**NDO STEERING GROUP**

**Minutes of meeting at the Coronation Hall, 6.30 pm, March 2, 2016**

**Present:** Steve Hepworth (Chair), Alex Oliver, Ben Owen, Robert Carpenter Turner, Michael Golden, Charles Reiss[[1]](#footnote-1), Tom Griffiths, Jonathan Young, Apologies: none. In attendance: Sarah Hughes, Senior Planning Officer Wiltshire Council.

**017/16 Minutes**: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

 Matters arising not on the agenda: none

 **018/16 Neighbourhood Development Order, update**: Charles Reiss reported that the Village Meeting recommended by the Steering Group had been approved by the Parish Council and will be held on Saturday, March 5, and that this had been publicised.

**019/16 Briefing from Sarah Hughes**: Sarah Hughes, as Link Officer for Wiltshire Council, was asked by members to clarify the long-standing question as to whether the Council is prepared to approve the Honeystreet sawmill development in principle. She was also asked more generally where the NDO process stands. SH pointed out that the NDO was a relatively new process in which all concerned needed to feel their way. Her reading of the regulations suggested that the decisive referendum must be based on the parish. Members questioned this pointing out that an independent planning consultant with knowledge of the process disagreed. They also pointed out that it ran contrary to the Parish Council’s unanimous decision that while the entire parish must be consulted, the vote should be limited to Honeystreet.

 SH was then asked whether a standard planning application might be viable. She said that, in principle, an application for "a substantial development" on the site would be contrary to policy. It was categorised as an existing employment site. Furthermore, Honeystreet was not categorised as even a small village. "It's basically [categorised as] open countryside." Members pointed out that Honeystreet had produced its own Village Design Statement which had been accepted as policy by Kennet District Council and subsequently by Wiltshire Council. SH said that things had changed and while Honeystreet clearly was a village it fell below the line of those settlements classed as suitable and sustainable for development.

 SH went on to say there could be “some mileage in mixed use." You could “never say never” but the onus would be on the proposer to show why an exception should be made. Members pointed out that David Milton, the Council’s Spatial Planning Manager, had suggested in an email that a planning application might be worth pursuing and that in such a case local opinion would be "a material consideration.” SH said the issue was not a matter of black and white, it was in the end a judgement call. The views of council officers could be reversed by the Planning Committee. Several members asked why the Parish Council was now being guided towards a standard planning application whereas in early meetings it had been encouraged by the Council to pursue an NDO. SH said that was unfortunate but one could not turn back the clock. Returning to the question of approval in principle she said it was not possible to give a definitive yes or no; that would be up to not just the council officers but the Planning Committee.

 Jonathan Young, for the site owner, said that the finance was finely balanced. With the 23 houses envisaged, 14 open market and 9 affordable, it would be a struggle to generate the required value. Alex Oliver pointed out that fewer houses with large plots could be worth more, particularly if they fell below the threshold triggering social housing. Charles Reiss, supporting that point, stressed the first recommendation of the Village Design Statement which laid down that any development must be "in keeping with the scale and character of the village."

**020/16 Future of the NDO**: Steve Hepworth (Chair) said that discussion on this item, as to whether to recommend to the Parish Council that the process be terminated, should be limited to the voting members of the Group. He said that the NDO application had still not been approved by Wiltshire Council, apparently because of the disagreement over the area to be covered. Members had heard that even if the NDO went ahead it would not give the Parish Council control over the final design of the buildings and other significant matters. Contrary to what had been understood, it now appeared that there had been no sustained effort to market the sawmill as a going concern. It could well be more productive for the developers to put in a straight planning application. For all these reasons he proposed a strong recommendation to the Parish Council that the application be withdrawn. Each voting member of the Steering Group spoke briefly in support of this view.

Proposed Steve Hepworth, seconded Ben Owen: That a recommendation be made to the Parish Council to withdraw the Neighbourhood Development Order. Carried unanimously.

Any other business:

**021/16 Planning consultant advice**: AO suggested that since funding had been secured for expert independent advice concerning the site, that could still be useful. Agreed that the matter be raised at the next Parish Council.

 Steve Hepworth thanked Sarah Hughes for attending, and for her advice.

 There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7.33.

1. Voting members: S Hepworth, R Carpenter Turner, B Owen, A Oliver, C Reiss, M Golden [↑](#footnote-ref-1)