Consultant - The land owner has not been consulted - it is a PROW. We need to investigate the entrance that we believed was in use. We will interrogate the facts. We have removed reference to that access from the plan and hope to resolve amicably.

Consultant - The pavement was originally a footpath by the hedge. The footpath is now within the site on the other side of the hedge.

Question - houses at bottom have licence to use vehicles on the PROW. This will be dangerous for pedestrians. 26-30 children could be using that footpath. Children will come down path on bikes and skateboards, there is nothing to separate them from the vehicles.

Consultant - there would be restrictions on what could be used - it would not be for cyclists.

Cllr Sully - it would be useful for the parish to get a Highways consultant.

Question - it can take ¼ hr to exit on to A361. Will lighting be provided on the footpath?

Consultant - information is changing all the time. We need to hear from local council and parishioners and amend accordingly.

### **Increased flood risk**

Question - what infrastructure will be put in place to mitigate flooding potentially impacting Top Street residents. The pond is wrongly sited.

Consultant - experts that advise thorough flood risk assessments on mitigation measures.

Question - water flow, drainage. Attenuation pond. It is in the wrong place for the fall of the land and the size is a problem. Top Street does not need another source of water that needs outlet. Foul water linking to main drain - how is that going to be managed?

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Consultant - reports from a broad range of specialists will ensure that is managed properly. The consultees will calculate the water problem.

### Infrastructure

Question - It is clear there is unmet need in Somerset, but that does not make this site the right site. The selection of this site was not on the basis of unmet need. The Questioner would not want to live there - there is not enough infrastructure.

Question - West Pennard school is full - there is not enough infrastructure to support the size of the development. There are no spaces on the bus. People must drive their kids to school.

### Conclusion

There are some fundamental things needed before the Council can give approval in principle, such as housing need, the footpath issues, density of housing on the site, drainage.

This will be discussed further at the June Full Council meeting and a budget for a potential Parish Council led Housing Needs Survey, at the May meeting. Members of the Public are welcome to attend and to submit comments to the Clerk prior to the meeting.

It was suggested that the PC seek advice ahead of the discussion around the implication of Somerset County not having a 5year development plan. Without a development plan it means that legislative protections are not available as a defence for developers doing their plans.

- 201. EXPRESSION OF SUPPORT** - Budget for research can be discussed at the May meeting. Members of the public are invited to submit comments to the Parish Council.
- a. **RESOLVED:** To withdraw the tabled motion - "To consider support (or not) for the proposed development of 100% affordable homes and to work with Property Link Consultants Ltd and Homes in Somerset in the implementation of the proposal." Proposed Cllr Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cllr Connock

**NEXT MEETING:** Annual Council Meeting - 7 May 2025