

WOODCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES 229

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Parish Council held on Thursday 22nd August 2024

The meeting started at 7.00 pm.

In attendance:

Cllrs Lucy Quinn (Chair), Gina McKay, Rob Woods and Neil McKay.

Also in attendance were Ian Philo Clerk, Borough Councillors Aline Hicks and David Ledger, and 6 members of the public.

1. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Wade Nash sent his apologies which was approved, and County Councillor David Robey sent his apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None.

2.2. Other Significant Interests

None

2.3. Other Interests

Councillor Rob Woods declared an interest in item 9 (Review Response to CALA Homes Planning Appeal).

3. Acceptance of Minutes.

The minutes of the Ordinary Meeting held on the 25th July 2024 were agreed as a true record.

Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Rob Woods.

The council voted 4-0 in favour.

Meeting adjourned for public participation 7.02 pm..

There were no comments from the members of the public.

Meeting reconvened at 7:02 pm.

4. Planning applications

4.1. PA/2024/1403

Pump Adjacent to Play Area at The Green, Front Road, TN26 3QE.

The Council made no comment.

4.2. PA/2024/1384

Annexe, Cruttenden Farm, Brook Street, TN26 3PW.

Change of use and extension to an agricultural barn to form a one-and-a-half

storey residential dwelling and 4-bay detached garage including associated parking and landscaping following the demolition of a redundant storage barn and static caravan.

The Council saw no issues and supported the application.

The Council voted 4-0 in favour to support. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Rob Woods.

4.3. PA/2024/1354

Forty Acre Oast, Shadoxhurst Road, TN26 3PW.

1 new self-build dwelling and associated landscape enhancements and parking provision.

It was noted that every effort had been made to ensure the proposal was ecologically and environmentally friendly. There were no other comments.

The Council voted 4-0 to support the application. Proposed by Councillor Rob Woods and seconded by Councillor Neil McKay.

4.4. NOT/2024/1458

Balcony Farm, Cuckoo Pitt Lane, TN26 3TF.

Prior notification for the change of use of agricultural buildings and land within its curtilage to 5 dwelling houses and associated operational development.

The Council noted that this was a reincarnation of a prior application, and there was some concern over the access for 5 houses given the narrowness of the lane. There was also some concern over the drainage and potential for flooding.

The Council voted 4-0 to support the application subject to the planner's consideration of the Council's concern regarding access and potential flooding.

4.5. AP-90677

Appeal under Section 28, Church Elms Farm, Redbrook Street.

The Council agreed to draw up a letter in response to the appeal to submit to the appeals planning inspector.

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Rob Woods.

5. Woodchurch Windmill

The Clerk read the notes taken at the meeting held at Ashford Borough Council on 31st July 2024.

See **Appendix 1** below for a copy of the notes.

6. Internal Audit

The Council agreed to accept the offer from Mulberry to lock in the rate of £70 per for the internal audit hour through to 2026-2027 inclusive. .

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Neil McKay.

7. Committee of The Whole

Councillor Rob Woods as acting Chair to the Committee of the Whole (CotW)

summarised the meeting, see **Appendix 2** for a draft excerpt from the CotW minutes of 15th August 2024, and the following recommendations were made.

To adopt the general format of The Resilience Plan circulated by the Clerk, however noting that there is nothing practical that the Council is able to do to improve the sewerage system, other than maintain pressure on Southern Water. To nominate Councillors/members of the public to certain tasks.

To investigate establishing a Youth Parish Council with some limited powers. The Council to approach existing youth groups in the village and also the school. The Clerk to write an article in the next Quarterly Newsletter.

To investigate ways of mitigating the parking issues around the village. The Clerk to liaise with District Councillor David Robey to ascertain the results of the research carried out a couple of years ago.

To contact Peter New to ascertain if there is an alternative hardware to CCTV or process that could be used instead, without empirical evidence of the need to fund CCTV. Peter New to be invited to speak at one of the forthcoming meetings.

To agree thank Ashford Borough Council for the grant. To adopt UKPN to carry out all contestable and non-contestable work (£11,110) and engage electrician to carry out the internal cabling in the Hub building in preparation.

To agree for the Clerk to insert an item in the Parish Council Newsletter article to see how much interest there is in allotments and if there are any landowners prepared to offer land for allotments.

The above recommendations were agreed 4-0. Proposed by Councillor Neil McKay and seconded by Councillor Rob Woods.

