

**Notes of virtual (Zoom) meeting held between Councillors and David James and  
Ashford Homes to discuss proposed development on  
Merfield/The Mead (planning ref: 2020/1686/OTS) on 15 September 2020**

Present: Cllr Steve Eyles (Chair for meeting), Cllr Ann Edney, Cllr Elaine Butler, Cllr Peter Travis, Cllr Barbi Lund (District Councillor), Cllr Linda Oliver (County Councillor), David James; Tom Griffiths (Ashford Homes) and Hugh Williams (PC Clerk)

It was asked why the planning application had been sent to Mendip when it was stated earlier that the application would not be submitted until further consideration. David James (DJ) apologised and said that the application had been submitted by Ashford Homes without his knowledge. Tom Griffiths (TG), Development Director of Ashford Homes, confirmed that the application had been submitted without DJ's knowledge due to a genuine misunderstanding.

It was asked if David James was happy with the plans for the development. DJ outlined that the plan saying it tried to reflect what housing a rural village would expect. He said that initially he had no desire to develop the land but he had been approached by the Parish Council (PC) to develop the site; however, discussions with Mendip and English Heritage were unable to find common agreement over how to proceed. He said that the detail of the current proposal will change but felt there was a good screen between this development and The Mead and also a good buffer between it and Merfield House which would preserve the house's heritage. It was asked if the plan helped the Neighbourhood Plan to which DJ said he thought it was an excellent plan which would improve and add value to The Mead.

Tom Griffiths said Ashford Homes became involved after Mendip had indicated development on the site should take place to help it meet housing targets in its Local Plan Part 2. In response to a comment that the design layout did not appear special and that there were only 3 bungalows in the 29 houses, TG said that there could be changes but he said all properties had good outside space. He added that this was only the start of the consultation and comments would be taken on board. The access from The Mead was well conceived and the buffer between the site and Merfield House would increase the biodiversity of the site.

It was asked why these plans were very different to those mentioned in April 2019 with less properties for the 'elderly' and local people wanting to downsize. DJ said that English Heritage had objected to any development round Merfield House, and when he had proposed 'village facilities' on the site the PC had said it would prefer housing. DJ had approached care home providers back in 2015/16 but none were prepared to develop one this far from Bath. He wanted 50% of the development to be 'affordable' housing and housing for the elderly (defined as over 55s).

It was said the current plan had only 41% of affordable and elderly housing. DJ said 50% was his target. Mendip required 30% affordable and this plan had that level so Mendip would not push to raise this.

It was said that not only bungalows could be considered suitable for the elderly as some preferred a house. Although the footprint of the bungalows looked large these were not particularly large properties.

It was asked if it was possible to withdraw the planning application to give a longer consultation time. TG could not see any benefit to this, the 21-day comment period he thought was long enough and in response to SE saying it takes time to consult with the village he said he thought comments could be submitted to Mendip until December. A cost would be incurred in any re-submission.

TG said in response to LO that there might be a possibility to increase the elderly housing by 2 or 3 properties to meet the 50% target wanted by DJ. These properties could be clearly laid out in a Section 106. DJ added that if the PC endorsed a requirement for more housing (20% of build) for the elderly he was sure Ashford Homes would amend the plans accordingly.

It was asked if there was a market for three five-bed houses as the Church Farm development had struggled to sell this size property. TG said that mid-size houses sell better but saw no problems with the larger houses.

Concern was expressed over a house very close to Merfield Lodge's garden and it was questioned whether the whole development could be shifted slightly west. TG said the full landscaping of the site would be carried out under reserved matters.

The road access both when built and during construction were raised. DJ thought approaches could be made to the garage owners on The Mead for possible school teacher parking to help relieve congestion outside the school. There was comment that the current congestion should be sorted out by the school. DJ said he was looking to ensure all construction traffic avoided the village centre. TG said that the traffic volumes from the new development were based on standard figures for a 29-house development and at its peak amounted to only 18 journeys/hour in and out of the site. Somerset would be fully evaluating the junction of The Mead and Straight Lane.

It was asked about the proposed new footpath; it was said this would replace the grass verge on Straight Lane up to the Crooked Lane junction.

The oak tree on the site would be protected and kept.

It was asked that no new play area was installed on the site but money be put towards the existing playing fields play area which would also help integrate the new development with the village.

DJ finished by saying this was the culmination of six years of discussion and that he supports the PC but he and his family have been hurt by some recent publicity. He wants to help the village meet its requirements for the elderly. He finished by confirming that there would be no expansion of the development beyond this current plan.