

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Public Meeting on Wednesday 11th March

In attendance: Borough Councillors Carl Storer, WHBC Housing & Planning Panel, Roger Trigg, Executive Member for Planning, Housing & Community, Julie Cragg & Steve Markeiwicz. Parish Councillors Phil Corke, Chairman, Andy Gribble, Vice Chairman, Laura Brooks-Payne, Sarah Hall, Anthony White. Parish Clerk, Janet Pearce.

Chairman, Councillor Phil Corke:

Welcome to the meeting. We are here to inform you about Welwyn Hatfield Borough Councils Local Plan which is open for consultation until 19th March and to hear your views. In the plan 12,500 new houses need to be built in the Borough up until 2031, with 160 in Woolmer Green on Green Belt land. Our Borough Councillor Carl Storer, who is on the Housing & Planning Panel and Borough Councillor Roger Trigg, Executive Member for Planning, Housing & Community are here to answer your questions.

Borough Councillor Carl Storer:

The Department of Communities & Local Government produce national statistics to determine housing demand which the Borough Council has to meet. Landowners can submit land for consideration and the Borough determine its suitability for development before including it in the Local Plan which will ultimately be passed to the Government planning inspector.

Although the site identified in Woolmer Green is Green Belt land any development will still have to satisfy Green Belt policy as it has always done. There has to be a good reason for developing the Green Belt.

I have put Tree preservation Orders on the trees outside Twin Foxes although it is uncertain who owns this land so it can't be built on.

The Local Plan consultation is open until 19th March.

Woolmer Green Resident: I am in favour of housing but object to farmers becoming multi-millionaires. How is the land priced?

Cllr Storer: The builder pays the market price for the land and some landowners will hit the jackpot. However developers will have to pay added costs of s106 contributions for infrastructure improvements.

Cllr Trigg: The sites are analysed by the Borough's planners and following the consultation the comments are passed to cabinet to make decisions. Then a revised document will be open to a further consultation before the final Local Plan is passed to the Department of Communities & Local Government.

Woolmer Green Resident: Who owns this land? There is a pattern here as there was a school proposed a few years ago and now new houses.

Cllr Storer: A farmer owns the land. The school was from an idea by Lord Cobbold which was totally separate.

Woolmer Green Resident: What happens if there is a change of Government?

Cllr Storer: Whichever Government is in power will need to build houses.

Woolmer Green Resident: I have lived in the village since 1971. Why does the Council think this development is favourable to Woolmer Green?

Cllr Trigg: The sites are assessed by professional planners. It is not usual to build on Green Belt but there are not enough brownfield sites available. We need to build 12,000 houses and so does North Herts. East Herts has to build 14,000 and Stevenage 10,000. 79% of Welwyn Hatfield is Green Belt and that will go down to 77%. At the start villages were excluded from the proposals but then it was decided to spread the development. Schemes must fulfil planning requirements so Woolmer Green may not get 160 houses it could be less. Some smaller villages have been allocated a similar number.

Woolmer Green Resident: I have lived in Woolmer Green for three years. What benefit is there to people moving in and to existing residents? We don't have a lot to offer; no infrastructure.

Cllr Storer: Don't assume it will go ahead it still has to go through the planning process. When an application comes forward you can comment on it.

Cllr Trigg: Hatfield is allocated 2000 houses but they have shops & infrastructure.

Woolmer Green Resident: Then why put forward a Green Belt site?

Cllr Storer: It's an area we could develop if we had to.

Woolmer Green Resident: How is it fair that Brookmans Park only get 20 houses?

Cllr Trigg: Most of the sites there are not suitable.

Woolmer Green Resident: Why not put forward Marshalls & Entech? They are brownfield sites.

Cllr Storer: It is up to the owners to put sites forward.

Woolmer Green Resident: What sort of housing will be built? Will property moguls get hold of them?

Cllr Storer: There will be affordable family homes. There are 51 housing association homes on the Frythe development.

Woolmer Green Resident: When decisions are made is what happens in Knebworth considered? We could merge with Knebworth. Where will children go to school; Woolmer Green school is full?

Cllr Storer: The Education Authority decided on schools and will respond to the consultation. We have no control over what North Herts builds. We have objected to their planning as it will have a big effect on us.

Cllr Trigg: We have met with North Herts. They propose a new primary school along with 400 houses as part of a Green Belt development on the western flank of Knebworth.

Woolmer Green Resident: New Road is adjacent to the site and it is a very congested narrow lane. Where will the access be?

Cllr Storer: On the drawing access is on B197. That's what the Council will accept.

Woolmer Green Resident: The clock roundabout and Knebworth are horrendous. How on earth will the road cope?

Cllr Storer: The clock is a mess and getting worse with the new development. I'm not very confident in Highways, they send a report and haven't been to look at the site. The issue is that the B197 is the relief road to the A1M as there is no alternative.

Woolmer Green Resident: It can't be changed, there is no alternative and an extra 25% more house are planned. We can't stop it.

Cllr Storer: It will be worse. Need to fight it on flow of traffic.

Cllr Trigg: All Councils are looking at the A1M and an All Lanes Running scheme is planned and funded to upgrade the hard shoulder of the A1M to provide a third lane which will be monitored by Smart Running and be in operation within three years. All proposals have to pass through the Highway Authority.

Woolmer Green Resident: The effect of traffic is a nightmare; on New Road, Swangley's Lane. Country lanes are affected as well, not just the main road.

Cllr Storer: No new access is shown on the drawing to New Road. It wouldn't be allowed.

Woolmer Green Resident: This area was previously submitted why was it rejected?

Cllr Storer: Probably because it's Green Belt land. That has to be a good reason for rejecting it.

Non Woolmer Green Resident: I'm not a Woolmer Green resident but own land adjacent to it. It's naivety to say the Green Belt will not be built on; it will be developed, it probably will go ahead as there is not enough brownfield. Put in your grievances now; there will be building in villages. Write as much as possible or it will happen.

Cllr Storer: Everyone writing in all helps. The Government has not relaxed its Green Belt policy but they want us to build houses. Every village can say no and give technical reasons and planning reasons.

Woolmer Green Resident: What is the proposed employment area on the plans?

Cllr Trigg: That is Entech & Marshalls which are already employment areas.

Cllr Storer: There is no need for more industrial land in this area.

Woolmer Green Resident: Could you consider the brownfield sites? Have you asked the land owners?

Cllr Storer: The owners are not likely to close a successful business. Another point is there is a proposal for a farm shop which sounds nice but it won't succeed unless it's in the high street.

Cllr Cragg: There used to be a successful shop but it got turned into housing. A shop can work if people use it.

Chairman, Cllr Corke: The consultation is on the website. Use structured arguments and make valid points. Thanks to our Borough Councillors and thank you for coming.

JRP 12.3.15