

Community Housing

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Introductions and Purpose of the Meeting

- Neil Warner from John Fitch planning consultancy introduced himself. The consultancy is based in Oxford with an office in Blockton.
- Charlie Luxton from Charlie Luxton Design, an architectural practice based in Norton specializing in sustainable architecture, mentioned their involvement in a community-led housing project.
- J.J. Wiley, from an independent heritage, archaeology, and landscape assessment consultancy, noted that they live in Charbury and work locally, particularly in conservation areas.
- Rory Hunter, along with his wife India, will be looking at the construction site. He emphasized their local connection and desire to do the site justice.

Site History and Development Proposal

- The site has a history of development proposals.
- The current proposal involves four or five units in the center of the site.
- Five units would allow for a private drive, keeping density lower.
- The five units are considered the "engine room" to allow Rory to take on the site and finance further development.

Design Considerations and Community Needs

- The site has been identified as providing an important break within the village and a connection to the wider landscape.
- The development is designed to start just beyond the edge of the conservation area, respecting the existing garden line.
- The proposal is inspired by a farmstead, including a farmhouse, barn-type buildings, and smaller, accessible homes for rightsizing.

- The design aims to maintain a visual connection through the site to the wider landscape.

Housing Crisis and Community Benefits

- The speakers acknowledged concerns about development and its impact on the community.
- They also noted the current housing crisis and the government's push for new housing.
- Kingham is considered a sustainable location for housing due to its transport links, school, and shop.
- The speakers are interested in exploring opportunities to provide new access to the landscape, such as walking loops and access to the brook.
- They also suggested the possibility of rewetting the riverside, creating a community orchard, and other community benefits.

Biodiversity and Heritage

- The location of the houses does not impact the heritage orchard.
- There are plans to reintroduce local aqua variety trees and restore grassland.
- They are exploring interest in bird hides and access to a restored river.

Affordable Local Housing

- The speaker is the secretary of the Hook Norton Community Land Trust.
 - The trust built eight affordable rental houses, four for sale, and a community facility.
- The speaker states that if the village wants to pursue a similar project, a conversation can be had, but it is a "long and convoluted process."
- The speaker emphasizes that such a project needs to be driven and led by the community.

Technical Reports

- Initial reports suggest no archaeology.

- A transport assessment indicates no significant impact on traffic due to the small size of the development (five units).
- There is drainage potential for surface water through sustainable urban drainage.
 - A request has been submitted to Thames Water regarding capacity, with a response expected in the new year.
- The potential is to lose only one apple tree, which will be replaced with multiple new apple trees.
- Landscape visual impact: Negligible impact from roads and footpaths on the wider Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Conservation Area

- Previous applications lacked detailed expert reports, which this proposal aims to address.
- Previous schemes had built form on the front portion of the site, negatively impacting the conservation area's character.
- The design is pushed outside the conservation area boundary but within the line of the adjacent garden lines.
- The position and layout of the buildings seek to maintain a sense of visual openness and connection to the countryside.
- The speaker notes that housing has always been in demand and that the built environment evolves over time.

Community Feedback and Consultation

- Sheets, pens, and post-it notes are available for attendees to jot down thoughts and ideas.
- Comments can be emailed to the provided address with "Lockwood" in the description.
- Attendees are asked not to take photographs of the documents to avoid confusion with formal applications later on.
- The consultation process will be documented, including comments received and responses to those comments.

Proposal Overview

- The proposal is for five houses in the middle of the site.
- The aim is to create a village green space at the front of the site.
- There is an aspiration to provide access to the area at the back with a new footpath.
- The proposal will be an outline, focusing on general principles rather than specific details like window placement.

Additional Considerations

- Arboriculture works have been conducted, identifying only one impacted tree.
- Preliminary ecological appraisals have been carried out.
- Contaminated land has not yet been assessed but will be addressed if present.

Development Details and Timeline

- Preliminary application process is underway with current landowners.
- Target application submission: Q1 2026, with potential on-site start in early 2027.
- Construction duration: Approximately 15 months, aiming for completion by mid-2028.
- Proposal includes 5 houses with consideration for community benefits like a riverside walk.

Housing and Community Land Trust

- The five houses are essential for financial viability and avoid triggering requirements for an adopted road.
- Exploring possibilities for affordable housing or an almshouse on the front of the site.
- Community input is sought for the remaining land, potentially through a community land trust.

Concerns and Assurances

- A resident expressed concerns about the community benefits not materializing or the land being developed by someone else.
- The developers stated that the purchase agreement includes a lockout, requiring them to submit the agreed-upon plan.
- The developers assured that they would not sell the land to another developer for a larger project.

Planning and Community Input

- Biodiversity net gain will be addressed, with a proposal to enhance the bottom of the site, secured for 30 years through legal agreements.
- Community input is desired for the front of the land, including discussions on maintenance responsibilities.
- The developers are open to the parish council taking on the maintenance of any community space created.

Application Details

- A detailed application is preferred to address concerns, including those related to barn owls.
- An outline application would only provide basic information about the consent for a certain square footage.
- A detailed application is possible given the information available, and discussions are ongoing regarding the process.
- Due to the context and conservation area status, more information than just a red line indicating house placement is necessary.

