

FALFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Meeting between Falfield Parish Council & The Tortworth Estate Company to discuss the Buckover Garden Village Concept.

Present:

For Falfield Parish Council: Veronica Stanley, Ken Fryer, Emma Jarvis, Jane Hathway and Megan O Connor,

For The Tortworth Estate Company: Rob Garnham, (Mediation in Planning), Robert Morton (Tortworth Estate) and Mark Chadwick (Hunter Page Planning)

Date: Wednesday 7th September in Falfield Village Hall starting at 7.45pm.

At the start of the meeting, Falfield Parish Council asked for clarity from Tortworth Estate on why they requested this 'closed' meeting as it is an unusual situation. Rob Garnham said that their only reason for having an informal, non-public meeting is so that they can hear from Falfield as a Council. It is important to them that the public are involved and have been so far, and will be again, but when everyone present wants their voice heard it is often difficult for the democratic representatives to give their views - usually simply because of time constraints. This meeting will allow issues to be explored and give Councillors time to talk.

Falfield Parish Council also queried whether they would be quoted and any discussions used in support of the proposals for marketing, The Tortworth Estate's team assured the Council that this is not an entrapment situation and this would not be the case.

The Tortworth Estate team say that it is still early days for the concept and that there is still no drawn master plan as yet. The stakeholder meetings have been pushed back.

Annoyance was expressed that Thornbury is given greater priority over Falfield in consultations to date. Tortworth Estate are planning to meet Tytherington Parish council next month, however other Parish Councils have deferred meeting at this stage. A meeting has been arranged with a representative of a group of young people.

Falfield Parish Council said that they are in a difficult situation as the majority of Falfield parishioners clearly object to the concept and they need to convey this. The Tortworth Estate team said that it is important to them that the local community engages with the master plan, even if they object, otherwise if the scheme is approved without engagement then the village design may not meet the needs of the local community.

Falfield Parish Council advised that they have not had a public meeting since the July meeting and have not yet been able to have further dialogue with parishioners about the Garden Village. In light of this they are unwilling to answer some of the items on Rob Garnham's agenda and would prefer to ask their own questions:

Q1. Why did you not tell us at the Parish Council Meeting on 19th July about the submission of the Expression of Interest?

The submission had to be made by the Local Authority, the Tortworth Estate team knew it would likely be submitted prior to the parish meeting but presumed South Gloucestershire Council would write it themselves. At the last minute, Hunter Page Planning was asked to write it by South Gloucestershire Council. Mr Garnham said it was SGC's responsibility to tell Falfield Parish Council about the submission.

Q2. Why have you chosen this site? It is a prominent and beautiful part of the local green landscape.

The Tortworth Estate approached Hunter Page Planning approximately one year ago and asked them to undertake an appraisal of the whole of the Estate's land in order to identify land for potential development. A new settlement was not part of their original brief, however as new settlements were highlighted as an option for consideration in the West of England's JSP consultation, this gave Hunter Page the idea for a Garden Village on their land. This site was chosen simply because they considered that it probably has fewer constraints than other land within the Tortworth Estate ownership.

The outcome of the West of England's JSP consultation may yet decide that large new settlements are not the solution. If the strategic plan does not identify it as a potential site then the proposals for this Garden Village may be abandoned.

Falfield Parish Council said that the agricultural landscape of the proposed site is visually important upon the northern approach into South Gloucestershire and the West Country. There are also many distant views to the site from the hills of Gloucestershire and across the Severn Estuary. Hunter Page's view is that this site is not visible from other settlements.

Q3. Has there been a study for other sites within your land ownership?

Yes. Other smaller sites on the Tortworth Estate have also been proposed for development.

Q4. Why this site as there is a record of poor public transport?

Advice to Tortworth Estate from South Gloucestershire Council is that any proposal will need be transformational in terms of its transport agenda. The design will need to provide solutions to current poor bus services and other potential transport problems. Hunter Page has asked their own transport staff to look at highways issues.

