

WOOLMER GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

Notes of Meeting with Grant Shapps

Friday 30th June 2017

In attendance:

Grant Shapps accompanied by his PA.

Parish Councillors Andy Gribble, Chairman; Sarah Hall; Jenny Hawkins.

Parish Clerk, Janet Pearce.



The Chairman set out the Parish Council's concern that 150 houses are proposed to be built on Green Belt in the submitted Draft Local Plan when there are two brownfield sites available.

Grant Shapps said that having been a planning minister that helped draft the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in his view the plans for Woolmer Green are not consistent with his vision of the aim of the NPPF which is to protect the Green Belt. Planning has a responsibility to provide employment land but that should not be at the expense of the Green Belt. The Government had already allowed permitted development to convert employment buildings to residential. He said the Parish Council has a good case and would back them all the way. Building on Green Belt should be the absolute last resort.

The meeting noted that Entech could provide 72 dwellings and commercial units that would provide up to 50 jobs as opposed to the scaled down business that currently occupies the site with 4 employees.

The Marshalls site was initially leased for 4 years but was extended when the company could not relocate to a suitably sized location in Stevenage. The current lease will run out in 5 or 10 years' time. Currently approximately 30 people are employed on the site. The owner had begun initial talks with planning to develop the land prior to Marshalls taking over the site.

Both sites comprise of old buildings, therefore would need considerable investment for business redevelopment.

It was noted that the two brownfield sites would fall short of the 150 Local Plan allocation but the Parish Council thought 25% increase in the village was too high considering it had already expanded by 50% in the last 25 years.

Grant Shapps said that the planning inspector had been appointed and that the Parish Council had a good case to take to him. Often groups with the same argument are asked to make a single representation at the inquiry but the next step was for the Parish Council to make contact with the planning inspector. Joining forces with Knebworth Parish Council to pay for a planning expert to represent both parties, as Knebworth PC had suggested, would be money well spent. Fundraising would be a good idea to help cover the cost.

The meeting expressed its concern at the urbanisation of villages and the lack of infrastructure. Grant Shapps said he favoured building new garden villages out in the countryside.

Grant Shapps suggested it would be a good idea to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However building on Green Belt to satisfy housing targets was not what the Government had in mind and he would back the Parish Council's cause.

Actions:

- The Parish Council to make contact with the planning inspector.
- Grant Shapps will arrange a meeting with the planning inspector.
- The Parish Council to work with Knebworth PC to fund a planning consultant to represent both parties at the inquiry.
- The Parish Council to consider how to fund the planning consultant.
- The land owners to arrange for separate representatives at the inquiry.

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