

## Notes of Meetings with Developers

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**present** NP Panel:- Ian Hill (SC), Gill Bindoff (NPCoG), Jeremy Bell (SC), Norman Perry (NPCoG), Tony Powell (NPCoG)  
Rachel Gill (NP Admin)

Note taking: Tom Bindoff & Terry Jackson

Sound recording: Peter Richardson

**25th May 2016 - Jeff Lowe (acting on behalf of Geoff Emmett), Alex Robinson (of Countryside Properties – house builders) & Ed Smith ( Wat 1)**

*Following an introduction where it was explained the objective of the meeting was to update developers/agents on the progress of the NP and to give them an opportunity to demonstrate how 'their' site/sites can meet the aims and objectives of the NP and it was made clear that the meetings are not part of the site selection process'. What Watlington Wants and What Watlington doesn't Want were listed, explaining that we are attempting to discover the 'tipping point' of what level of development would be acceptable and what would not be acceptable to local residents, there was some discussion about the 'wants' and 'don't wants' of Watlington.*

*Tony Powell went through the 3 stages involved in listing site preferences:*

- 1. Listing all possible sites starting with those suggested by SODC Listing*
- 2. Arriving at Potential Criteria, against which to objectively evaluate sites.*
- 3. Arriving at which sites are available, which are not available and which are unknown or not currently available but could be in future.*

*This was all done in communication with SODC and the list of criteria have also been justified deriving mainly from Consultation 2.*

*Alex Robinson stated that our aims were very laudable and a great starting point for them. Avoiding unsympathetic development is a driving factor; they have won awards for their housing designs and pride themselves on considering landscape features in their developments.*

*Jeremy Bell wondered about headline numbers and how sites will be connected. Alex responded that they would peel back the identity of the town and their architects and landscape architects would develop a proposal in keeping with the town and respectful of the AONB. They would explore the public rights of way with a view to perhaps utilising them for*

pedestrian access to the town in addition to the existing pedestrian way. Jeff mentioned that they have produced a conceptual plan of how the site will fit with housing on either side and landscape considerations. Alex went on to say that they have considered key frontages although reiterating it is just conceptual at this stage, they have given sensitive treatment to the Southern boundary and the Goggs as they will no doubt be concerned, offering mainly screening.

They touched briefly on flooding issues on site saying they'd been working with EA and SODC on what could be done to help the residents of the Goggs. They considered the problem to be with the stream not the site and suggested some on-site works to provide potential relief to the threatened and susceptible properties in the Goggs. Preliminary engineering drawings are available showing how surface water would be managed through a short ditch in the north of the site ~~They don't have engineer drawings but to summarize the idea is to focus on drainage on site~~ to divert and provide relief to the Goggs.

Gill B pointed out that it was actually a ground water issue that caused the recent problems to houses in the Goggs to which Alex replied that there was a ditch, swale and pond in the plans and that there had been detailed modelling which showed an improvement in the existing drainage situation. Jeff pointed out that they would be providing a permanent solution to improve the flooding situation. This has been discussed at some length with the EA and SODC who were agreeable to the proposed solution which involves approval to connect the proposed drainage to the existing highway system. The proposals will provide an improvement to the existing situation, and not just not make things worse or no better. When queried on access it was explained that they can provide the necessary splays to satisfy OCC and SODC. Jeff went on to add that they realised that if flooding and access issues were not dealt with the site would not get anywhere.

To Jeremy's question of how many houses, Alex replied they were looking at up to 40 units approximately. Jeff said that at 1.2 hectares the site could hold up to 42 but the final number will be determined by factors such as screening for the settlement and the AONB and flooding and access work. Alex mentioned that as the plan evolves it will become clear what is an appropriate level of development, stressing that at the moment it is all conceptual. Alex said that it will be important for the Neighbourhood Plan to determine its priorities from the site and how this can contribute to the overall delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan i.e. overall number of affordable homes that can be provided on site.

Gill B mentioned that Watlington NP are taking the Landscape Assessment Report very seriously to which Jeff L responded that he did n'ot understand ~~that why~~ there was no recommendation on access contained in the Landscape Assessment Report. Alex recognised that the Landscape Assessment implied a looser development may be more appropriate.

Jeremy B appreciated their conscientious approach and stressed that the NP need to think of

*the whole town and he would therefore encourage them to consider the pedestrian problems of connectivity to the flood plain land and not to only look on the single site.*

*Tony Powell asked if their research could reveal who they thought their potential clients would be. The response from Alex was that at the moment households in Watlington and surrounding areas are suppressed from moving up the housing ladder being unable to afford to buy so their target audience would be young families and those moving from towns and cities wanting the ever popular rural lifestyle. Tony asked if they'd seen our housing needs survey. They hadn't.*

*Jeff L said that the site will need policy compliant density and mix and affordability. He stated that it is not about opportunity for lots of executive style houses. They want to supply houses for people who want to remain or return to Watlington. Alex added that coming up with an acceptable mix is a puzzle to fit together and that more can be done with 40 houses than with 18.*

*Jeremy B said he'd be interested to see how such density would look. Alex explained that high density housing doesn't have to be unattractive to which Jeremy responded that the High Street was an excellent example of this having an incredibly high density.*

*Tony P said the big issue is that the market price of £280k – £285k for a low cost home was still NOT affordable for most first time buyers even with discounts. He asked 'How can you help with this?' Jeff L replied that SODC needs to be in discussion as to how to make the 40% work for Watlington. We need a real debate with SODC.*

*Tony P asked 'Did you know Watlington' to which Alex replied 'Yes, it offered good synergy. Tony wondered if they were looking at other sites in South Oxfordshire but the response was negative. Jeff L then handed out an aide-memoir which he'd prepared as a script for a more formal presentation.*