Falfield Parish Council flagged up that traffic on the A38 is often at a standstill through Whitfield all the way to Grovesend traffic lights on weekends, bank holidays and whenever there is congestion on the M5. This is through the centre of the proposed development. Adding the vehicles associated with 3000 houses will make the congestion worse and that the current public transport system serving the parish is very limited in what is available to those who have no other means but to use public transport.

Q5. What is the overall acreage of the proposed site?

170 hectares. Hunter Page estimated an average housing density of 25 dwellings per hectare. The photograph on the opening page on the concept document is of Whiteley Village in Walton on Thames, Surrey. *(This is a retirement village of 255 alms-houses plus residential care homes built in 1917)*

Q6. Why 3000 houses?

Falfield Parish Council said that this size of settlement is not typical of the character of existing 'villages' in the South Gloucestershire area which are much smaller in scale.

Hunter Page says that it would be up to 3000 houses, it may be less. It would be a different entity to the existing villages in the area, it would be a new model.

Q7. Is this the maximum build for this site?

To be confirmed. The grey coloured shapes on the concept sketch diagram would include housing and other types of development. The quantity of housing is simply an estimate based on the area of the grey shapes divided by an average density.

Falfield Parish Council queried the misleading 'Village' description as the proposed scale is that of a new town.

Q8. Do you have plans for more of Tortworth Estate Land to be developed?

See response to Q3.

Q9. How are you intending to protect the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)?

There are two SSSI sites of covering 2 hectares within the boundary. The Buckover Cutting site is at risk. The Brinkmarsh Quarry site is of national importance and protection would have to be designed in, a green buffer zone or park around the quarry was discussed.

Q10. What industry will be brought to the Proposed Garden Village?

This is unknown at present, nobody is on board yet. Rob Garnham may approach Horizon. Highways England says that employment land would need to be in place from day 1 of any development.

Q11. Will the Garden Village be under the Local Government of Falfield Parish Council?

This not a Tortworth Estate decision - the governance of Buckover Garden Village has not been considered yet. Tortworth Estate may manage the open spaces.

60% of the proposed site is within Falfield Parish. The knocks on implications for Falfield Parish Council are significant, in terms of workload, resources, staff etc. and needs consideration.

Q12. How will this development benefit Falfield?

Robert Moreton's brief to Hunter Page is to address the impacts on Falfield Parish as it will bear the brunt of the development and any problems the parish currently has could be reviewed. Investment, jobs and housing may or may not benefit Falfield parishioners.

Q13. Falfield Parish Council asked if it would bring mains gas to Falfield Village as there is no mains gas throughout the parish.

Robert Moreton said that this is unlikely as there are other renewable sources of energy that are preferable.

Q14. What plans do you have for a Business Park?

8 hectares of employment land is proposed.

Falfield Parish Council asked about the proposed site for a business park near Gambriel Lane as indicated in Tortworth Estate's JSP submission. Robert Moreton said this has not been looked at in detail yet and it is separate to the Buckover Garden Village proposal.

Q15. Can it still be called a 'Village' if it has industrial sites within its boundary?

Hunter Page says that it can still be called a village.

Q16. We all know the Motorway Junction 14 and 13 is problematic as well as the A38 at peak times, especially during the school holidays. Have you had any feedback on the motorway junctions or the A38 from Highways England?

See response to Q4. A meeting has been held with Highways England. Tortworth Estate owns the land around current Junction 14. A new junction 14a is drawn on the latest concept plan. Hunter Page mentioned that another idea is to close existing junction 14 and add a new junction.

Falfield Parish Council expressed concern with this idea as it would redirect all of the traffic for Charfield & Wotton under Edge along the A38 and through Falfield Village to access Tortworth Hill.

Q17. The motorway junction as drawn is not practical. It destroys protected sites, obliterates people's houses and directs traffic towards a country lane. Why have you drawn it like this?

