

## Proposed Development in Wilburton

There has been some Social media comment regarding a proposed development in Wilburton. The Parish Council does not wish to engage on Social Media, however I felt it might be helpful to make a statement, as Chair of the PC, regarding this proposal, and addressing one or two misunderstandings of the work of the PC which have been pointed out to me.

The development proposal is being put forward by the Strettham and Wilburton Community Land Trust (SWCLT). The SWCLT have recently reached agreement with the landowners of twenty four hectares behind Townsend Mews, to the West of Millfield Lane.

The SWCLT is not part of the Parish Council, nor is it controlled by the PC. Parish Councils are invited to nominate Trustees, however once selected Trustees are not answerable to the PC, and they act independently. The PC has no authority regarding Planning Applications. Planning applications are controlled by the District Council. The PC is invited to give an opinion, when plans are submitted in our Parish, but has no authority to approve or reject plans.

For information only, because of comments noted on Social Media platforms, the full Parish Council only meets quarterly. Nothing is ever done secretly, unless it is of a highly confidential nature, such as staff disciplinary meetings et al. Minutes from meetings cannot be published prior to them being signed, and in line with normal practise, minutes can only be signed and approved at the next meeting, and cannot be published until they are signed. Parish Council meetings are however open meetings, and members of the Parish are always welcome to attend and observe if they wish, and at one point of each meeting members of the public are able to ask formal questions of the Council. Members of the public are also asked to attend the Annual Parish Meeting, which takes place so they can learn of the work of their PC, question Councillors, hold them to account and give their own opinions. (At this year's annual Parish Meeting only three members of the public attended). All of the above information is available on our website. Contrary to what I am informed is believed by some, I am as certain as I can be that no secret plans, meetings, backhanders or corruption of any description have ever taken place whilst I have been Chair of the PC.

The Parish Council is very committed to, and very much in favour of continued development within our village. Over the past 25 years there have been well over 100 homes planned for and built within our Parish. None of these have been subject to any adverse comment from the PC. The reason we need continued development is because rural communities with an ageing population, of which we are one, cannot protect their infrastructures and survive long term without a continued supply of new younger people moving to them. Without the newer homes I mentioned above, the village school would have closed. As it is, the newer families from the newer homes in the village are ageing, and as I write this, for this September only nine new pupils have registered at our Village School. If this trend were to continue, the school would not survive. Two of the key points to note here relate to an ageing population, and house price inflation. As an example when The Orchards was built 25 years ago, six of the eight houses were bought by young couples, and since being built eighteen children from those houses have attended the village primary school. The owners of six of those houses today no longer have primary school aged children. As with that road, most of the houses constructed in developments over the last 25 years have been large 4/5 bedroom detached properties. Unlike 25 years ago, the prices of this type of property today put them out of the reach of many young couples, so future development of this type may not protect the village infrastructure. To protect the future of our village, the Parish Council believes we need to encourage the building of more affordable homes, so that we can continue to attract younger couples and families. For this reason we fully support the work of SWCLT.

Rather than me say too much on this subject, please read this article from November 2017 on the decline of Rural Communities.

<https://www.housing.org.uk/press/press-releases/rural-life-in-decline-as-countryside-pubs-schools-and-post-offices-close>

The Parish Council is very much opposed to over-development and any attempt by commercial housebuilders to purchase vast areas of land for purely commercial development. As a case in point, we were very involved at the Mereham enquiry. I personally addressed the Government enquiry, as did two of my colleagues on the PC. (For those who may not remember the Mereham proposal, it was for a development by Multiplex Stannifer on all of the land which is between the A10 to the East, Twenty Pence Road to the West, the A1123 to the North and the Great Ouse to the South. The proposal included 5,000 homes, a supermarket, schools and a bus station. This would have made a new town bigger than Cambourne, and well over half the size of Ely. Our objections were upheld, and the plan was defeated). Reference to Mereham with regard to a proposal to build some homes on a 24 hectare site is not really relevant, but I felt it might explain how your PC always has been fully committed to work hard to preserve the integrity and character of our village.

The Parish Council does however fully support the work of the SWCLT. For those who are not familiar with the aims and work of the SWCLT they have a website, and I recommend you visit it and also read this article.

[http://www.cteast.org/ugc-1/1/2/0/swclt\\_case\\_study\\_april\\_2017.pdf](http://www.cteast.org/ugc-1/1/2/0/swclt_case_study_april_2017.pdf)

Unlike any outside developer, we know SWCLT is fully committed to the preservation of our village. The SWCLT will manage the development. One of the PC's nominations as a Trustee was born in Wilburton, and has served as a Councillor in our village for over thirty years, and there is nobody that I have ever met who is more engaged with and emotionally committed to the past, present and future of the village I live in. This is representative of the make-up of the Trustees. For this reason I personally trust the CLT and know that our village will benefit and secure its future through support of this development. I do not want Wilburton to risk suffering the fate of so many other rural communities with ageing populations.

As of today, absolutely no outline proposals or plans have been submitted to the District Council, because the SWCLT will not do anything prior to consulting with Parishioners. Speculation regarding house numbers is speculation based on no known evidence, because there is no evidence yet.

The SWCLT have decided to use the developers and architects they used for Manor Farm in Stretham on their new development, because of the fantastic job they are doing there. If you are concerned I suggest you go and look at Manor Farm to see the work of the SWCLT first hand. You will observe the low density of houses on the site, compared to most modern developments. The architectural style is sympathetic to the architecture of our villages, which I do know is very important to the SWCLT. If you wish to know more about this, can I suggest you attend the consultation meeting, rather than engaging on Social Media. The SWCLT consultation will take place on 26<sup>th</sup> September, in the village hall between 4pm and 8pm.

Kevin Hennessy

Chair, Wilburton Parish Council