

THAME TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of Thame Town Council held on 16 September 2014 at 6.30pm in the Upper Chamber, Thame Town Hall

Present: Cllr D Bretherton, D Butler, N Champken-Woods, A Dite, N Dixon (Deputy Mayor), M Dyer, L Emery, H Fickling, V Humphries, P Lambert, D Laver, J Matelot Green (Town Mayor) and M Welply.

Officers

H Stewart, Town Clerk

A Oughton, Committee Services Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Dodds (SODC), Stiles (Holiday) and Wyse (Holiday).

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Public Participation

Mr Marianczak spoke on behalf of the Elms Petition Group (EMG), he began by thanking the Council for the opportunity to speak and present the case to Save The Elms and for the extension of time given for this purpose.

The Group felt The Elms site had made its way into the Neighbourhood Plan under questionable circumstances and was not a suitable site for development. The access roads surrounding the site were not suitable for either construction traffic or the increase in traffic movement that would be generated once the dwellings were occupied. Several meetings were referred to during which The Elms had been discussed and clarification was needed on how the final number of dwellings on the site had been decided.

Reference was made to correspondence received from English Heritage which had been withheld from the people of Thame, had it been available residents would have been able to make an informed decision at Referendum. If The Elms had not been included in the Neighbourhood Plan any development on the site would have been difficult if not impossible.

Mr Marianczak made reference to the planning application for Elms Park, an area which had been donated to the residents of Thame and had its own unique character. It was felt any development on The Elms would have a detrimental effect on The Park.

The Neighbourhood Plan had already been tested and ignored with the approval of the planning application to construct industrial units on the land at Cotmore Wells Farm and the group felt this set a precedent for other changes to be made to the Neighbourhood Plan. It was suggested that a small working group be formed with representatives from the EMG, the Council, SODC and the Town Clerk with the aim of removing The Elms from the Neighbourhood Plan and distributing the allocated housing amongst the remaining sites identified for development.

Mr Marianczak urged the council to listen to the people of Thame and make the change to preserve The Elms.

Mrs Willson, ex chair of Lea Park Residents Association spoke to Council confirming that she had been involved in the process since the public meeting with SODC when it became apparent that if the Town did not have its own Plan the allocation of 775 houses would be put onto one site. Having been a resident on Lea Park for many years Mrs Willson had experienced first-hand the problems created by a large housing development on one site.

Lea Park Residents Association along with the other Residents Associations in the town fought hard to reduce the number of houses Thame had been allocated and each had strong views as to where the development sites would be located and the number of dwellings assigned to each site. Consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan was well publicised and Mrs Willson referenced a letter she had written and was published in the Thame Gazette in April 2012 urging areas in the town to form Residents Associations and have their say. There had been many opportunities for people to influence what would happen in the Town and to be involved in the process.

If the Elms site was taken out of the Plan the allocation of 45 dwellings would have to be redistributed onto the other identified development sites and each Residents Association would put up a good case for the houses not to be added to their area.

4 Notices of Motion

There were no notices of motion.

5 Minutes

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 2 September 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

6 The Legal Status of Statutory Development Plans

Discussion took place around the demand that Thame Town Council hold a second referendum asking for the removal of The Elms from the Thame Town Plan. Mrs Guiver, Planning Policy Officer at South Oxfordshire District Council, explained the legality of Neighbourhood Plans. There was a serious element of responsibility in compiling a Plan which included a rigorous process of consultation and examination by an Independent Examiner before going forward to referendum and adoption.

Once adopted a Plan could be altered but the whole process of consultation, examination and referendum would need to take place. Any change to site allocations within an existing Plan would need to demonstrate a change in circumstance since the Plan had been determined and if changed the landowner may be eligible for compensation. It would be equally likely that other groups in the town would then want changes made to other site allocations.

A planning application had been submitted for the development on The Elms and if not determined within the stipulated timescale or refused the developer had the right to take the application to the Appeal process which would likely take place before a new Plan had been adopted.

7 Thame Neighbourhood Plan

The Mayor, Cllr Matelot Green invited discussion on three points; i) to address the statements made by the Elms Petition Group as to the rationale for including The Elms as an allocated site in the Thame Neighbourhood Plan, ii) to show that The Elms was included as an allocated site from the start of the process and was not included by 'foul' means and iii) to provide background information putting the letter from English Heritage, dated October 2012, into context.

The report tabled addressed the points and made reference to a number of documents (appendices to the report) which confirmed The Elms was made an allocated site as a result of comprehensive consultation with the community. Members agreed that the Council did not debate where the sites would be or influenced the content of the Plan, this had been done through consultation with the community and put together by an independent planning and urban design consultancy contracted by the Town Council to produce a Neighbourhood Plan.

Mrs Guiver confirmed that any land owner or developer was entitled to submit a planning application and that the SODC Local Plan, Core Strategy and the Thame Neighbourhood Plan did allow for developments as a matter of principle within urban areas provided the application complied with policy.

The Preferred Option Booklet which had been delivered to every household, invited a response to a question specifically asking whether there was support for development on The Elms. The statutory consultation evidence base totally contradicted the claim that The Elms was included by 'foul means'.

Discussion took place on the background to the letter from English Heritage, a statutory consultee. It was agreed that the letter had been received after the consultation period had finished but nonetheless was included and published with all the other responses on the SODC website.

Members agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan was the result of consensus and that not everyone would agree with every aspect but it had been adopted through democratic means. The Plan had gone above and beyond what was expected of a Neighbourhood Plan.

RESOLVED that:

- i) Thame Town Council reaffirms the integrity of the process by which the Neighbourhood Plan was developed and that the Thame Neighbourhood Plan is a sound development plan document.***

8 Land East of Thame Park Road (Neighbourhood Plan – Site C) P14/S1619/O – Amendment No. 1 & Amendment No. 2

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.28pm

Signed
Chairman, 23 September 2014