

Dear Steve and Mike,

I promised to reply more comprehensively to your questions(listed below) when I had more time to give you a considered response. As you have said the aim is to reduce the time spent answering fairly straight-forward questions at the special PC meeting on 25th Feb. To that end, if you are happy with this I shall make this response and your questions available at the meeting.

1. Assessment of Housing Need

It is not my intention to carry out another assessment of need at this stage. Colleagues may feel otherwise and if so I shall be guided by the majority view. If we are going to assess the need then we need to be in a position to act on it. If we don't then it simply invites a developer to use the need assessment as a justification to act, potentially on a plot and in a way the community would oppose. Our last assessment is now out-of-date but I have no doubt that there is still a need. Housing in the Parish commands a premium compared to other surrounding parishes, and this attracts developers and makes property out of reach to many. I do not yet understand how our need is amalgamated with the needs of adjacent parishes but will know the answer by the time we meet.

So, in summary a needs survey now would raise expectations, invite others to jump on it and possibly lead to outcomes we would not want. We do not need to do this to set up Option 5 (minutes of 21st Jan meeting)

2. Land for 'Affordable Housing'

We have never initiated discussions with a developer or landowner. However, landowners from time to time attend PC meetings and may ask questions during or after the meeting on an informal basis. As it happens we do receive an E mail periodically from someone we don't know asking how our NP is progressing. We suspect the sender is a developer and our replies have been very obscure and non-committal

3. Operation, budgets etc

Your questions under this section are really a little too detailed for this stage in the process, and are properly the responsibility of a CLT when established.

However I can give you some indication of how it might work based on other examples. I know of three others in detail: Beer and Midhurst in Surrey and one in Dorset. In the case of Beer the driving imperative was to offset second Summer homes which were out of reach to local people. In the case of Midhurst all housing is at an astronomical price and beyond those whose skills the community needs (care workers/ police/ local authority etc). The Dorset example of a CLT runs a pub so perhaps this is not relevant to us.

I do not know how 'our' CLT might work but the Beer model is perhaps the nearest comparison in more ways than simply geographic proximity. In the first phase Beer has seven properties, three of which have been sold at 80% of value and four are rented at 'affordable' rents. The CLT has the option to repurchase the sold properties when owners wish to move on. Both owners and renters were selected from the local 'housing need' list. The scheme was financed by in part a 'public service loan' (not the correct title) from EDDC which is currently being refinanced using the leverage of the land and property value. As it happens the business model works even though the land was purchased. Beer are now embarking on Phase 2.

In this model, although not the Midhurst model there has been no commercial development to offset a portion of the loan requirements. This is the route, not surprisingly, preferred by developers. Even one commercial property sold at market value in an affordable scheme of say 5 houses would make a big difference.

Finally if the land is donated or sold at a discount it fundamentally changes the economic dynamics as you will immediately appreciate.

4. We should, in my view anyway, endorse option 4 whether we proceed with a CLT or not. It is an off-the-shelf solution, easy to endorse which will give us some protection about density and design. However it cannot apply to the whole Parish but would definitely include an area around Broadhembury village.

Turning to EDDC's 78 page Heritage Strategy 2019-2031 which you mention in your point 4; I do not think it achieves anything as a stand-alone option which might afford protection or opportunity. There are many useful points in it but its significance is 'trumped' by the NP, the LP and NPPG's. In this regard para 185 of the NPPF (2018) is quoted in the Heritage Strategy as is EDDC's LP para 18.61 as the two driving legal policy considerations. Broadhembury village features as an example of a Conservation Area and the Blackdown Hills AONB also gets a mention. To be perhaps brutally honest this document is interesting and a 'good read' but the actions are all; 'inform/urge/encourage/promote/update/enhance/facilitate/work with/widen knowledge/celebrate/etc. All excellent intentions but they are not going to be decisive considerations to counter a developer with resources and resolve. However you have prompted me to make sure that we make more of it in the NP.

Conclusion

I believe that we are at risk of ending up with something the community has told us clearly it does not want. The completion of our NP might afford some protection but I do not believe it will mitigate the risk significantly. Far more effective would be the establishment of a CLT, run by and for the community which could move quickly to counter any threat. A CLT would have first refusal on the school if it closed, could develop broadband and in other places owns and runs pubs, shops and playing fields. It is a flexible organisational vehicle which we should have in place for many eventualities.

This is my personal view. It is not yet endorsed by the PC but I am willing to support any other viable community solution. A CLT would not be an off-shoot of the PC, although the PC might have Trustees and ideally it should be led by someone with experience of housing/land/development/estate management.

I have tried to answer your questions as thoroughly as possible, but would add the caveat that this is not my 'special subject' and I may have unintentionally misrepresented some of arguments. I am of course open to persuasion.

On Tuesday 25th I would like to conclude the meeting with an agreement in principle to set up a CLT.

Yours, Bob

CLlr Bob Nelson
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On 3 Feb 2020, at 11:59, Steve Chipperfield wrote:

Bob

Many thanks for the detailed Minutes setting out options for affordable housing, etc. Both Mike Drewe and I have individually taken a little time to digest the overview, the options and the proposals you have set out and can see that you have tried hard to navigate a way through the various opportunities and obstacles.

At the moment this process naturally leads to some questions – some for the purposes of clarification and others perhaps to try to keep ourselves open to any potential for unintended consequences, an issue you have also highlighted. With a view to our being able to make a well-informed contribution to the 25th February meeting, it would be helpful if you could provide a response to the questions below. This will avoid us having to deluge you with questions at the meeting (others naturally need to be heard) and also to save the PC's time.

1. New assessment of need

Unless I misunderstood you when we chatted after the meeting, I think you stated that – while the old assessment was now out-dated - you did not want/ intend to undertake another due to the expense. On that basis it is difficult to understand where BPC could go from there. Can you therefore please clarify if, or in what circumstances, BPC is planning to undertake a new assessment:

- If yes, when, and would this need to be in conjunction with Awliscombe, Plymtree and Payhembury again, or is there a solo option?
- If no, how do you propose to progress your Option 5 from a Planning perspective?
- Do you perceive any risk that a new assessment of need from BPC could be 'trumped' by one asserting a more substantial level of need from an opportunistic developer?

2. Land for affordable housing

- Has BPC identified key target sites?
- Have discussions been held with any of the landowners?
- How likely do you think it is that land would be gifted and with what conditions?

3. Construction and operational budgets and management

- How would BPC fund the construction of the affordable homes?
- Has BPC undertaken an initial (scoping) budget to establish the viability of the proposal looking at:

- Capital and interest repayments on the design and construction
- Maintenance costs
- Operational management and letting services
- Against predicted revenues?

4. Other options

- Has BPC considered EDDC's Heritage Strategy as contributing to an option?
- If so, what factors excluded it from featuring as a protective element among the list of options?
- Is there any reason why Option 4 could not be integrated within Option 5 – or would that be unnecessary if the project was solely affordable homes without a commercial element?

Many thanks, Bob, and we look forward with interest to your response.

Regards

Steve Chipperfield & Mike Drewe

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