

# The Parish Council of Dickens Heath

## Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday March 5<sup>th</sup> 2019 in the Parish Rooms, Waterside

### Present:

**Dickens Heath Parish Councillors;** Trevor Eames, Maureen Holloway (Chair), Diane Potter, Nargis Rashid, Doreen Wright.

Solihull MBC Councillor; Richard Holt

In attendance: 13 members of the public

Clerk: Ms Helen Marczak

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### **Minute 149 (2018/19) Apologies for Absence**

Councillors David Jones and Alan Scholes.

### **Minute 150 (2018/19) Solihull Local Plan (SLP) Review – Supplementary Consultation**

Chair Maureen Holloway opened the meeting and said that the Solihull Local Plan Review is a non statutory consultation being carried out by Solihull MBC. Councillor Trevor Eames would give a presentation and this would then be followed by an opportunity for residents to ask questions. Solihull MBC, in the latest version of the Plan, seemed to have listened to the Parish Council and had reduced the number of homes on Site 4 from 700 to 350. The Chair clarified that there is no planning application at this stage.

Councillor Trevor Eames went through, and summarised, Solihull MBC's 'Reviewing the Plan for Solihull's Future' – a briefing for Parish Councils on the SLP Review.

- This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> review of the Plan, they do not have a 5 year land supply, there has been a legal challenge, and there is pressure on housing numbers.
- They have a duty to co-operate in the Housing Management Area (HMA) and this can't be met from brownfield sites. There is a shortfall of 48,000 homes in the HMA that authorities have to meet, and 2,000 of these are currently included in the SLP.
- The purpose of this consultation is to allow people to comment on the proposals that affect them.
- Their timetable is to aim to submit the SLP for examination this Autumn with adoption proposed for 2020.

Councillor Eames then gave a second presentation on how the proposals would affect Dickens Heath.

- This is a Review of the sites and housing numbers, it does not cover highways details or school places for example. Though the primary school needs have been met, and secondary school needs will be met by displacing non Solihull children that currently take up places.
- In terms of flooding, all new sites will have to show they are safeguarded from flooding during the lifetime of the development.

Councillor Eames then looked at the individual local sites:

- Site 26 – TRW – this is a done deal.
- Site 12 – Taylor Wimpey, with up to 1,000 houses accessed from the Stratford Rd. This seems fairly definite.
- Site 4 – West of Dickens Heath – this is the site that will most impact on the village.

Minutes of Dickens Heath Parish Council Meeting held Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Signature.....

Date.....

**Site 4 – West of Dickens Heath**

Councillor Eames went through the detail of the site.

- The ownership of most of the site is with the Horne family, with Richborough acting on behalf of the land owners, except for a section of land at the top of the site which belongs to Persimmon Homes.
- The orange shading signifies medium density housing, and the beige shading is low density.
- The Persimmon Homes site – proposal is for 100 to 120 medium density properties.
- The proposed number of properties for the whole site is now 350 (down from 700 in the previous version of the Plan) so it is very low density.
- The red shading signifies 'local wildlife areas' – but this land will remain private and so not accessible to the public.
- There is no provision for retention of all the current playing fields.
- Akamba is due to be retained, but could be developed.
- The original Richborough proposal included 600 properties along with an area at the top of the site which would include a community sports hub and replacement sports pitches, which were to be funded from the development.
- There is a small area of public open space identified on Birchy Leasowes Lane.
- Parking at Whitlocks End Station – this is due to be increased by 261 spaces up to 565 spaces.

**Questions were then invited from members of the public**

**Has there been any reaction from Sport England to the loss of pitches?**

Councillor Eames didn't think so. SMBC will have to find alternative sites for the lost sports grounds. Sport England will object if these are not provided. But this is currently in limbo and we don't know where they might be provided.

**What about infrastructure?**

Councillor Eames said that once the sites have been selected, then SMBC will look at the roads.

A resident said that people can't make informed comments if they don't know what may happen with respect to the infrastructure.

Councillor Eames added that the Plan cannot go to Enquiry in Public without knowing how it can be delivered.

Borough Councillor Richard Holt also added that, as the plots of land are in private ownership, the sites have to be identified first with the highways detail coming later. He said that SMBC are under immense pressure to grant planning permission given that there is no 5 year land supply – this Plan contains sites that they feel they can deliver, and they will then have a 5 year land supply. There are pressures which are external to Solihull (from Birmingham) and this Plan would defend this.

**What about rail? There is no direct link to Solihull or the NEC.**

Councillor Holt agreed, but added that better transport links would lead to more development – so it is a Catch 22. Councillor Eames said that there is a lot of investment planned for transport across the West Midlands – train lines are being opened up (eg. the Kings Heath line) and Park and Rides are being put in. Birmingham are also planning a congestion charge. Park and rides are hugely expensive per additional space, but every year new ones are going in. Developers will also be asked to contribute to them.

