

# Yeovil Town Council

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## Minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee of Yeovil Town Council held on Monday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 7.00pm at Yeovil Rugby Club, Church Lane, Barwick, Yeovil BA22 9TR

**Present:** Cllrs E Potts-Jones (Chairman), K Gill, D Gubbins, K Hussain, A Kendall, S Lowery, W Read, A Richards, R Spinner, R Stickland and H Stonier.

**Also present:** Cllrs A Soughton, N Gage, T Lock, M Lock, P Lock, P Gubbins, E-J Hopkins

**In Attendance:** A Card (Town Clerk), H Ferdinand (Deputy Town Clerk), Sally Freemantle (Deputy Town Clerk), L Jones (Administrative Assistant)

There were 108 members of the public present. 13 members of the public arrived late and were not admitted.

1 member of the press was present.

7.05pm – Meeting commenced

The Town Clerk, Amanda Card, opened the meeting by welcoming the public to the meeting. In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, she called for nominations for a Chair. Cllr E Potts-Jones was nominated, seconded and agreed by the Planning Committee members present.

The Chair then called for nominations for a Vice-Chair. Cllr W Read was nominated, seconded and agreed by the Planning Committee members present.

The Chair then addressed the public explaining that the venue for the meeting had been moved to the Yeovil Rugby Club to accommodate more members of the public than the Council Chamber at the Town House, and that the meeting would focus solely on the consideration of the application at Acacia Lodge. She emphasised that the Town Council is just a consultee, and therefore members of the public also needed to make their views known directly to South Somerset District Council, the Local Planning Authority. The Chair also drew attention to the fact that some Town Councillors, including some sitting on the Planning Committee, were also South Somerset District Councillors, and that they would declare this at the appropriate time during the

meeting. She explained that these Councillors were able to speak and vote on the application, but that they could also reconsider it at the District Council's Area South Committee taking into account all relevant evidence and representations made at that time.

The Chair continued by setting out the order in which people would be asked to speak. She advised that speakers would be allowed up to 3 minutes each and should avoid repeating points made by previous speakers.

#### **10/207 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TO CONSIDER THE REASONS GIVEN**

Apologies were received from Cllr G Hunting (unwell), Cllr G Oakes (prior engagement), Cllr J Lowery (unwell), and Cllr J Dash (personal reasons)

**RESOLVED:** To accept the apologies with the reasons given.

#### **10/208 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs Karl Gill, David Gubbins, Kaysar Hussain, Andrew Kendall, Wes Read and Rob Stickland are members of South Somerset District Council and whilst they might speak and possibly vote on this application which might be referred to that Council for determination, they would reconsider the application at District level taking into account all relevant evidence and representations made at that tier.

Cllrs P Gubbins, A Soughton, T Lock, M Lock and P Lock who are not members of the Planning Committee declared that they were also District Councillors, and in addition Cllr P Gubbins declared he is Chairman of the District Council's Area South Committee.

#### **10/209 MINUTES**

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the previous Planning Committee meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the previous Planning Committee meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 be signed as a correct record.

#### **10/210 CONSIDERATION OF PLANNING APPLICATION 21/02466/COU AT ACACIA LODGE, 166 HENDFORD HILL, YEOVIL**

The Chair introduced the application to be considered: application no. 21/02466/COU at Acacia Lodge, 166 Hendford Hill for the proposed change of use of the care home to accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.

## The Chair invited the supporters of the application to speak

### *M Handcock (Chief Executive of Bournemouth Churches Housing Association)*

In summary, M Handcock made the following points:

- that the Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) has provided housing and support for over 50 years across the south west for people experiencing homelessness and other challenges
- There is a real shortage of housing, and much of the housing available is not affordable. Acacia Lodge is a brilliant opportunity to provide more homes for local people.
- Since April 2020, at the start of the pandemic, BCHA began delivering support at Pathways in Yeovil which was difficult with so many services locked down and not accessible. Despite that, there have been 10 positive moves to longer term housing in the last 6 months.
- He recognised that the location of Pathways in Newton Road is not ideal being close to the town centre and to other communities and businesses, all of which impact the crime and disorder statistics in the locality
- The current building does not offer the opportunity to improve the facilities, and the space for proper engagement with support services.
- Acacia Lodge would provide a much better standard of accommodation with en-suite rooms and space to relax, small clusters of residents, outdoor space, space for a multi-agency presence on site, etc all of which will give the best opportunity for people to move forward in their lives
- Acacia Lodge will not be a night shelter or a hostel. It will be a home for 3 months to two years and the residents will be actively encouraged to be part of the community
- We need to ensure everyone has a voice, especially as the level of objections has been so visible.

