

**MINUTES OF VIRTUAL (via ZOOM) SPECIAL MEETING OF
RODE PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON TUESDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2021 AT 7.30pm**

UNCONFIRMED

Present:

Cllr Peter Travis – Chair (PT), Cllr Ann Edney (AE), Cllr Pat Restorick (PR), Cllr Elaine Butler (EB), Cllr Jim McAuliffe (JM), Cllr Mike Salmon (MS), Cllr Steve Eyles (SE)

In attendance: Cllr Barbi Lund, Cllr Linda Oliver, Hugh Williams – Clerk, Andy Fussell (landowner), Simon Steele-Perkins (Waddeton Park) and 25 members of the public

Report back on issues raised on 2021/0071/OTS

Andy Fussell (AF) said the affordable houses could be protected as such through a ‘deed of variation’ to ensure they were offered first to local people. This had been done on the Church Farm site. This deed would be agreed between the Developer and Mendip. He added that a scheme such as one through ‘Wombat’ could be put in place to ensure Brown’s Ground created an income – this scheme planted willow trees for harvesting to be used for cricket bat manufacture. PT said he had received this information but as the quotation had been marked ‘strictly confidential’ he had not been able to circulate it, but he had sent Councillors the top line of the financial information and had offered to show the letter to any Councillor that asked to see it.

Simon Steele-Perkins (SSP) said the planning application now had the aim of achieving the highest energy standard (EPC: A) with heat pumps, solar panels, electric charging points for cars etc. all being required. However, he said the application was only outline and therefore unable to specify the final layout/design of the 49 dwellings. This approach of an outline planning application had been used on the Church Farm development and there was confidence Autograph, or similar developer, would develop the site close to the currently proposed layout.

The garden sizes were ‘above average’ for the properties but would again be subject to reserved matters. It was acknowledged that a thorough heritage assessment had not been carried out on Barbara’s Field as geophysics had not been possible due to its ploughed state. A survey, along with trial trenches would be carried out in the next couple of months. However, Somerset County Council had considered the current assessment adequate.

Questions

Further questions were put to AF and SSP; MS said that as none of the ‘affordable’ housing on the Church Farm estate had gone to local residents or to people in Mendip; therefore, was there a need for it here, perhaps the development was too large and therefore generating too many ‘affordable houses’. SSP said that Mendip required 30% of any development to be ‘affordable’ housing but people saw housing in Rode as still too expensive, so, maybe further discounts were required for the sale or rent of these types of property. MS also questioned the location of the development for ‘older’ people as it was some distance from the village centre.

JM questioned the assertion from SSP and AF that there was strong local support for this development as to date all the 60+ responses on the Mendip Planning Portal were against this development. In response it was suggested that those supporting the development were reluctant to come forward. AF added that there was support for the donation of Brown’s Ground to the village

for perpetuity. JM asked whether Brown's Ground would be prepared prior to donation, i.e., trees planted, paths installed, water put in for allotments. AF said he hoped this could be done by the developer and it could be put into the S106; but the PC would need to decide what they wanted on the field for inclusion in the S106. He added he would cut the grass and hedges around the field.

AF and SSP left the meeting.

Parish Council Decision

PT said that following the two previous meetings and this meeting he felt the PC was in a position to make up its mind whether to approve or reject this application.

MS said he felt the development was disproportionately large and access to the site was far from ideal, with the transport assessment poorly researched. He felt neither AF nor SSP had justified the need for this development in Rode.

AE said she had seen many changes in the village over her life and thought the donation of Brown's Ground could be a millstone for the PC. Significant green space had been given to the Playing Field Committee and the need for more was questioned. Also land for allotments, although needed, would not satisfy the new demand generated from this development. The development was too large for the village and she could not support it.

JM said that Rode PC had recently declared a climate emergency and this development would go against this declaration. Rode had poor public transport and all these houses would generate extra car journeys to get to work/shop etc. He said with many business closures there were now significant brown field sites available for development in towns and cities. He said many of the issues arising from the Merfield/Mead development were the same here and reflecting the parishioners' views he would oppose this development.

PT said that many Councillors joined the PC over the years to fight development but unfortunately development had taken place on Bradford Road, Walnut Close, Fairfield etc. all being on what was greenfield sites; even with the PC rejecting them. House numbers had risen from 300 in 1960 to 400 in 2000 and up to 500 in 2020, with proposed developments this could reach 600 well before 2030. He had considered favouring one of the current two applications (Merfield vs Barbara's) in the hope that if one got approved the other wouldn't. However even with the possible benefit of gaining Brown's Ground, he felt the parishioners' views should be followed and this application rejected.

PR said she had seen a lot of development and was not against small scale building but thought there was not a need for this large development. The development would generate increased traffic within the village. Already the playing field committee found it difficult to get members so problems could be foreseen getting people to manage Brown's Ground. Reflecting parishioners' views she would vote against the application.

The Parish Council voted 5-0 against the application (2021/0071/OTS), EB was unable to comment or vote due to loss of internet connection. SE (and AP) could not comment or vote due to disclosable pecuniary interest in the application.

PT suggested that, although a good transport assessment done through a resident had been prepared, Patrick Moss should be approached to gather current data together as part of the PC response. This was supported by members of the PC, with an estimated cost of £1,000.

Parishioners were asked not to send any further comments on the application to the Parish Council but to send them to Mendip who would consider all the comments and make its decision on the application. The Parish Council could not forward any comments sent to it to Mendip, as these needed to be sent directly to Mendip (quoting the planning reference). The deadline for commenting was 9th March. The PC would be finalising its comments at its next full meeting on 2nd March.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

Signed:

Date:

Print:

Website: rodeparishcouncil.webs.com