8. Local Plan

The Council voted 4-0 to agree to send the Local Plan response compiled by Councillor Rob Woods see **Appendix 3** to Ashford Borough Council, noting a small amendment to the percentage wording to read "90% would want to move back if they could".

Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Gina McKay.

9. Review Response to CALA Homes Planning Appeal

The Council agreed 3-0 to the response letter to send to the appeals planning inspector. See **Appendix 4** for the response submitted.

Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Neil McKay.

10. Hub License Agreement

The Council agreed to the much shorter license agreement subject to the name of the licensee being amended to the new charity name.

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Gina McKay.

11. Public Convenience Refurbishment

The Council agreed to defer the decision of the contractor until quality of workmanship

could be confirmed from each contractor.

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Rob Woods.

12. Defibrillator Inspection

The Council agreed to a monthly inspection of the 4 defibrillators that the Council is responsible for.

The council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed by Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Gina McKay.

13. Hedge Cut Village Green Extension

The Council agreed to the hedge cut on the Village Green Extension, this will be carried out by G Bugden at the same cost as last year (£150).

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed Councillor Lucy Quinn and seconded by Councillor Neil McKay.

14. Service of Tractor Mower

One of the employees mows the outfield of the village green that the gang mower is unable to mow. He supplies and uses his own mini tractor to carry out this work and requested a contribution to the annual service cost.

The Council agreed to pay 50% of the service cost up to a maximum of £250.

The Council voted 4-0 in favour. Proposed Councillor Rob Woods and seconded by Councillor Neil McKay.

15. Finances

Items for Payment and Bank Reconciliation

The council noted that £40 direct debit to ICO stated in July items for payment should have been for August and excluded a £5 discount for payment by Direct Debit therefore resulting in a debit in August of just £35.00.

Income of £5005 in current account is made up of £5000 transfer from deposit account and £5 from Woodchurch Hub payment for lease/licence agreement to 2028 inclusive. There is an additional £11,108.46 to be added to the items for payment, this is the upfront and entire payment required by UKPN before they will carry out any work. The Clerk requested payment in tranches but this was flatly declined.

Bank Reconciliation	July 2024
Opening Balance	£6102.43
Salaries & HMRC	1182.00
Running Costs	2858.28
Management Agreement Pavilion Utilities	66.00
Total	£4106.28
Income	5005.00
Expenditure	4106.28

Cashbook Closing Balance **£7001.15**

Bank Statement Balance **£6102.43**

Income 5005.00

Expenditure 4106.28

Bank Closing Balance **£7001.15**

Difference **0.00**

Reserve Account

Opening Balance 80873.19

Transfer to Current A/C -5000.00

Interest 83.53

Balance **£75956.72**

Total Held at July 31st 2024 **£82957.87**

Items For Payment August 2024

	Items For Payment August 2024			
Payments Made since the last Meeting			Amount	Vat
Direct Debit	EDF	Pavilon Electricity	£ 66.00	£ -
Direct Debit	Castle Water June Direct Debit	Pavilion Water	£ -	£ -
Direct Debit	ICO	Data protection fee (didn't debit in July)	£ 35.00	£ -
Subtotal			£ 101.00	£ -
Items for Approval				
Payment Method	Payee	Description	Total payable	VAT
Bacs	Salaries (incl £544.50 back pay)	Employee salaries TBC	£ 1,982.75	£ -
Bacs	I Philo	Petrol	£ 32.40	£ -
Bacs	HMRC	HMRC	£ 269.30	£ -
Bacs	G McKay (Defib Warehouse)	2 sets defibrillator pads	£ 196.80	£ 32.80
Bacs	Black Forge Signs	Village sign restoration	£ 3,000.00	£ 500.00
Bacs	Memorial Hall	Room and Hall Hire	£ 18.00	£ -
Bacs	D Jarvis	Petrol (mower and strimmer)	£ 24.25	£ -
Bacs	UKPN	Power Upgrade	£ 11,108.46	£ 1,851.41
Bacs	Ian Philo	Planning application PC noticeboard	£ 199.00	£ -
Bacs			£ -	£ -

Subtotal			£ 16,830.96	
		Total	£ 16,931.96	£ 2,384.21

15.1. External Audit

The Council Resolved to note the external auditor report.

