

Clifton Hampden NDO update

26/09/2024

The Parish Council has a statutory power to review and to provide input on all planning matters, whether big or small, that may impact the local area, its environment, and its residents. The proposed Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) for the village of Clifton Hampden is no exception.

Scrutiny of the NDO is very important because, unusually, it provides an alternative route to planning permission by allowing certain developments to proceed without the need for individual applications. Although the NDO is supposed to be a community-led project, opinions within the community are deeply divided. This division is the reason why the Examiner specifically asked the Parish Council to give consideration to the various concerns raised by the objectors.

It is important to acknowledge that current Parish Councillors, as individuals, are among those who have concerns about the proposals, which were promoted by the previous Parish Council. However, we have conducted a thorough and objective analysis of the community's concerns, as requested by the Examiner. We have tried to find balanced solutions to progress the NDO in a way that benefits the entire community.

We have had numerous meetings with the NDO Steering Group and interested parties promoting the NDO. In our recent meeting with the key stakeholders - Giles Baxter, (NDO Steering Group Chair, and member of CHandBNDO campaign group); Christopher Purvis, (Trustee of the Gibbs Family Trust and Church Warden); Charles Campion, (Savills Director for Rural Management and Land Agent for Gibbs Trust); and Christopher Brotherton, (a Director of Thomas Homes, the Developer) - held on 2nd September 2024 in public, the Parish Council sought responses to a number of key questions. However, in the view of the Parish Council, none of our concerns have been addressed. Specifically:

1. **Housing:** The Parish Council questions the validity of the NDO's assumptions and decisions because they do not align with SODC Local Plan H9 policy relating to Affordable Homes, nor with the community's survey responses, nor the Housing Needs Assessment. A key document in this context is the Viability Assessment (VA), which outlines the profitability expectations of the Landowner and Developer. Across all VAs (1, 2, and 3), along with other viability evaluations commissioned for this assessment, we have identified inconsistencies in the calculations for build costs and sale prices leading to significant variance in the projected outcomes. Infill development of larger housing in the parish within the past 3 years has already exceeded the HNA requirements for larger houses, and, therefore no more are needed.

Given these discrepancies, the Parish Council strongly recommends that the NDO plan be brought into compliance with SODC Local Plan H9 policy (Affordable Homes). This could be achieved by converting some of the

unrequested larger homes, or, smaller homes into affordable housing. Adjustments of the unit figures used for build cost and sale price within the range that is used in all the assessments reviewed can accommodate this change, without impacting the project viability.

The Developer has suggested that village residents might be given an opportunity to buy the new houses for a few weeks before they are put on the open market. A short opportunity for current villagers, who have cash ready to buy the new housing, is not an answer to the requests during the consultations for affordable housing for first-time buyers, houses for rent to young families or for downsizing. The covenants on village housing have to be long-lasting to ensure that the village remains a community rather than a rich dormitory suburb.

- 2. Surgery freehold.** We find a proposed recent change of the status of the freehold, as set out in a letter dated 28th February 2024 by the Developer, very difficult to justify. All the positions of the relevant bodies, including the surgery and the ICB, have been known for at least 3 years. And yet, it was only after the current Parish Council challenged Steering Group members on this very point that a change of policy to leave the freehold with the Developer was announced. We believe that the freehold should stay in the ownership of the community, as stated in the submitted NDO document, to ensure the community has a say in the long-term usage of the building.

We also find it difficult to accept the Developer's assurances that his company will continue to subsidise the rent for the surgery to the tune of c.£50,000/year for the next 18 years without this commitment being enshrined in a formal legal document.

- 3. Parking** is a worrying concern. Any proposal that increases parking stress and congestion, must be approached with great care and responsibility - especially as the surgery plans to increase its patient base from 3,500 to 7,000. Furthermore, the GP practice requires exclusive use of the parking spaces during working hours, potentially from 08:00 to 18:00, thus reducing the current 22 spaces shared with the village hall to just 9 dedicated spaces. The Village Hall Committee has said this is inadequate because it would severely impact village hall users and resident and visitor use. We note that the proposed cemetery car park on the Paddocks site, located approximately 300 metres from the school, would be available for use. This will go some way to addressing the issue during school runs, when the parking requirement is currently for 30 spaces at peak times. The entrance to this carpark will need modification if it is to be used for this purpose with cars exiting and entering at the same time. Car parking at the Barley Mow lies outside the Neighbourhood Planning Area and is too inaccessible to serve the village.
- 4. Flood risk.** The community is understandably concerned about any potential flood risks that this development may pose to an already fragile situation. Five

homes had to be evacuated in January 2024 due to flooding caused by surface runoff, on a scale not experienced before. The regular Thames' floods have been compounded by sewage discharge into the High Street. Even in non-flood times, there has been an increase in raw sewage released into the river. Thames Water recognises the current problems and an upgrade of the sewage works is planned for 2027 but we are told that "government targets for storm outflows are not expected to be met until 2045-50". The documents submitted as part of the NDO proposal do not sufficiently address these concerns, particularly regarding the management of runoff and sewage from the sites. The Parish Council are not satisfied by the Developer's statement that there is no risk, without this being indemnified. We also want assurances from Thames Water that the additional development will not increase the risk of flooding or lead to raw sewage discharges before the plan can be approved by the qualifying body.

5. **Post Office and shop** The failure of the NDO proposers to reveal the basic terms of the post office lease puts the whole parish in an inappropriate position. For example, we do not know what will happen should the current postmaster retire or the shop otherwise cease trading in whole or in part. The proposed arrangements in the NDO put the post office building ownership into the hands of a body which is not controlled by the Parish Council. The Parish Council must be able to review directly any clauses or restrictions on the property Title, the tenant's lease, and any other documents that could affect the asset management of the property.

Overall, the detailed examination we have conducted over the past few months has led us to believe that there are serious weaknesses in the NDO as it is being presented and that major changes are required before the proposals proceed to referendum. The Parish Council recommends the stakeholders to make changes which respond to the key concerns raised by residents and as set out in this document - otherwise it is unlikely that the Parish Council will allow the process to proceed to referendum.

Burcot and Clifton Hampden Parish Council