

Methwold Parish Council

St George's Hall, Methwold on Monday 15th November at 7.30pm
Minutes of the presentation by Ashwood Bond Developments Ltd

9 parish councillors attended the meeting and 27 members of the public including Cllr Ryves.

Three Ashwood Bond Developments Ltd representatives attended.

The Chairman of Methwold Parish Council welcomed all to the meeting and explained that this was not a normal parish council meeting, and neither was it a planning meeting.

The reason for the meeting is that the parish council have been approached by Ashwood Bond Developments Ltd who are interested in developing the land behind the car park at St George's Hall to build 35 houses. However, to meet requirements for this number of houses to be built they would need to purchase a strip of St George's car park to access the land, this is otherwise known as a ransom strip. It is a piece of land that the Developer does not own but needs to be able to purchase to enable this size of development, without purchasing this piece of land a planning application to develop 7 houses could be made.

The parish council have not entered discussions with Ashwood Bond Ltd apart from asking for a plan and proposal to be available to present at a public meeting when COVID rules allow.

This request puts the parish council in a conflict-of-interest position, the only way forward is to hold this public meeting to allow Ashwood Bond Ltd to present their proposal to the members of the council and public, and to give everyone the opportunity to ask questions of Ashwood Bond Ltd.

It has taken some time to get to this point due to not being able to hold a public meeting until now.

Presentation from Ashwood Bond Developments Ltd.

The meeting was shown a plan and proposal for a mixture of high quality 35 dwellings with 20% of affordable homes and a community unit.

To be able to achieve this a strip of St George's Hall car park would need to be purchased from the Parish Council, without this up to 7 additional houses could be built. The lane the other side of the wall next to the car park is access for the 2 houses which are already there.

The Developer expects that the sale of the strip would mean a loss of 4 car parking spaces.

Ashwood Bond Ltd stated that their intention would be to take the plans through to approval and then sell on to a Developer.

Questions from the public - *responses from Ashwood Bond Ltd are in italics.*

a. Will the road to the site be adopted? –

AB - This would be offered to the parish council to oversee, if the parish council refused to take responsibility for the road to the development a management company would be set up for the development who would manage the access road.

b. Has a safety audit been carried out on the site, this is the narrowest part of the road in the village and the pub has been hit several times, with 35 houses and a potential of 2 vehicles per house this is an additional 70 vehicles with extra movement, how will you mitigate building 35 houses, where is the Access/Highways report?

AB - A Construction Management Plan will be required which the parish council should have input - *All concerns will be met, Ashwood Bond Ltd stated they shared concerns over the junction but with the enlarged single point access they feel they have addressed this.*

c. It is negligent not to have the Access Highways Report and bought it to this meeting?

- d. Already those in the parish living next to other building sites have to put up with the disruption and mess, how will you make sure you remain within the agreed process, how will you monitor the building deliveries to site etc?
AB - This would be down to the quality of the Construction Management Plan.
- e. As a community can we be sure you will be the final developer of this scheme
AB - No once the planning application has been approved the intention is to sell the site on.
- f. What are you prepared to pay for the strip of land?
AB - This will be a 3rd of the uplift on the land.
- g. There is a community building on the plan, what is this?
AB - It is envisaged that the land for a community building would be given to the parish council who could use the funds from the sale of the land to build a community building – e.g. nursery, shop.
- h. What houses are you looking to build?
AB - This has not been decided.
- i. You have come to this meeting with no paperwork to support your proposal, this does not give confidence, you have not come properly prepared for this meeting.
- j. Is the parish council financially solvent?
Parish Council Chairman - Yes, the accounts are audited internally and externally each year.
- k. Have you looked at the infrastructure of the parish, schools and doctors?
- l. What developments have you been involved with
AB - Homebase site and Pizza Hut in Lowestoft, 750 house development in Solihull.
- m. Was the field earmarked for development in the Local Plan?
AB - It was considered in 2016 but access was the issue, the site is considered sustainable.
- n. The parish had an allocation of 45 houses in the Local Plan but have had approaching 200 new houses built, do you have an overview of the 7 houses you can build if you don't purchase the land?
AB - No but these can be provided.
- o. Have you approached Norfolk County Council to see if they would approve access to the site?
AB - Access can serve the 2 current houses plus an additional 7 if permitted.
- p. At what point does this parish become non-viable for development?
AB - Methwold is a defined as a Key Service area.
- q. If you get permission for 7 houses without the additional land from the strip of the car park how will you get lorries up the narrow lane to the building site, it's a 90 degree angle to turn lorries up the lane.
- r. Did your traffic survey visit on a Monday when the auction is on?

- s. It may be a good idea to have additional houses but the majority of residents wouldn't want anymore traffic, the schools are full and the Doctors are stretched, this is not in the interest of the community.
- t. The parish council could only consider selling the land if a strong Construction management plan is in place.
- u. If there were to be smaller houses built would this mean more houses built on the site?
AB - Can't answer this at this stage.
- v. There is no mains sewerage in the village, there would be water run off from the new development, will this be accommodated in the current system? Is there room on site for a sewerage system as there is on the other sites in the village?
AB - Anglian Water have advised on requirements and this system would have to be designed.
- w. Could the parish council ask for mains sewerage to be put through the village so all could link up to it if they wished to? There was a show of hands and 3 people in the room thought this was a good idea.
- x. Regarding the amount of money that could come from the sale of the land would this be taxed?

The Chairman thanked Ashwood Bond Ltd for making their presentation and stated again that the parish council could not make the decision on the sale of the land as this would be a conflict of interest, as the Complex is now being held in a Charitable Trust with the parish council as the Sole Trustee the decision would have to be made by the Sole Trustees at a separate meeting at some time in the future after a ballot had been held to find out the wishes of the village.

A resident asked the Chairman to confirm that the parish council/Sole Trustees would not go ahead and sell the land without consulting the people of Methwold and that they would abide by the result of the vote.

The parish council members in attendance agreed that the residents should be consulted to find out if they wish the strip of land at the car park to be sold. The best way to ensure everyone has their say is thought to be by a ballot. The Borough Council Electoral Services would need to be consulted to carry this out correctly and there would be a substantial cost associated with this, the Developers were asked if they would pay for this.

The Chairman thanked all residents who attended for their time and input, there are still 2 vacancies on the parish council if anyone would like to volunteer, details can be obtained from the Clerk.

Meeting closed at 8.50pm