The external auditor has issued the AGAR Certificate, for 2023-2024. This has been displayed on the website.

There were 3 advisories on the covering letter which were not deemed of importance to be attached to the certificate: 1 Early Publishing of Right to Inspect. The Clerk explained that the auditor had failed to note that the Council agreed the AGAR at an Extraordinary Meeting on 7th May and therefore prior to the 30th May Ordinary Meeting. 2 The variances lacked any mathematical workings, however they were within the boxes rather than a separate sheet. 3 There was no cashbook, this is incorrect and one was sent by email.

16. Correspondence.

The Clerk was asked about the nature boards that were on the green and why they had not been put back up, they could be attached to the fencing around the play area. The enquirer was referred to the Village Green Charity.

Received further comment on the wooden fingerpost on the corner where Susan's Hill meets Front Road is missing. The member of the public has been referred to the museum.

Have chased up KCC regarding overgrown tree along the footpath to the windmill. KCC has responded on the day of the meeting to highlight that the footpath is clear and this must be sorted out between the complainant and the owner of the land that the tree sits on.

A report of offensive smell emanating from dog waste in litter bin near the junction of Front Road and Lower Road. The Clerk visited the site that evening but the bin had been emptied.

Have received three enquiries regarding councillor vacancies.

17. Items for Information or Agenda for Next Meeting

Consider action that can be taken to apply further pressure on Southern Water with regard to flooding and sewerage capacity.

18. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at 7pm on Thursday the 26th September 2024 in the Memorial Hall Annexe.

Signed _____
Chair

Dated _____

Appendix 1

Meeting With ABC 31st July 2024

Present. Woodchurch: Ian Philo, Wade Nash, Rob Woods, Mel Bailey.

ABC: Simon Betty, David Kemp, Victoria Cooper-Samways, David Ledger, Aline Hicks.

Woodchurch Mill representatives have been trying to get answers from ABC for the past 5 years, with ABC failing to provide any constructive response. At the last meeting, held on 24th August 2023, ABC recommended the sale of windmill. However, subsequently the decision to sell was deferred, with no reason offered.

It was highlighted that the budget at ABC remains severely constrained, and going forward they would like to seek a buyer on the open market or at auction to achieve the correct market value. However, when pressed they were unable to suggest a guide price when asked. It was noted that the windmill has several restrictive covenants attached to its ownership, which would impact on the value. ABC would require any prospective buyer to abide by these covenants and listing requirements despite having allowed the mill to fall into disrepair.

Following storm damage in January 2019, ABC had the sails and fan tail removed, for safety reasons. ABC to date has made no attempt to make an insurance claim for the storm damage which would go some way to relieve the financial burden.

It is thought that up to £300,000 would require spending to bring the structure back to the condition when it was listed. If the mill were to fail to realise a bid at auction it remains unclear what value ABC would put on the mill given that any buyer would have to assume all repair costs.

ABC would not object to the mill being declared an Asset of Community Value (ACV).

ABC showed an interest in a more holistic approach that was put forward, whereby WPC and ABC form a partnership and over the long-term help form a Community Land Trust whereby income can be ploughed back into the mill. However, this would require the ability to secure land and would be subject to a housing needs study. ABC also agreed to ascertain if any of the land parcels in Woodchurch owned by ABC could be deemed to be rural exception sites appropriate for affordable housing development. It would be an opportunity to help shape the local plan and deliver affordable/ethical housing that the community needs rather than what the developers want.

It was noted that KCC had brought some of their mills up to scratch, and would be useful to ascertain how much KCC spent on the repair of each one

It was suggested to ABC that the Mill should be added to the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. This would add to the wider, formal, awareness of the plight of the Mill.

Action points.

- ABC to discover the KCC renovations cost of a mill.
- ABC to look into why insurance claim made and if one can be made now.
- Woodchurch to proceed with registration as an ACV.

A further meeting was penciled in for 2 months.

Appendix 2

Excerpt From The Minutes of the Committee of The Whole Meeting held on 15th August 2024 Regarding The Village Plan

Winter Resilience Plan

Noted we have no fluvial flooding problems but to use the template provided by the Clerk with focus on mitigating the impacts of sewerage system flooding in parts of the village and on the risks to vulnerable residents of cold weather, storm disruption , electricity outages and heavy snow.

Actions - 1) RW to get feedback from Appledore Road residents on flooding mitigations. 2) Nominate key personnel to oversee the process and take on key roles. 3) Consider role of the Hub.