### *H Lazenby (Director, Clive Miller Planning Ltd and agent for the application)*

In summary, H Lazenby made the following points:

- Where a proposal accords with the local plan, it should be granted planning permission unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise, and the decision must be based on sound evidence
- The Local Plan promotes the supply of mixed housing including specialist housing to meet identified local needs. This proposal would deliver an ongoing reduction in homelessness and address the impact it has on individuals and the community.
- The material considerations are: highway safety; residential amenity; and the impact on the Hendford Hill Conservation Area. There is no objection from the Highway Authority; the crime and prevention and security measures sought by the police can be addressed in full; and Acacia Lodge is in good condition and can be adapted without any external alteration so will not change the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- It is residential amenity that remains, and we recognise the genuine fears relating to the potential for crime and anti-social behaviour. However, the expectation of crime and anti-social behaviour is only a material consideration when based on sound evidence, and even then must be balanced against the positives of the proposal.

- BCHA have shared detailed information of the experience in running these services, and how they intend to operate Acacia Lodge. The property would also be well lit with CCTV and 24/7 staffing and support
- Having considered the proposals and the objections, there is no sound evidence that the existing crime and anti-social behaviour experienced in Newton Road would be transferred to Hendford Hill, and there are clear grounds for planning permission being granted, and no cogent planning reasons for refusal.

*L Dunster (Pathways service user)*

L Dunster recounted his experience of how he became homeless and how terrible the experience had been, and that it had been made far worse by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. He hoped people would not judge him as a bad person, and wanted others to know how important simple things such as a person's privacy is. He said moving to Acacia Lodge would be like moving to "heaven".

*A Stonier*

A Stonier spoke in support of the application saying there were many heart-breaking stories of people finding themselves homeless, and that they deserve a decent place to live.

*Cllr H Stonier declared a personal interest as she is related to A Stonier.*

The Chair then invited people who were objecting to the application to speak

Seventeen members of the public spoke in opposition to the planning application (T Casey, I Haig-Brown, S Chorley, L Thurston, J Falconer, M Pickering, R Tostevin, A Pickering, M Wilkes, P Cook Perry, R Beaver, P Lambden, D Mellors, P Skipp, R Ackerman, W Van-Den-Bergh and E Whear).

*Cllr E Potts-Jones declared a personal interest as she knows Mr R Beaver having both served as directors on the Huish Academy Trust until recently.*

In summary, the objectors raised the following concerns:

- They were keen to say that their objections were not personal attacks on homeless people. There was concern for the plight of homeless people, but thought Acacia Lodge was the wrong property in the wrong location.
- The proposal is contrary to the South Somerset Local Plan (SSLP), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and the Rough Sleeping Strategy
- The NPPF states that planning decisions should aim to achieve places that are safe and accessible so that crime and disorder and the fear of crime do not undermine quality of life
- Policy EQ2 of the SSLP seeks to preserve and enhance character and appearance, and specifically states development proposals should create safe environments addressing crime prevention and community safety
- The Rough Sleeping Strategy advocates the need for small residential units for homeless people
- There is no long term strategy to reduce homelessness

- The application has serious shortcomings and fails to protect the neighbourhood and residents from the impact of the proposal
- There is a lack of detail provided by the application, and there is no assessment of risk
- The proposal has a very small outside area where residents can relax (a small courtyard garden, the ornamental front garden, and a small smoking area to the rear of the adjacent pub garden)
- Residents would be able to gain access to the large field behind which stretches behind neighbouring houses and into the town centre
- The proposed 2m high fence is not sufficient
- Nearby residents would feel vulnerable, threatened and unsafe, and do not want to have to move
- BCHA have proposed no measures to control the potential for anti-social behaviour and crime, and to deal with issues that might occur outside the premises
- BCHA must take responsibility since they took over the management of Pathways and the problems of anti-social behaviour that spill out into Newton Road
- The existing issues experienced in the Newton Road area will be transferred to Hendford Hill
- If drugs and alcohol are not allowed within Acacia Lodge residents may go outside to use them leading to anti-social behaviour
- If visitors are not allowed into Acacia Lodge, they may collect outside which could lead to anti-social behaviour in the locality
- More safety measures are required
- Councillors have raised concerns in respect of the high crime rate in the Newton Road area; is this what they want to see at Hendford Hill?
- The proposal will have a detrimental impact on the health and mental well-being of the residents in the local area
- Having all these residents in one large home is a recipe for disaster. Need smaller units, not a large institution.
- The nearby Country Park will become a no-go area
- Hendford Hill is an intrinsic part of the major routes through the county. It forms part of the A30 east-west route through Yeovil at the point where it links with the A37, another major route running from the south to the north of the town.
- Hendford Hill is a very busy road where vehicles frequently speed, and the proposal will inevitably lead to greater numbers of pedestrians using Hendford Hill with a greater potential for someone to be hit.
- Hendford Hill has a pavement only on one side which is used frequently by elderly people walking into town, parents taking their children to the nearby nursery, staff and customers going to the Quicksilver Mail PH, and nursing staff going to a nearby care home. If, like at Newton Road, anti-social behaviour spills out onto the pavement this will be a significant problem.
- Concern for the safety of pedestrians using Rustywell Lane which leads to Rustywell Park
- Acacia Lodge should be used as a care home as there is a demand for spaces in care homes
- There is an existing small homeless hostel with eight residents further down Hendford Hill. There is a high level of support for the residents here, but still there are significant problems which impact on the neighbours. This size of hostel works for Hendford Hill, but