Hunter Page said that the drawing is diagrammatic and a straight line is easier to understand, in reality it would have to curve around the obstacles.

Q18. If a new junction is to be built, will the new motorway junction be in place before the building of houses etc?

Not necessarily. This is an unknown.

Q19. The tenant farmers are a strong part of our local community, how will they be looked after?

Robert Moreton cannot discuss this in detail. He informed his tenants of Tortworth Estate's intentions before the JSP was submitted in January 2016. All their tenancies are finite. Over time their farmer tenants have taken over larger areas of land and the number of Tortworth tenant farmers has reduced to seven.

Q20. You have mentioned that Thornbury will also benefit from this proposed build, can you elaborate on that also?

A new cemetery and a new health centre have been mentioned.

Q21. On the one hand you say that you do not want to extend Thornbury, yet why are you proposing to build it so close to the town. Surely this is a contradiction?

Hunter Page considers that there is no visual coalescence between Thornbury and Buckover.

Falfield Parish Council flagged up that it will be seen as an extension of Thornbury and the small gap between the two is already being infilled with development. Hunter Page said that if South Gloucestershire Council are serious about the Garden Village idea that they should attempt to safeguard the gap and not allocate it for development.

Q22. Are you expecting the residents of Thornbury and Falfield village to drive back and fore to use any 'local facilities' you propose to provide for them? This is not sustainable.

Advice to Tortworth Estate from South Gloucestershire Council is that any proposal will need be transformational in terms of its transport agenda.

Falfield Parish Council expressed concern that there is a risk residents would shop in the new village and start to abandon Thornbury High Street. Rob Garnham suggested second branches of the same shops move to the village to avoid competition.

Q23. If Junction 13A proceeds, surely another new motorway junction is unlikely?

Not discussed.

Q24. How would the proposed design protect the amenities of existing parishioners who are happy living in the open countryside?

Hunter Page said that they cannot protect their views. The settings of Listed Buildings will be protected.

Q25. What would happen to the existing residents whose houses would be absorbed into the proposed new housing estates. How will their existing environment and outlook be protected? Landscape buffers at perimeters and parkland could be incorporated. New housing will not be positioned close up to existing boundaries.

Q26. How would you protect the amenities of the existing parishioners during any construction works?

By using the Considerate Contractors Scheme.

Falfield Parish Council said that this is not enough given the likely prolonged nature of construction works of this scale. Parishioners would be living amidst a building site plus its construction traffic for 10+ years. This needs more consideration at concept design stage to protect their amenities.

Q27. How are you proposing to fund the construction works? Will you be selling parcels of land off to developers?

Yes, some parcels of land will be sold off to different developers, contractors, local house builders etc.

Q28. If so, how will you control what finally gets built?

Falfield Parish Council expressed concern that if other developers buy the land they will try to change the nature of what is built, e.g. into denser lower quality housing with fewer amenities to maximise profit, which deviates from the 'vision' that Tortworth Estate is currently marketing.

Robert Moreton said that they will not sell land to developers who do not meet their aspirations and Hunter Page said that South Gloucestershire Council could perhaps create a Design Guide to control the appearance of the 'Village'.

Falfield Parish Council said that this is not enough, that many housing developers are ruthless and that South Gloucestershire Council alone cannot be relied upon to deliver Tortworth's 'idea'. A more robust toolkit restricting deviations from the original intentions, for developers to commit to before any land is sold was discussed.

Q29. Would the Parish Council end up having to deal with multiple developers at a later date?

Yes, this is a possibility.

Falfield Parish Council expressed concern about having to engage in multiple community engagement consultations with multiple developers in the future and the time and the resource commitments this would entail. The Tortworth Estate team were reminded that Falfield is a very small council with volunteer councillors and a part time clerk and were asked to consider the ramifications of this for our small parish.

E J J
15/11/16