Improved Mobile Connectivity

Deferred to next meeting.

Engaging with Young People

Following any expressions of interest, to nominate a small group inc coopted members if required to consider the feasibility, issues and options for a Woodchurch Youth Council.

Actions - 1) Clerk - Article in next 4-page newsletter to assess interest from younger residents and parents. 2) GM - to advise members on the School Council. 3) All - use contacts to seek views of those already involved in youth service provision.

Parking and Traffic Safety

To continue to seek interventions and examine ways of mitigating parking challenges in the village and increasing public safety.

Action - Clerk to contact Cllr Robey for views on progress on Highways related matters prior to Cllr E Jones' resignation.

CCTV Camera Provision

Whereas it is known that certain crimes are regularly committed in and around the Village Green there is no empirical crime related evidence to support spending the £6000 budget allocated.

Actions - RW to contact Peter New to seek advice on the options available including more proactive methods and/or alternative hardware.

Power Upgrade to the Hub and Toilet Refurbishment.

Following the grant of £11000 from ABC to continue this connected project as a priority.

Actions 1) To endorse the Clerk's appointment of UKPN (sole provider) to undertake the recabling as soon as possible. 2) All - Agree contractor for the toilet refurbishment at next Full Council meeting 3) Clerk - Examine costs of portable toilets. 5) Clerk - to write article for next newsletter.

Allotments Provision.

As a first stage, to ascertain the true demand for allotments in the Parish noting the legal requirement for the Council to seek appropriate land if a minimum of 6 residents petition the Council.

Actions - Clerk to write article in next newsletter requesting any interest in donating land to the village for that purpose. (Noted the possible links with the Local Planning process which are being considered separately at the August meeting of the Full Council)

Windmill Update - Minutes of recent Meeting with ABC already distributed to members.

Actions:- Suggest W Nash/MBailey write an article for the newsletter following the outcome of the follow up meeting in September.

At The Next CotW Meeting

Progressing the idea of a Neighbourhood Plan. (NB members may wish to read the Neighbourhood Plan recently endorsed overwhelmingly by residents in Tenterden)

Actions - In the light of substantial new interest from residents in joining the Council, to revisit the report on Council structure to ascertain the value of a Planning and Highways Committee to deal with this and Item 5.4 above).

General Recommendation - That residents are updated on the progress of the Council's Village Plan commitments via a dedicated report in the next newsletter.

Action Clerk

Appendix 3

Q6 Aspirations for the borough over the next 15 yrs

To maintain the quintessentially English pastoral character of the Borough closely associated with the Garden of England moniker whilst concurrently developing an administrative centre (Ashford town Centre) that we can be proud of and which reflects the needs of residents and visitors.

Q7 Issues/ Challenges the borough faces that need to be addressed over the next 15 yrs The impact of changes in consumer behaviour on the town centre and businesses in rural villages

Wealth inequalities - The need for more well paid jobs (over living wage) and skills development in the manufacturing and cultural sectors - Ensuring that key regenerative developments (eg Old Railway Works and Brompton Bikes) are completed in the next term to alleviate the wealth inequalities identified in the Index of Multiple deprivation in the South Ashford area.

The impact of large housing developments in other authorities Eg Otterpool and Charing Heath on the current travel to work or travel for leisure patterns.

Flexible housing strategies that reflect the needs of different demographics (elderly, young people, new marrieds etc) including a greater emphasis on ethical housing.

Potential growth of second home ownership where properties are left vacant for long periods.

The need for greater diversification in the agricultural sector to overcome the production challenges faced by our growers.

Ensuring land availability & low cost accommodation

1. for overseas and local workers in the agricultural/horticulture sector
2. for care and health service workers to meet the growing demands of an ageing demographic
3. for other key workers

The impact of the London housing market (DfL's) and its solutions for accommodating its homeless residents

Managing climate change

Q8 How can the new local plan address these issues

Use Neighbourhood Planning principles to allow individual communities (parishes) to shape their own communities by identifying land where different types of developments are acceptable and where they're not

Taking a more scientific approach to the allocation of homes in rural settlements by differentiating between those in need of additional homes in order to make them sustainable and those that are considered sustainable already.

