

CROPREDY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Cropredy Parish Council held to review Planning Application 23/00977/OUT in the Methodist Chapel on Monday 10th July 2023 at 7pm

Present: Councillors Tania Johnson (Chairman), Bob Garland, Jacqui Smith, Des Knight, Gill Moss, David Best (Clerk) and 94 members of the public attended the meeting.

The following parties were represented at the meeting: Cropredy Surgery, Brasenose College (Landowner), Carter Jonas (Agent), Obsidian Strategic Asset Management Limited (Applicant and developer/promoter)

1. INTRODUCTION by Cllr Tania Johnson

Nicholas King Homes had withdrawn their application 23/00976/F for a development at the south of Cropredy near the school.

It was announced that the meeting would be recorded.

The aim of the meeting was to inform residents on information relating to the surgery and provide clarification prior to the application being considered in the Cherwell District Council Planning Committee.

The village survey carried out 3 years ago revealed that 97% of respondents considered that Cropredy Surgery was important to them, but the surgery had advised the Parish Council that it was operating above capacity and requires larger premises to operate effectively. The developers identified that need and offered to build a community building/ new surgery if outline permission is granted. The NHS has advised that it would consider plans for a new surgery although it would not contribute towards the building cost or consider an increase in the operating cost over the current level. Cherwell Planning has advised that if permission is granted a new surgery would be contained within an s106 agreement which is a legal agreement which any developer would be required to build.

2. CROPREDY SURGERY – Dr Tom Holyoake:

Cropredy Surgery is not far from crisis point. The building is too small, the car park is too small and the current premises are not fit for purpose. In 2002 when it opened there were 2,200 patients and it was too small then. There are now 5,000 patients. That number of patients is required to be profitable and stay open. There is insufficient room for the number of clinicians required for that number of patients. The surgery has outgrown the building and it is not fit for purpose. The surgery has to rely on locums that makes the business unviable. Options to increase the size of the existing premises have been investigated but have not been possible.

Cropredy surgery is neutral on the housing development being neither for nor against.

There is a distinct possibility that there will not be a surgery in the village within a few years. A larger building would secure the future and enable it to be a training practice with a midwife and physios. The alternative is to close the books, increase waiting times and give a poorer service. There are currently 4 years remaining on the current lease and there would be reservations renewing it for another 25 years. The surgery would like to continue to provide services in the village rather than moving and shutting the doors altogether.

3. CARTER JONAS - Mr Steven Sensecall:

It was realised that the surgery was under pressure when the application was made. So the application is for up to 60 houses and a community building/surgery. Without prejudice discussions have started with Cropredy Surgery since the application has been submitted. The Cherwell planning officer has advised that more detail in terms of minimum size and specification if a surgery is to be considered as a reason to approve the application. Brasenose College, the landowner, is prepared to facilitate provision of a surgery. There is no done deal currently but the parties are talking and believe that there is a way forward.

4. AGENT FOR BRASENOSE COLLEGE – Mr Grant Westall-Reece

If the surgery were to move to a new building on the site, it would be possible that Brasenose College might consider a 'softer' deal on rent.

4. OPEN FORUM/ QUESTIONS:

Q – Why did Cropredy Surgery not engage before?

A – It didn't feel there was a way forward previously but it does now.

Q – What is the position if there isn't the option of a larger building in Cropredy.

A – The next step would probably be to close the books or merge with another surgery.

Q – If the opportunity of larger premises became available outside Cropredy would you move?

A – Yes.

Q – Would the proposed new surgery meet your needs?

A - Yes, more than, but Byfield surgery, with 8,000 patients, is also at risk and may close within 4 years, with the possibility of some of its patients transferring to Cropredy

Q – Is there a trend to bigger practices?

A – Yes

Q – Who would be the owner/ landlord of a new surgery provided as part of the development?

A – Either Brasenose College or a specialist provider

Q – What would happen if a new surgery was not affordable?