**Site 4 has wildlife and sustainability issues.**

A resident said that she understands SMBC's problems – but Site 4 is high grade Greenbelt land. A case needs to be made regarding the housing figures that have been used – more up to date housing figures are lower and should be used instead. Site 4 is surrounded on 3 sides by wildlife/woodland sites – its development would have enormous consequences for local

wildlife as interconnectivity is so important. No other site has this. It goes against every Government policy. The sustainability checks have been carried out by consultants – but the resident believes that the site is only 30% sustainable, which would make it a 'red' site. She also added that this site is not within walking distance of the village centre, but there is nowhere to park in the village centre. There are many reasons why this site is not sustainable in Government policy terms.

Councillor Eames added that the Parish Council are meeting regularly with SMBC Planners, but SMBC are under a lot of pressure to increase housing numbers and to increase them significantly.

#### **Accessibility and concern re an access route through Birchy Close**

Residents of Birchy Close (which is a private road) are concerned that SMBC wish to allow access for this development to the village centre through Birchy Close – to make it sustainable. This would be strongly objected to by residents of Birchy Close.

Councillor Eames replied that he has seen no plans for this at the moment.

#### **Pedestrian and cycle link to Whitlocks End station**

A resident said that it looks like there will be a pedestrian/cycle link to the station through Akamba. Councillor Holloway replied that the Parish Council don't know of any plans for this at the moment. At the moment, the consultation is just on the sites and housing numbers. The resident commented that if the link appears to be there, then it will influence how people respond.

#### **Junction of Birchy Leasowes Lane and Dickens Heath Rd would need to be improved**

Councillor Eames said that some trees have recently been chopped down at this site (which is ancient woodland) – for which Tidbury Green PC have applied for a TPO, supported by DHPC. Following this felling – the TPO is being chased up.

#### **What is the PC's view on Site 4?**

A resident asked - in the view of strong public objections to this site in the Parish Council's survey, will the Parish Council be objecting to it? Chair Maureen Holloway said that the Parish Council will incorporate the views of residents in their response. Councillor Eames added that not many members of the public have turned up to the public information sessions on the SLP. The Parish Council will make a decision on their response at their meeting on March 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Publicity of Meetings**

A resident asked how this meeting had been publicised as she read about it by chance. The Chair responded that it had been publicised in the usual way that all meetings are publicised. She added that the Parish Council were not obligated to hold this meeting, but decided that they should hold a special meeting as it was such an important issue.

#### **How does the PC know what the views of residents are?**

The PC will take on board concerns raised at this meeting and will formulate their response to the SLP Review, in public, at the PC meeting of March 12<sup>th</sup>. Councillor Eames added that he has additional views of residents via the Residents Association. In its response to the previous version of the SLP, the Parish Council held a survey and sent the results of this to SMBC. Many of these representations were not directly relevant to the consultation process. The Parish Council has to make its response on sound planning grounds, but they are able to say that the vast majority of residents are opposed to this development. But residents are opposed to all the sites across Solihull – only the land owners are really in favour, and this is SMBC's dilemma. Councillor Nargis Rashid added that Solihull has to have more houses, and if we don't do our bit to agree on some additional housing – then sites will be imposed on us. Borough Councillor Richard Holt agreed that no one wants it in their own backyard, but SMBC have to find the houses. We are in a housing crisis, and SMBC are vulnerable to speculative

development. If they can't deliver a Plan, they will lose control. They need a line that they can defend.

**Unsustainability of Site 4**

A resident said that all agree that the right houses in the right location are needed. But this is the most unsustainable site of them all. She doesn't object too much to the Persimmon site, but she does to the rest. There are many far more suitable sites in Solihull – she suggested that some of the 'amber' sites could make up the slack.

Borough Councillor Richard Holt said that he respects the scientific analysis, and wondered whether local parish councils would be willing to 'trade sites'. Councillor Trevor Eames replied that, through Solihull Area Committee, he knows that all the parish councils are totally against their proposed sites.

**Why was the other site in Dickens Heath parish scrapped?**

Councillor Eames replied that the other site included community land owned by SMBC, so there was uproar from residents as so many used it as a public open space. Plus there would have been major problems with the additional cars coming on to the roads at that point.

**SLP Review responses from residents**

Residents should respond to SMBC as they are running the consultation. However it was agreed that the Parish Council would benefit from seeing a copy of residents responses – so that they can be taken into account at the March 12<sup>th</sup> PC meeting. The Clerk to appeal for comments via Facebook.

**Meeting ended 9pm**