

JOIN THE DEBATE: Email: news@thecomet.net or write to: The Comet, Bank House, Primett Road, Stevenage SG1 3EE.

OPINIONS

and impartiality.

JOHN SKEELES F.C.A
By email

Not planned as edge of village

Thank you for the very good coverage of the recent NHDC planning control committee meeting, when full planning permission was given to Cala Homes to build 78 houses on the edge of Pirton Village on land adjacent to Elm Tree Farm (let's call it ETF1).

The parish council and community of Pirton worked hard and successfully, over many months, to gain improvements to Cala Homes' original plans for the site.

The one issue we could not get either Cala Homes or the planning control committee to budge on was that of numbers of dwellings. The only reason for the reduction in numbers from 82 to 78 was to increase the amount of amenity space within the development – and even that was lost at the last minute when the “green” was taken out and used instead to “soften” the external approach to the development.

Neither Cala Homes nor the planning committee seemed able to distinguish between the need for internal amenity space and external good design practice.

Now, of course, we know why – at least as far as Cala Homes is concerned. Cala Homes never

intended this to be an “edge of village” development, with the attendant good design practices of low density, low scale housing and soft green edging. They never intended it to be the new transitional zone between village and countryside.

I have recently been shown an entry on the Land Register for the adjoining field (let's call it ETF2). The entry tells me that in September 2016, before Cala Homes put in their planning application, its parent company Cala Management Ltd had already entered into an agreement (terms unknown) with the landowners and Gladman as agents for the landowners. This agreement is registered at the Land Registry as a restriction against the sale of ETF2 by the landowners to a third party without both Gladman and Cala Homes being notified.

Further, a mortgage deed registered with Scotland's Companies House refers to a Sale Agreement made on July 21, 2016, between the landowners, Gladman, and Cala Management Ltd which appears to cover both ETF1 and ETF2.

Within 48 hours of the planning committee's decision, Gladman had informed the Pirton community of their intention to apply for outline planning permission for ETF2 for up to 99 dwellings, although clearly their “consultation” information had been prepared some weeks earlier.

I have no reason to think that the planning officers or planning

control committee members had any clue about this registered restriction, and its possible implications.

They should all have been aware, however, of the inclusion of ETF2 in the draft Local Plan in a long list of “reserve” sites (sites that have not been allocated or investigated by NHDC) that came forward from all over the district during the final consultation on the draft Local Plan.

I must trust that this knowledge, even if tucked away somewhere in the subconscious, did not in any way affect the decision made on the night.

DIANE BURLEIGH OBE
Cromwell Way, Pirton

Invite to AGM

Staff from the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust will be showcasing some of their very best services at an annual general meeting being held on Thursday, July 6, at the University of Hertfordshire.

You will have the opportunity to ask members of the board questions on your key issues, as well as offering a range of interactive opportunities to talk to our staff and partners.

The event starts at 5pm with our marketplace and afternoon tea. The formal meeting will start promptly at 6.30pm with proceedings scheduled to finish at 8pm.

Places are limited for this key

event so please take a moment to confirm your attendance by emailing June O'Sullivan at ftmembership.enh-tr@nhs.net or by calling 01438 284613.

We very much look forward to seeing you next Thursday, July 6

NICK CARVER
Chief executive
East and North Herts NHS Trust

Plan will change villages forever

The North Hertfordshire District Council proposed submission Local Plan, while providing much-needed new housing, has the potential to change irreversibly the character of several towns and villages in the district.

In Ickleford, for example, acceptance of the four proposed development sites within the village would increase by 40 per cent the number of dwellings, with inevitable consequences to traffic, pollution and strain on the already-stretched infrastructure.

However, we and, I'm sure, other residents of North Herts were comforted by the consultation process which NHDC put in place, and the review of the Local Plan and consultees' opinions by the independent inspector. We viewed this as a genuine chance to influence the Local Plan to enable sensible increases in housing while, as far as possible, limiting impact on existing

communities. Sadly, you and your readers might be interested to learn that the consultation and inspection are a complete sham being played on us by NHDC.

On June 21, I attended a public exhibition hosted by Barratt Homes and David Wilson Homes on their plans to develop site LS1 in Ickleford adjacent to the boundary with Henlow/Lower Stondon. I asked the representative of Barratt Homes about their likely timelines for planning application submission, and was advised that it would be summer 2017. I mentioned that the Local Plan and associated comments from residents and local organisations had not yet been reviewed by the inspector, and therefore their planning application looked premature. However, the Barratt Homes representative informed me that NHDC's planning department has actively been encouraging developers to submit their plans now so that the council could show the inspector that there is strong demand from developers for NHDC's proposals.

My conclusion is that we have all been hoodwinked, that those at NHDC have already made up their minds and will happily concrete-over large areas of the district – irrespective of residents' opinions – and that we have all wasted our time in submitting our views during a bogus consultation. So much for local democracy!

MILES MAXWELL
Chairman, Ickleford Parish Council

We're transforming your rail journey on an unprecedented scale

We've been working hard to make the UK's fastest growing rail network fit for the future – improving stations, introducing new trains and destinations, and changing how we work to ensure you get the best information and service from us. We know it's caused upheaval, but this much-needed transformation is nearly complete. Thank you for your patience.

We welcome your views on the new 2018 timetable. See how your journey will look and have your say at: transformingrail.com

Watch this space