By defining "key worker" and identifying dedicated key worker sites combined with land allocated for a dedicated network of ethical housing sites

Adopting a Town Centre first policy

Policies to encourage diversification in the agriculture sector whilst maintaining the Garden of England sense of place

Defining land where the encouragement of energy generation from natural sources (eg solar) will take primacy over agriculture/horticulture developments. (or vice versa)

Take a less parochial view and interpret the impact of big ticket developments in neighbouring authorities on the wellbeing of Ashford's residents and their ease of movement

Identify areas where second home ownership could be or will not be permitted

Key Issues for Local Planning in Woodchurch

In May 2024, Woodchurch Parish Council's Village Plan was endorsed by residents at the Annual Parish Meeting. Informed by responses to the Village Survey 2023/24, it demonstrated that the current tenure imbalance has resulted in a large unmet need for smaller and more easily manageable accommodation from elderly residents, those forced out of the village by high property prices and those wishing to return in the next 5 years.

In the light of the Village Plan consultations, The Parish Council revised its key aims and objectives. The following aim and associated objective relates closest to the Local Planning process

Aim - To be a strong voice on behalf of the local people and businesses, representing their views.

Objective - To communicate with our residents, relate their views, needs and aspirations to the appropriate statutory and non-governmental bodies. To work with these organisations to ensure services and future development are responsive to local needs.

What are our local needs?

The Parish's elderly demographic is far greater than any other parish in the Weald South Ward (Source last Census)

38% of the local population are estimated to be aged over 70 compared to 10% aged 20-40 (Source - responses to village survey 2023)

57% of the homes in the parish are occupied by 2-persons.

15% say family has moved away due to a lack of suitable/affordable accommodation (Source - responses to village survey 2023). 90% of that would want to move back if they could.

21% say members of their family will be looking for a property in Woodchurch in the next 5 years. Of that group 61% would be looking to purchase - 29% requiring social or shared ownership

Of Woodchurch's working population twice as many (30%) work outside the Parish compared to those who work in the village. (inc Full time, p/t and home working)

Evidence (from Survey 2023) suggests that the local population is highly supportive of its local businesses notably its pubs (83%), post office (89%), general store(74%) butchers (59%) coffee shop(71%) and garages (61%)

43% of Woodchurch residents are retired. The high elderly demographic is generally less happy with internet and IT than the younger demographic which helps to sustain our local businesses and social groups

Residents have indicated that the best mix of housing to meet their future needs are
Tenure:

1 bedroom inc bungalows (42%)

2-3 bed inc bungalows (72%)

4 bed (14%)

Type

Shared ownership (49%)

Homes to rent (34%)

Market homes (n/a)

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9% of the elderly demographic or persons with disabilities, would seek to downsize or move to more suitable accommodation if it was available (This is estimated at about 90 households) The most recent analysis of the local Primary School admission numbers supports the demographic data. 16 places at the school were not filled at September 2023/24

Summary

1. Woodchurch has no wish to become a closed community but the current tenure imbalance needs to be addressed. The imbalance was exacerbated by the outline approval of 40+ homes on open countryside off Front Road in 2022 (reserved matters refused and now subject to appeal)
2. A similar criticism has been levelled at a proposed development on Appledore Road which was included in the last Local Plan, planning approval refused on appeal for 20 dwellings on planning policy grounds and subsequently resubmitted concurrently with a further submission for inclusion in the Local Plan to 2042 (Ref P41/173)
3. Should these applications be acceptable to ABC planners and H M Inspectorate the Council is pleased that the affordable component on each site should help to satisfy some of the local demand for up to 3 bed homes. However the majority of the homes proposed are not what the village needs, will not be aimed at locals and moreover, represents an equivalent of around 15 years' of windfall approvals on infill sites which in the past was sufficient to maintain the critical mass that sustains the village's businesses and which has contributed positively to the sense of place.
4. The local plan to 2042 is an opportunity to address the tenure imbalance and infrastructure weaknesses such that a) local needs take primacy and b) Woodchurch's rural sense of place is maintained.
5. Woodchurch has a strong sense of place formed by a strong identity deeply felt by inhabitants and visitors, compounded by heritage assets such as the Church, Village School, Village Life Museum, The Village Green. Woodchurch Windmill and the Rare Breeds Centre. Any further substantial developments of market homes that erode the feel of Woodchurch as a rural community spanning both The Weald of Kent and Romney Marsh within the Garden of England is unwelcome.
6. If the 2 applications referred to above receive approval, our residents will have to accept an equivalent of a 15 year supply of market homes built mainly on agricultural land/open space outside the village confines given the lack of appropriate and available housing land within the confines.
7. If the Parish Council had had the data it now has at the last round in 2015 the likelihood is that it would not only have objected to the Appledore Road site (now Ref P41/173) but promoted the idea of it being classified as a rural exception site given its close proximity to the existing grouping of social housing and shared ownership schemes in that part of the village. The Parish Council believes that an ethical housing scheme could be brought forward on it with a legal planning agreement in place to ensure that the homes will always remain affordable, will support home working, will be for people such as key workers in housing need (eg agricultural workers or care staff at the local Residential Home) and prioritised to those with a strong local connection to Woodchurch.

