

Hughenden Parish Council

Council Offices, The Common, Great Kingshill, Bucks HP15 6EN

Clerk of the Council – Mrs L M Turner

Tel: 01494-715296

E-mail: hughendenpc@btconnect.com

www.hughendenparishcouncil.org.uk

Our Ref: HPC/3404/HVRA

23rd April 2010

Hughenden Valley Residents Association
c/o Chairman - Mr P Cawte
12 Whitfield Road
Hughenden Valley
Bucks HP14 4NZ

Dear Paul,

The Parish Council has received three letters from Hughenden Valley Residents' Association recently. Two signed by Paul Cawte, Chairman of the Association, on 4th and 16th March 2010, and another, also dated 16th March 2010 from Dory Morgan, as chairman of the planning sub committee. As there is some overlap in the points raised it seems sensible to send one reply.

The Residents' Association (letter of 4/3/10) considers it should have been consulted before leaflets inviting attendance at an Open Day on 10th March 2010 were distributed throughout the Parish. The Council disagrees as this is a Parish wide initiative to which all parishioners were entitled to be informed at the same time. Residents in all wards used their networks to achieve this and the Council is grateful for this assistance. It may be that HVRA could have been advised of the content in more detail immediately prior to delivery but the comments in paragraph 2 of the letter of 4/3/10 are not justified and appear to be an over reaction to a consultation exercise. This is, however, in the past and the Council wishes to maintain and enhance co-operation with residents in all wards.

The Council has been accused of being secretive. Rural Housing has been an agenda item for some time (at least 5 years). A Parish Appraisal, Parish Plan, and Housing Needs Surveys in all wards provided the early part of the consultation process. Any suggestion that the Council was secretive about its interest in facilitating affordable rural homes is unjustified. The Open Day was another stage in the consultation process.

The process of establishing a need for rural affordable homes was completed, in the manner described above, before searching for, and identifying, a possible site. (see Dory Morgan's letter) The search was Parish wide and there is no justification for the assertion in Paul Cawte's letter of 16/3/10 that the 'focus on Hughenden Valley and the surrounding area of Green Belt/AONB causes this Association concern amounting to suspicion regarding the possible motives of the developers and the Parish Council'. What can this possibly mean? It is an insult to the professionalism and integrity of the Council and wholly unjustified.

The advice from English Rural Housing Association is pertinent here and may help to clarify some issues. 'Any site classified as brown field would have been within the development boundary and therefore not suitable for two reasons - firstly these sites are available for open market development, and are priced accordingly, and secondly the affordable housing could not be restricted to local occupancy. It is important to the Parish that the occupation of affordable housing is restricted to people with a local connection. All of Hughenden's green field sites are in Green Belt.'

The Parish Council's interest in, concerns for, and maintenance of, the beauty of the area in which we live is unquestionable. It is part of our *raison d'être*.

The consideration of potential sites and the discussions around these were the confidential element of the process, and rightly so. Land purchases and development are sensitive issues with possible commercial implications. There are also personal information implications when considering land owned by more than one individual. Therefore HPC asked the Rural Housing Trust, and later English Rural Housing Association, to look at potential sites and identify a possible way forward. Ten sites were considered suitable for further exploration and these remained confidential until a provisional selection had been made.

The Parish Council, which is committed to trying to facilitate affordable rural homes, voted unanimously in November 2009 to proceed to consultation on the Warrendene Road site. The 10th March 2010 date was the earliest for which plans and materials could be prepared, and staff made available. The venue was not ideal but larger halls were not available and it was felt inappropriate to delay consultation further.

HVRA has, of course, every right to oppose the development of 10 houses along Warrendene Road if it so wishes. Arguably, the time to do so should be if the proposals go to a full planning application. Then opposition can be on planning grounds rather than in trying to discredit the Council's processes. The Council does not doubt that there is opposition to the proposals and all views will be considered before a decision is made on next steps. This may involve a planning application or it could be related to site selection. It has always been the intention, and indeed, part of the process, for ERHA, HPC and WDC planning officers to review the information from the Open Day, other responses by letter and email, information provided by any residents' association, and HVRA reactions.

The Parish Council's flyer inviting residents to the Open Day has been criticized. However, careful reading and consideration might have produced a more measured response. The same care has not been shown in the latest flyer from HVRA. There are assertions, not facts, in it about the Exit Poll, drawing conclusions which are not statistically accurate. It must be remembered that it is those against a proposal who tend to make their views known, not the 'silent' majority. It was with some surprise that the Council learned that the HVRA planning sub committee has delegated powers to act alone, without necessarily referring to the executive committee. In comparison, the Parish Council is publicly accountable and governed by clear standing orders and processes.

Rest assured that the way forward will be evidence based. It would be inappropriate to start the whole process from scratch, as suggested in the last paragraph of Dory Morgan's letter. The Council and its partners will use the results of the consultation exercise to inform next steps. It hopes HVRA would agree that this should proceed without impugning the integrity of elected councillors. The manner in which Parish Councils conduct themselves is laid down in law, and adhered to by HPC, making them publicly accountable in ways that residents' associations are not.

The third paragraph of Paul Cawte's first letter concerns the actions of an individual. The Parish Council is unable to substantiate these allegations and cannot uphold the complaint and will therefore take no further action in this matter.

This letter is being copied to all those to whom HVRA sent their letters.

If you have any queries with the above please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs L M Turner
Clerk of the Council