

Wokingham Borough Council

Gorse Ride Project Residents Steering Group

Thursday 09 May 2019 – 07:00- 21:00

St Mary's and St John's Parish Centre

Meeting Notes

Residents / Stakeholder Attendees:

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| Steve Bowers | (SB) | Dart Close Resident / Tenant / Finchampstead Parish Councillor |
| Mandy Gatrack | (MG) | Billing Ave Resident / Tenant |
| Annette Lenton | (AL) | Billing Avenue Resident / Tenant |
| Matt Sales | (MS) | Whittle Close Resident / Homeowner |
| Jade Morgan-Jones | (JMJ) | Orbit Close Resident / Tenant |
| Ian McArthur | (IM) | Nine Mile Ride Residents |
| Caroline McArthur | (CM) | Nine Mile Ride Residents |
| Steve Bromley | (SBr) | Ratepayers Hall |
| Jac Pluves | (JP) | FBC Centre |

WBC / WHL / representative Attendees

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| Simon Weeks | (SW) | WBC Ward Councillor |
| Ian Pittock | (IP) | WBC Ward Councillor |
| Bill Flood | (BF) | WHL Managing Director |
| Rhian Hayes | | Category Manager (acting), Economic Prosperity and Place |
| Zareena Ahmed-Shere | (ZAS) | Senior Specialist (Estate Regeneration) / Gorse Ride Project Manager |
| Amy Ba | (AB) | Decant Officer |

AECOM / ACG Project / Design Team Representatives

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| Jonathan Walton | (JW) |
| Paul Avery | (PA) |
| Magda Opala | (MO) |

Apologies

Becky Eytel, Jim Gallagher, Barbara Wonja, Harry Row, Sarah Lynch, Roland Cundy, Claire McEnoy.

| ITEM | SUBJECT | ACTION |
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| 1 | Welcome and Introductions | |
| 1.1 | SB welcomed everyone to today's meeting. Apologies were noted as above. | |
| 2 | Actions from the Previous Meeting | |
| 2.1 | Legal documents have been drawn up to make it clear that WHL/Loddon Homes will take a second charge behind the bank / mortgage provider where applicable. This will satisfy most lenders. One Equity Share loan has just successfully completed where the Council / Loddon Homes took a legal charge after the applicant's mortgage lender's first charge. | |

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| <p>2.2</p> <p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> | <p>The Council / Loddon Homes Equity Share Loan Scheme was launched in March 2019. A brochure setting out the details of the scheme (including zero rent and interest features) and application process was sent to all eligible Gorse Ride resident homeowners. 1 loan application was successfully completed this month. Another 3 applications were received and are being processed.</p> <p>ACG will provide clarification on balconies later during this meeting</p> <p>Information that Louise Strongitharm collected from National Achieves is available upon request. We have 10 printed copies of these documents at this meeting for you to take away.</p> | |
| <p>3</p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> | <p>Phase 1 Update</p> <p>Following tender evaluation a preferred building contractor for Phase 1 has been identified. All those who submitted tenders have been notified whether or not they have been successful. The preferred contractor will be formally appointed later this month, after the expiry of the required 10 day standstill period. The appointment of the preferred contractor will be announced on the website and through a press release.</p> <p>The project is still on track to complete by next summer</p> | |
| <p>4</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p> <p>4.3</p> <p>4.4</p> <p>4.5</p> | <p>Phase 2 – Progress</p> <p>The Masterplan now provides a total of 249 dwellings. This has been revised following positive feedback from the last two public consultation events held earlier during February.</p> <p><u>Update on Residents 1:1 Meetings</u></p> <p>ZAS provided an update on the ongoing individual resident meetings. She has met with approximately 78% of all affected tenants and 84% of all homeowners. Although several attempts have previously been made there has been no contact with 22% of tenants and 16% of private property owners.</p> <p>It has been challenging to get in touch with some residents. SW advised that a letter should be sent out to these residents again reminding them of the approved Gorse Ride redevelopment plans and the requirement for moving so that development can happen. The letter will ask these residents to book an appointment with the Decant Officer / Regeneration Project Manager to register their rehousing preferences and find out about the support available. ZAS stated that the majority of Phase 2A residents had engaged but we will be sending chase letters / doing door knocks to bring about dialogue with the very few who have been hard to reach.</p> <p>10% of tenants have permanently moved off site in line with their wishes and a further 20% either wish to or are considering moving off site permanently. 48% have confirmed that they want to come back to the rebuilt estate. No contact has been made with 22%.</p> <p>29% of homeowners have moved off the site permanently and a further 19% have told us that they wish to move elsewhere off site. 34% want to return to the rebuilt estate and buy a new home in either Phase 1 or 2. 18% of homeowners have either not made contact or made up their minds about what they want to do.</p> | <p>AB</p> |