A – If a new surgery is not provided then it would be harder to get planning permission for the houses.

Q - Current viability of surgery?

A – It is not viable for a practice to be spending so much money on Locums to cover leave etc. (as there is insufficient room in the current building to employ additional permanent doctors.

Q – A percentage of the current patients is from outside the Cropredy, if you expand the surgery how does that benefit Cropredy residents?

A – 5,000 patients is viable/ good but the building was not designed for 5,000 patients. It was too small the day it opened and not fit for purpose. (But, if viable, Cropredy patients would keep the surgery within the village.)

Q – What will happen in 4 years time when lease expires?

A – It depends on the terms but I would not sign another 25 year lease on the current building.

Q – Residents are being asked to make a decision without all the details.

A – Unless Cherwell planning has more detail on a surgery they won't give it any weight in their decision on the planning application. Obsidian had agreed with Cherwell Planning to leave the application in abeyance until we can provide that detail. What residents are being asked is if a deal can be done on a new surgery are you for or against the planning application.

Q – What is the minimum number of houses?

A – That is up to the developer but it can't be more than 60. The application is for houses and a new surgery. If both are not provided there will not be planning permission.

Q – Is Obsidian the developer?

A -No

Q – The site area is 5 hectares and, with higher densities of say, 50 dwelling per hectare, 250 houses could be built on that sized plot.

A – The application is for 60 houses and a community building. That can't be changed if the application is granted. A new application would be required to build more than 60 houses.

Q – How would Brasenose College facilitate a new surgery?

A – It has to be commercially viable. The college could not build it and pass it on for nothing but the commercial terms could be softer than normal as the surgery makes the development more acceptable.

Q – Why can't Brasenose College donate the land?

A – Brasenose College is also a commercial entity but it could negotiate a softer deal. If Brasenose can accommodate a new surgery it gets the houses so it is a win/win.

Q – The surgery is being used as a pawn.

A – Brasenose is delivering for a need if a new surgery is built, but is also building the houses as part of the development.

Q – Cropredy doesn't want any more houses.

A – Then residents have to decide whether they want a new surgery or not.

Q – How much detail on the surgery will there be in the application?

A – The detail needs to be clear. That is why the application is in abeyance.

Q – Why aren't the District Councillors at this meeting?

A – Because they have to remain independent.

Q – If planning permission is refused would Brasenose be prepared to sell the land?

A – They would keep it in the hope of getting better value from it in the future.

Q – What involvement have you had with the NHS Integrated Commissioning Board?

A – They have advised that [the move to the new building] must be cost neutral and Carter Jonas has completed the first stage of their engagement process.

Q – Who will pay for the maintenance of the common area/buffer between the development and existing houses?

A – That hasn't been decided yet but it is either given to the Parish Council with some money to maintain or to a management company.

Q – The surgery employees are totally unaware of the current scenario.

A – This has not been kept a secret and the practice hold employee meetings every month so all the staff are informed. They have been advised that the practice needs to look at ways of keeping it open and they are aware of the challenges and the possible solutions.

Q – Could a new surgery be provided with a smaller number of houses?

A – If permission is granted a house builder will decide whether a smaller number of houses would be optimal. Sometimes a smaller number of larger houses is more profitable but it could not be more than 60. On other schemes a covenant has restricted the number of houses.

Q – Is Cherwell recommending this application?

A – That is not known as the planning officer's report has not been published yet.

Q – What is the timescale for the decision?

A – At the moment it is scheduled for the Planning Committee meeting on 8th September

Q – With the current design [of the buffer zone] some existing houses are nearer the development than others.

A - That could be increased if residents wanted it, as the layout could be changed after permission is granted.

Next Steps

The Parish Council will analyse the result of the residents poll

The meeting ended at 8.38pm

There being no further matters the Chair closed the meeting at 8.38pm

Chairman
24th July 2023