Community Access Area Proposal

- The idea is to create a community access area with a pond, planting, walking area, benches, and open space.
- Engagement with the community is encouraged to understand their needs and create a suitable structure.

- The developers are open to conversations with a group of people who have a clear idea of how they would like to see the land used.
- Plans include biodiversity net gain, 30 years of landscape improvement, and grassland improvement, with potential re-wetting of the river.

Housing Details

- Two houses at the front will be single story to avoid overlooking issues.
- Space standards and distances to boundaries have been considered to ensure compliance.
- The single-story homes are intended as "homes for life," suitable for people who want to downsize but stay in the village.
- The aim is to create a mixed community with different types of homes.

Land Ownership and Maintenance

- Ownership and maintenance of the undeveloped land will depend on discussions and outcomes.
- Options include working with a Land Trust or establishing a fund for maintenance.
- Community input is crucial in determining the future of the land.
- The balance between development and community benefit needs to be addressed.

Community Concerns

- Concerns were raised about the maintenance of the common areas, particularly the pond.
- Parking issues at the station were mentioned as a related concern.
- A resident asked for guarantees that additional houses won't be built on the site later.
- Infrastructure, especially sewage, was raised as a concern due to existing problems and planned new developments.

Guarantees and Restrictions

- The purchase agreement is conditional on the application.
- BNG credits at the back of the site would legally restrict development for 30 years.
- The land in front remains in the conservation area, providing character and appearance protection.
- The existing conservation area status means that any future development would still need to address its impact.

Drainage and Sewage

- Thames Water is assessing the system's capacity.
 - Thames Water will indicate capacity for houses and provide a date, which can be accelerated with payment.
- Speaker disagrees with the privatization of the sewage system.
- Alternative options include a package treatment plant and wetlands, but regulations may require connection to the existing system.

Housing and Community

- Building new housing is essential to solving the housing crisis.
- Concern exists that new houses may become Airbnbs instead of being occupied by local residents.
- There are legal ways to ensure homes are owner-occupied.
- Access to the land for locals is seen as a positive proposition.

Site Design and Community Integration

- Ancient apple and pear trees will be preserved, and no building will occur there.
- The aim is to create a nice community, balancing housing needs with community access to green spaces.
- The design considers a mix of housing and a route for people to walk and enjoy the area.
- The intention is to create a controlled wildlife site with boardwalks and managed access.

River Restoration and Community Assets

- Discussions have occurred with the Evenlode Restoration Trust about river restoration.
- The river has been overdug and is poor for wildlife, presenting an opportunity for restoration.
- There is potential to create a permissive path along the brook to the Legion Field, creating a walking loop.
- The speaker acknowledges the idealistic nature of these plans but emphasizes the need for community support.

Community Involvement and Concerns

- The Diocese of Oxford owns the field, not the local church.
- The parish council has an important role in the development.
 - The parish council needs to ensure its voice is heard and that the adoption of the land is fully understood.
- Concerns exist about preventing houses from becoming Airbnbs.
 - Leases can specify that the house must be the principal residence.
 - Mitigation strategies can be implemented, but some people will find ways around them.

Planning System Limitations

- Planning only views a house as a house.
- The speaker believes Airbnbs are not as problematic as empty homes because they are occupied and contribute to the local economy.
- Leaseholds could control property use, but the government has discouraged them.
- The planning system is "clunky" and doesn't focus on utilities like water pressure.

Water Pressure

- There are solutions for water pressure issues, such as substations.

- Water pressure is a problem in West Street.

Parking

- The parking proposal meets Oxfordshire parking standards, possibly exceeding them.
- Oxfordshire has specific parking requirements and the speaker anticipates "endless backwards and forwards about the exact number of parking that they will allow you to have."
- Parking is incorporated into the built form to minimize visual impact.
- A private drive will be co-owned and managed by the five properties.

Site Access and Layout

- There will be a pedestrian access to the left of the bull sign.
- The road access will widen, tucking the wall in slightly.
- The middle of the field will remain planted with a pond, with houses beyond the rise.

Lighting

- There are specific controls around lighting to minimize light pollution and ecological impact.
- The development's size allows for avoiding excessive street lighting.
- Ecology is a key consideration, especially regarding foraging routes for bats.

Environmental Impact and Sustainability

- Passive house principles are used, with the aim to exceed building regulations.
- Bio-based and local materials are used.
- PVs and batteries will be used where suitable.
- The speaker states, "we are very, very focused on sustainability as a practice."
- Local tradespeople will be used.

Allotments and Development

- New allotments in the nature reserve.
- A developer's stream going into a pond was going to kill.
 - Unclear if this is still the case.

Responding to Proposals

- Copies of proposals are available.
- Time frame for response:
 - Not immediate, responses can be submitted after the Christmas break.
 - Aiming for mid-January to start compiling feedback.
 - Comments will be incorporated as they come in.

Community Input

- Parish Council has meetings coming up.
- Ideas and thoughts are welcome.
 - "So generally it's just any. Any ideas send them through or think about them."
- Take time to review the drawings and provide feedback.
 - "Give us. Give us any thoughts and. And we'll try and incorporate things as a mob."