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| | <p><u>Decant / Rehousing Position</u></p> | |
| 4.6 | The decant of Phase 2A tenants is in progress. To date 14 tenants have been rehoused off site in accordance with their preferences. | |
| 4.7 | Since May 2018 the Council has acquired 11 privately owned houses. One owner-occupier has received equity share loan support to buy their new replacement home off site. We have agreed to buy back a further 4 privately owned houses and these are at various stages in the conveyancing process. | |
| | <p><u>Voids Strategy</u></p> | |
| 4.8 | As properties are becoming vacant, until recently they have been temporarily re-let to accommodate homeless people. We have now reviewed this strategy as the current demand for homeless accommodation within the Borough has almost been met and projections show that only a few homes are need each year to satisfy future demand. | |
| 4.9 | As more properties on Gorse Ride continue to become vacant, the condition of each vacated home will be assessed to determine which ones should be boarded up and secured or temporarily re-let according to the level of work / void preparation costs involved. Before properties are boarded and secured, gas, electric and water will be disconnected and copper piping taken out which will help reduce the likelihood of break ins. | |
| | <p><u>Equity Share Loan Update</u></p> | |
| 4.10 | As stated previously, 4 applications received so far. One applicant has purchased a property off site with an equity share loan assistance and a further 3 are in the early stages of the application process. | |
| | <p><u>Site Surveys</u></p> | |
| 4.11 | Tree surveys have been completed. Bat tracking surveys and measured building surveys will be taking place this month. All affected residents have been notified. | |
| | <p><u>Final Masterplan / Planning Application / Consultations</u></p> | |
| 4.12 | ACG talked through the latest plan that had been revised in response to comments from February's public consultation, technical officers feedback and new survey information. The planning application is planned to be formally submitted in late June 2019 after conclusion of the public consultation events planned this month. | |
| 4.13 | Overall the site layout remains the same. The storey heights of homes at the junction of Gorse Ride South and Billing Avenue has been reduced and a few more bungalows have been added. | |
| 4.14 | It was raised that tenants are being adversely affected through increase in Council tax bills following payment of home loss which is being treated as an income. Benefits and Revenue are treating the £6,300 home loss as a saving rather than compensation. As a rule, if savings are in excess of £4,000 then Council Tax payments are affected. A way round this may be phasing the payment over 2 financial years which may be considered upon request. | |
| 4.15 | SB asked about the tenure mix and if there would be 136 social rented units provided as agreed in the Executive Report. ACG confirmed that there is currently | |

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| | <p>no reference to tenure within the current plans. This is to be agreed at a later date prior to submission of the planning application.</p> <p>4.16 BF advised that the number crunching was still in progress to see if this would be achievable. The project is funded from various sources (s106 commuted sums for affordable housing, revenue from sales of private and shared ownership dwellings and WHL / Loddon Borrowing). It is not possible to use the revenue from the sale of private homes to fund social ones. Social homes will need to be funded through s106 commuted sums and WHL / Loddon Homes borrowing. Loddon Homes need to be assured that the level of borrowing needed to part fund the project can be repaid. The priority is putting residents back on the estate on similar rent levels. To do this Loddon Homes will be receiving lower rental income from returning Gorse Ride Council tenants (Loddon Homes standard social rent is higher than WBC's) which means that it will take longer to clear the debt. Every effort will be made to replace the 136 social rented dwellings that will be lost, but much of this will depend on grant funding. We are talking to Homes England regarding grant funding to help make the numbers work. Homes England grant of £1.5m has already been secured to help deliver the 46 new homes on Phase 1 and there have been positive discussions with them about grant support to deliver Phase 2.</p> <p>4.17 There was a discussion on the amount of car parking provision and the pros and cons of allocated / unallocated parking spaces. The parking spaces are provided on plot, on street and in courtyards. SW pointed out that the overall provision still currently exceeds WBC's parking standards. AL asked why 1 space per dwelling has not been provided. There is a need to balance parking, attenuation, landscape and public open space requirements. Technical officers did not favour reducing the green spaces to provide more parking or like the idea of undercroft parking.</p> <p>4.18 Comments were made that unallocated parking on the street would cause problems. AL stated that the overall parking levels are fine as long as it is allocated. Housing Officers are continually dealing with parking disputes between neighbours where parking is not allocated. It was noted that the situation will need to be well managed as it is not possible to have allocated parking on adopted roads.</p> <p>4.19 The Chancellors announcement this Spring that made reference to energy efficient "future homes standard" and to ban gas / fossil-fuel heating systems in all new houses from 2025 was briefly mentioned. There was a discussion about incorporating green features such as solar panels / energy efficient heating systems to future proof the new homes</p> <p>4.20 The regeneration surgeries are running regularly fortnightly on Tuesday mornings. The manned Public Exhibition on the latest plans will be held on 11th and 16th May. Feedback / comments are invited by 30th May 2019.</p> | |
| <p>5.1</p> | <p>Any other business</p> <p>None – next Steering Group meeting tbc</p> | |