

SWINDON PARISH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

held on

28th May 2013

at Swindon Village School

Present:

Peter Allen (Chairman of the Parish Council)
Shaun Cullimore (Clerk to the Parish Council)
Tracey Crews (Head of Planning, Cheltenham Borough Council)
Craig Hemphill (Principal Planning Officer, Cheltenham Borough Council)
Bernard Fisher (Cheltenham Borough Councillor and Gloucestershire County Councillor)
26 members of the public

Introduction by Peter Allen

Peter Allen introduced Tracey Crews, guest speaker, to the meeting. Tracey had had a long involvement with the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), the subject of her talk.

Presentation by Tracie Crews

Tracey described the hierarchical structure of planning policy. There is a National Planning Policy Framework. Whilst Cheltenham has a local plan produced in 2006 it does not fit within the current Framework. Cheltenham Borough Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council and Gloucester City Council are working together to produce the JCS. The document must identify the housing needs of the area through to 2031 and develop preferred options for how those needs should best be met. Local plans will then be produced that are compliant with the JCS.

The JCS activity is currently identifying preferred sites for development. A public consultation period of at least six weeks will then commence. Tracie stated that the Borough Council will listen to public comments and concerns but may need to take decisions in the global interest that do not please a particular demographic.

Cheltenham must produce an Objectively Assessed Need document that identifies the housing needs of the area, supported by a body of evidence.

Clearly there is local opposition to housing development. Tracey made the point that local planning must be proactive. It is not possible for Cheltenham Borough Council to simply say "no" to development. They must objectively quantify the need for housing and identify preferred areas where development should take place. In the absence of such a plan a developer who appeals against refused planning permission is likely to be successful.

Once higher level planning policy documents are in place more detailed Neighbourhood Plans can be produced (e.g. by Parishes). Whilst production of plans may be expensive financial help may be available (e.g. from the Government who have committed £50m for this purpose, the Prince's Foundation, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and from the National Association of Local Councils). Whilst the JCS will be concerned with high level planning considerations, Neighbourhood Plans would be able to shape the detail of developments.

Neighbourhood Plans can be produced that cover an area bigger than a single Parish, meaning that costs can be shared. There are simpler and cheaper alternatives to Neighbourhood Plans though they are unlikely to carry as much weight.

There was discussion of the figure for the number of persons per household used in the planning process. Tracey confirmed that the planning process was using the latest figures.

Cheltenham Borough Council are working to quantify the land supply. Unless the Borough has a five year supply of usable development land it will be difficult to prevent developers developing in non-preferred areas. Tracie confirmed that the land supply includes sites that have planning permission but have not been developed. Many developments are stalled due to the economic climate.

There is a development consortium waiting in the wings that wants to undertake a development of approximately 4500 houses, three primary schools and a secondary school. At the moment they are waiting for the Joint Core Strategy to be finalised so that their development can be compliant with it and intend to invite full public participation. However, if they feel that other developers are gaining competitive advantage by submitting early applications they may follow suit. Once it is published the JCS will identify preferred sites for development and provide a degree of protection from development for other sites. Tracey confirmed that at the present stage of development of the JCS does not identify specific areas.

In answer to a question Tracey stated that the use of brownfield sites, preferred by local residents, may not be cost effective due to the costs of clearing industrial contamination. The Borough Council can do what they can to promote the use of brownfield sites but cannot offer financial incentives to developers.

The Green Belt was identified to prevent the coalescence of Cheltenham and Gloucester and Cheltenham and Bishops Cleeve. The boundaries of the Green Belt must be reviewed regularly. The Green Belt does not offer protection from development if local housing needs cannot be met without incursion into the Green Belt. An area declared an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has the highest protection from development though even there development is not necessarily impossible.

Peter Allen expressed concern that the impact of development on surrounding areas needs to be considered. A large scale development outside Swindon Parish may still have significant impact on us (e.g. traffic, drainage). An holistic view is needed. Craig responded stating that these matters should be taken into account in the application and the County Council will address certain matters (e.g. traffic modelling).

Tracie expressed the opinion that people should engage with developers during consultation. This does not imply acceptance of what they want to do but allows people to influence development.

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council has good information regarding planning on its web site.

Report from Peter Allen

See attached.

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th May 2012 were accepted.

Report from Bernard Fisher

Following the May elections Bernard is both our County Councillor and Borough Councillor.

Bernard described the composition of the County Council. The Conservatives have 23 seats, the same as the Liberal Democrats and Labour combined. At the first meeting Labour had voted with the Conservatives, denying the Liberal Democrats the chairs of any committees.

On the subject of potholes Bernard reported that 41,677 had been fixed but the County Council faces an £84m backlog.

Bernard was asked to ask Chris Riley about the County Council's plans for resurfacing Hyde Land and Runnings Road.

He was also asked to see if County Councillor Vernon Smith's plan for potholes to be fixed in a single visit (rather than being marked first then subsequently repaired) was being pursued.

Bernard noted that commercial property can be converted to residential use without planning permission; only the building regulations apply. The former Odeon and Haines and Strange sites would be used for residential development.

With regard to the car sales businesses unloading cars on Manor Road, Bernard was asked if the County Council would consider making a creating a layby. Bernard also said he would see if there were any planning restrictions imposed on the car businesses.

Peter expressed concern that developers who made sub-standard road repairs were not being pursued by the County Council to make good the road surfaces.

The meeting closed at 10:50pm.