8. There are a number of Local Plan submissions presented to the Borough Council for inclusion in the Local Plan which in the view of the Parish Council, would not normally be acceptable due to planning policy constraints and their negative effect on the essence of the village. We would therefore recommend their refusal

The Rectory Close site Ref (P41/236) for the same reasons as in the last round - on grounds of inappropriate location, impact on open countryside, impact on the Conservation Area and Church, access, loss of amenity due to traffic movement, loss of natural habitat and public safety

Land West of Lower Road - (P41/010) on the grounds that this is open space within the Woodchurch Conservation Area and that several proposed housing developments on abutting land have recently been refused and an appeal rejected confirming the Parish Council's view that any further housing on this key open space will create a harm to the village that is greater than the benefit

Land east of Lower Road (P41/208) - principally on grounds of its impact on the Conservation Area, an additional layer of housing, access, loss of amenity due to traffic movements and inadequate highway infrastructure.

Land West of Front Road - (Ref P41/202) (rear of land approved in outline for 40+ homes) principally on the grounds of inappropriate size and location, impact on open countryside, access, traffic movement, inadequate highway infrastructure, public safety, loss of natural habitat and its impact on the existing flooding problems in the village. This application also includes a sizeable solar farm. Whilst the Council is generally supportive of clean energy projects -

a) this development would further erode the countryside setting and views. Its harm to the rural sense of place is considered to vastly exceed the benefit

b) that the Borough Council has the power to put conditions on any development requiring the installation of photovoltaic equipment. The Parish Council was pleased that ABC's Planning Committee recently agreed a condition requiring the owner of 37 The Green, Woodchurch to install such equipment. This Council feels such conditions should be the norm.

The land proposed for 80-85 homes (Ref P41/202) also on Appledore Road is in the view of the Parish Council unlikely to be acceptable in planning policy terms given its location outside the village confines, access issues and impact on the countryside. However given its very close proximity to application ref P41/173 and the existing grouping of social and shared ownership accommodation in Bridge Close/Brattle, the Parish Council feels it too, could, in principle, be considered as a rural exception site in order to meet the current unmet need for low cost, energy efficient accommodation by different demographic groupings in the village.

The supply of social homes in the village has, like everywhere else, been affected by Right to Buy but with the right mechanism in place, it would be possible to sidestep Right to Buy legislation and maintain a stock of truly affordable housing in perpetuity.

Conclusions

There is little or no available land for development within the village confines. Any new developments will need to take place on or around the edges of the village and will

inevitably impact on the rural setting and in some cases on the character of the Conservation Area including the Open Space “green lung” in the centre of the village.

There is small demand in the village for homes of more than 3 bedrooms. The majority need is for 1, 2 and 3 bed accommodation which is diametrically opposed to the type and size of accommodation developers want to impose on the village.

In the view off the Parish Council all the sites submitted for inclusion in the Local Plan (with the exception of Appledore Road (Ref P41/173) which is still subject to a planning decision, should be rejected for market homes development on a range of planning policy grounds.

The Parish Council recognises the need for more housing nationwide but feels that no two villages are the same. Decisions that have lead to market housing developments in Woodchurch on high value land wrought by low supply and high demand stoked by Ashford’s “38 minutes to London” tag has negatively affected the unique character and rural sense of place and increased the cost of accommodation (both purchase and rental) beyond that which many of our residents, especially those in low paid and/or key worker roles, can afford.

Woodchurch’s residents, especially those with a strong connection to the place, primarily want to see the character of the place preserved and focus put on a supply of new homes that will satisfy their unmet needs.