based on the experience of a small property, a much larger facility such as Acacia Lodge would inevitably cause significant disruption to Hendford Hill

- The police will not prevent problems occurring, but will only react once something happens
- Do we need this size of facility in Yeovil as there are relatively small numbers of homeless people in Yeovil and in South Somerset?
- Providing small units for homeless people is very costly, so where homeless charities have large properties they need to implement very detailed policies, including specialising in support for mental health and substance abuse problems. It is important to encourage residents to engage in the community, and the use of a night-time curfew is good practice
- There are many failings in the BCHA operations manual
- The proposal will have an adverse impact on local businesses, effect the whole town and give it a bad reputation
- The manager of the adjacent Quicksilver Mail PH has leased the pub for 20 years and has had to adjust to difficult circumstances such as the smoking ban, the financial crash, and now the pandemic. He considers his pub to be a friendly and safe place and has only had to call the police twice in 20 years. With this proposal next door his staff and customers would feel uncomfortable, and he might be forced to close, and the building changed to a shop or flats like other pubs in Yeovil.

The Chair then opened up the discussion of the application to the Town Councillors.

In summary the points they raised were as follows:

- Thanks were given to the public for coming to the meeting and giving their views
- It is useful for the Ward Members and the District Councillors to hear the views of people from both sides
- Local people need to be brave and speak up
- The Ward Members would reserve the right to defer their decision until the Area South Committee and when the case officer report would be available containing more information
- Would be keeping an open mind
- There are serious concerns raised by the proposal
- Have sympathy with the local residents and local businesses and recognise the potential impact the proposal could potentially have
- Possibly wrong location
- Hendford Hill is a gateway into Yeovil, and this proposal may have an adverse impact on the impression we want to give of the town and be detrimental to tourism
- Need to have more police information on the problems in Newton Road
- The major issue is the potential for the proposal to have an unacceptable impact on the residential amenity of nearby residents
- The application does not propose any security measures to protect the residents of Hendford Hill
- The Human Rights Act and the NPPF protects people from actual crime and the fear of crime
- Believe there is a need to do something for the homeless, but the problems associated with such developments cannot be spread around the town

- The proposal raises numerous issues which need addressing
- Cannot make assumptions about what *might* happen
- The potential impact on highway safety on Hendford Hill is a concern
- The impact of the proposal on the conservation area is a concern and needs to be fully assessed
- The meeting has taken place too soon as there are too many questions and not enough answers
- Any recommendation of this Committee should be deferred to be able to make an informed decision/recommendation
- Various Councillors said they would support a recommendation to refuse the application, and others to defer the application.

Cllr K Hussain proposed to recommend refusal of the application on the grounds it would result in anti-social and criminal behaviour that would have an adverse and detrimental impact on residential amenity. This was seconded by Cllr A Richards.

Cllr S Lowery then proposed that the application be deferred because of the lack of information. This was seconded by D Gubbins. In accordance with Standing Orders (Section 1) a vote was taken on the second proposal: there were 5 votes in support of the proposal to defer the application, 3 votes against the deferral, and 2 abstentions.

The Chair announced that the Committee had resolved to agree the deferral of the application because of the lack of information.

The public in attendance at the meeting were unhappy and called for a vote on the first proposal that had been made to recommend refusal of the application. The result of the vote was: 2 votes in support of recommending refusal, 5 against recommending refusal, and 3 abstentions.

**RESOLVED:** to agree the deferral of the application because of the lack of information.

The meeting closed at 8.52pm.

Signed:

Date:

