

**Notes on a virtual (Zoom) meeting to discuss possible
Merfield development held on 12 May**

Present: Cllr T Morrow (TM), Cllr P Travis (PT), Cllr P Banwell (PB), Cllr A Hooker (AH), Cllr S Eyles (SE), Cllr E Butler (EB), Cllr P Restorick (PR) [by phone], Clerk H Williams and D James (DJ). Cllr A Edney was unable to access the meeting.

The meeting was held for DJ to brief the Parish Council on his proposal for a development of 26 properties on the Merfield land adjacent to The Mead and Straight Lane.

DJ said that he was aware of a number of speculative applications locally and so he had decided now to put in an outline application to Mendip to develop this site by The Mead in conjunction with Ashford Homes. His architect had recently carried out a number of site surveys. DJ confirmed no agreement had been finalised with Ashford Homes.

DJ gave information on a possible timetable: Outline planning application to be submitted to Mendip end of May/early June, the approval of the outline plan for the 26 unit development could be given by Mendip as early as September after which detailed discussions (reserved matters) would take place. These would finalise access, house layout, ecology etc. Final approval could possibly be completed by the turn of the year and, if that were the case, building could start in Spring 2021.

The proposed development of 26 properties had already been identified by Mendip and included in their response to the Inspector's Interim Report on the Mendip Local Plan Part 2. DJ stated that his aim was to include an emphasis on housing for the elderly and he hoped there would be 5 bungalows included in the final plans.

DJ said that an element of 'affordable' housing would be included in the plan. Some Councillors expressed concerns over the definition of 'affordable' and asked if the 'affordable houses' could be built to a budget that ensured they were actually financially affordable for Rode residents.

There was discussion over access to the site and a strong view was expressed by some Councillors that access should be via Straight Lane with only pedestrian access onto The Mead. DJ said that he was keen to preserve the screening trees on The Mead but as yet no firm plan existed about access to the site.

DJ said there were no plans to develop any housing within the grounds of Merfield House as outlined in Policy 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

There was a question over discounts for local residents, as originally suggested by DJ. He said discounted prices for residents would be difficult to manage, for example when properties were resold. He invited suggestions as to how this could be handled.

Given the limitations of lockdown, concern was expressed about how any full consultation would be managed, especially with those villagers who might be most affected by this 26 house development.

The Parish Council thanked David James for the information he had given it and requested that as soon as plans were available, they be shared with the PC and the village. It was expected that there would be considerable interest and discussion over this proposed development and DJ was ready to participate in this.

Clerk to Rode Parish Council