Whilst there is a demand for market homes, there is also a high demand for social rented or shared ownership properties and a supply of new single storey accommodation which for the past several years has not been satisfied, other than through ad hoc availability at two residential parks in the village.

If the 2 sites on Appledore Road can be designated through the Local Planning process as rural exception sites, it would allow the Parish Council to examine ways of providing a solid stock of appropriate and low cost housing aimed at meeting the needs of the village.

There is demand for appropriate accommodation in the next 5 years from people wishing to return to the village.

The village’s demographics, particularly its elderly retired demographic are a contributing factor in the sustainability of Woodchurch’s key businesses and public services. The village already has a critical mass of residents and visitors such that new homes of over 3 beds aimed at an external market are not required to support businesses.

If the 2 developments currently in abeyance in the village are approved, it is highly likely that the admissions gap at the local school will be narrowed, if not closed altogether. However, if more affordable, cheap to run, homes are built to attract a younger demographic, one would expect the local primary school to become sustainable in the long term. The village needs to move towards demographic equilibrium in order to sustain our businesses and social groups and key public facilities such as the School.

Appendix 4

Woodchurch Parish Council

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Appeal by CALA Homes on Planning (reserved matters) application Ref OTH/2024/1141 - Land between 82-120 Front Road, Woodchurch

Woodchurch Parish Council is commenting on the new evidence supplied by Southern Water and the developer's consultants, Motion, on the drainage strategy for this development.

With the benefit of historical information, the Parish Council is uniquely placed to comment not only on the most recent information but also the impact this development, if approved without full investigation, could have on the wellbeing and health of our residents in Appledore Road who for many years have endured flooding at their properties.

In 2012, in a study into the options for foul water provision dated 20/7/2012, Southern Water reported its conclusions on a proposal to discharge .6 litres/second of foul flow from 10 new homes in to the sewerage system (manhole 3401) in Front Road. The results were clear. The proposed development would increase flows that would create a greater risk of flooding. The costly remedy, proposed by Southern Water at the time would be to increase the diameter of the foul water sewer in Front Road from 150 - 225mm for a distance of 569 metres. Those infrastructure improvements were never undertaken and the 10 homes were not built.

The wellbeing of our residents generally, but chiefly in the Appledore Road area, is the key reason this Council has consistently requested a Grampian Clause requiring that works are carried out before any homes are built on this site. Without that condition it is difficult to see how Southern Water, the developer or Kent County Council can give cast iron guarantees that the feed-in flows from an additional 40+ homes will not impact further on them.

We note that the developer has instigated a Level 1 capacity flow enquiry with Southern Water - the most basic form of enquiry and that Southern Water's response to CALA Homes is very different to that of the more comprehensive 2012 options survey. It now claims there is adequate capacity in the local sewerage network to accommodate a foul flow of 0.36 l/s for more than 40 homes at the same manhole despite no infrastructure improvements.

They do however, continue to say no surface water flows (existing or proposed) can be accommodated within the existing foul sewerage system but even with an on site tanking arrangement planned, the Parish Council considers it is impossible to gauge the sewer feed in rates after periods of heavy rainfall, for example, and by extension, the impact on our residents.

There appears to be no consensus on the flow rates. Motion, in its report, refers to a flow of .29 litres per second and a calculation by a previous consultant of .45 litres per second. In short, the Parish Council considers the outcome of the Level 1 enquiry and its presentation as evidence by the developer to be an optimistic scenario and not the worst case scenario.

Southern Water has been asked for an explanation but has not responded to the Parish Council's request.

Given that

- A. There is little consensus on the flow rates
- B. That Southern Water reneged on its original proposals to safeguard the village,
- C. That the current proposal is to erect 300% more homes on the site than the 2012 proposal,
- D. That Southern Water's calculations exclude surface water flows
- E. That flooding still occurs regularly in the lower part of the village (Appledore Road) and
- F. That the the flooding has a severe negative impact on our households, the Parish Council would have expected a more scientific or thorough analysis to have been undertaken and for an explanation of the most recent flow rate calculations to be shared with the village.

The Parish Council now looks to HM Inspectorate to use its powers to prevent the developer from overloading our sewerage system even further before Southern Water has taken steps to upgrade the system (as it promised 12 years ago) to cope with the additional load and give assurances to residents in the lower lying parts of the village that their properties, their health and wellbeing are safeguarded.

DRAFT