

**Notes of public meeting held on Rode Playing field to discuss  
Development on Merfield/The Mead site on 17 July 2020**

Present: All Rode Parish Councillors, Parish Clerk, District Councillor, County Councillor, Will James, Ashford Homes, CMS Architects and 17 Parishioners.

Peter Travis (current PC Chair) opened the meeting and, after thanking the Playing Field Committee for hosting the outdoor meeting, gave a background to the development. He said that in the Rode Neighbourhood Plan 4 development schemes had been put forward but all rejected by the villagers. A development adjacent to Merfield House had been the least opposed. Since then the draft Mendip Local Plan Part 2 had been published and the Inspector's report on this had identified a requirement for 505 houses to be built in NE Mendip. Mendip in trying to meet this target had identified that a minimum of 26 be built in Rode on the Merfield/The Mead site. Rode, Beckington and Norton St Philip Parish Councils were legally challenging this and had managed (highly unusually) to get a hearing agreed in mid-September.

Will James (on behalf of David James) said that during the development of the Neighbourhood Plan they had not favoured any development on their land but would give the land to build a new school. This had not been taken up and they looked at building a care home on the site as a need for one had been noted in the Neighbourhood Plan; however, the distance from Bath was too great for one (?). They then looked at a housing development of 26 homes and had started discussions with Ashford Homes as they were a local firm and not a large developer. The development would include a number of small bungalows. A footpath would connect the site to the centre of the village. Some priority to local residents would be given through a Section 106.

Ashford Homes gave further information on the development which would be split 50% general housing, 20% for the elderly and 30% affordable housing [*NOTE: The government definition of affordable housing states it must be provided at a level at which the mortgage payments on the property should be more than would be paid in rent on council housing, but below market levels. – somewhat vague*] A scheme to give priority for 3 to 4 months to local residents to buy properties would be given and a 6 month window given after this to a wider local area. Outline application, including a transport assessment would be submitted soon.

CMS confirmed that care homes had been looked at but rejected and now a 29 house development (to maximise the site) had been drawn up with Highways consideration to be undertaken.

There were two main concerns expressed by residents. The first was whether the site should be developed at all. The second was the access to the site via The Mead with congestion particularly at school drop off and pick up times. Questions were raised whether access could be via the existing Merfield House drive and it appeared this had not been fully considered but was thought it might fall foul of English Heritage. Increased traffic from the development would add to congestion at the Beckington roundabout, although in response to this it would be minimal compared to current traffic flow. There was agreement that a full access study would be carried out, however, it was emphasised that this must include monitoring during school term drop off/pick up times.

There was concern that construction traffic, which would be asked to use Straight Lane (this follows some pre-application discussions with Somerset County Council Highways), would cause considerable damage to both the road and trees etc. on this lane and fears were expressed that construction vehicles would probably use the village centre as a means of access.

Points were raised over need for increase in medical facilities which are already stretched and the capacity at the school. The developers agreed they would be required to make a contribution to these. The site with provision for the elderly was not ideal as it was far from the village centre and shop, post office, village hall and buses.

A request was made to withdraw the application for development to maintain the existing rural environment at this end of the village.

The National Planning Policy Framework has 3 criteria: economic, social and environmental that are considered for any development. The sustainability of the development will depend on these criteria and although this was a greenfield site it was pointed out that as part of this assessment employment during the build and maintenance of houses plus the requirement for more housing would be factors in favour of building.

The meeting was reminded that it was unusual that there was a landowner and developer willing to listen to local people to determine what was required within the development, with a real chance to influence the outcome.

The meeting ended after 1¼ hours, with deep concerns particularly over access to the site and any development of the site.