

BK3 Proposed Land Allocation Public Meeting 31st August 2016
Barkway Village Hall 7.30pm

Present:

Cllrs, Rev S. Falaschi-Ray, Dr R. Davidson, B. Morss, G. Swann
Parish Clerk C.Toms
District Councillor G. Morris

Public 113 members.
Apologies 36 residents.

Cllr Falaschi-Ray chaired the meeting and presented the current stance of the Parish Council regarding the above draft proposal.

The Parish Council had grave concerns that the BK3 development, as a whole or in part, was disproportionate to the size of Barkway, and would be non-sustainable from the point of the lack of amenities within village, the poor service roads, poor public transport and the increase in traffic that a development of this size would create.

Cllr Falaschi-Ray pointed out that the village was facing 3 actions:

- 1) BK3 adoption into the NHDC Draft Plan for Preferred Land Allocations.
- 2) Since NHDC did not have a 5 year housing stock plan, regardless of 1) above, Rand Brothers would be making a planning application on the West portion of BK3, and
- 3) A development company which owned the Eastern portion of BK3 "McIntyre's field" was expected to file a planning application by the end of 2016.

BK3 in its entirety had been given the allocation by NHDC of up to 140 homes. It is 19 acres / 7.7 hectares in size.

Cllr Falaschi-Ray invited Robert Rand, of Rand Brothers to address the meeting.

Mr Rand stated that since Hertfordshire County Council compulsorily purchased part of their field in the early 80's with the provision to build a new school, Rand Brothers had actively sought to develop the rest of the site. Until recently, NHDC had not allocated this site as a category 1, 2 or 3 but, with the need to build houses urgently, or face fines, NHDC has now removed the category rating for land allocation, and has incorporated it into their draft plans. NHDC need to build 16,500 homes by end of 2031.

Mr Rand stated that Rand Brothers were going to put in an application for housing development on their share of BK3 fairly imminently.

Mr Rand stated that he did not know or had any contact with the developers controlling McIntyre's field.

Mr Rand stated that consultees had already prepared their reports on archaeology, sewerage, highways, etc. and that an outline planning application would be filed in

September, a period of public consultation would then take place at the end of September and thereafter it was in the hands of NHDC to decide its viability.

Mr Rand stated that this was a large development and a good opportunity for the village, in that, his intention was to build some social housing, since there was none available in the village (*see Editor's note*), and that he would be creating homes for the young people in Barkway who wished to live there.

He stated that it was Rand Brothers intent that 40% of the development would be social homes, and this was greater than the minimum required if they were to sell the site to a private developer (15-20%) who would seek to maximise density.

Mr Rand stated that sites BK1 and 2 whilst sustainable, would not create social housing as they were too small. He stated that developments of 15 or under houses had no requirement to build social housing.

He stated that if a normal developer purchased the site they would likely look to build 20 houses per acre. Mr Rand would look to build half that amount.

He stated that their field had been suggested as more suitable by NHDC planning for higher density population than McIntyre's, which would be lower density and higher value properties. (Mr Rand stated this point in answer to a question put later in the meeting).

Mr Rand stated that the number of units proposed in the outline planning application would be the housing number allocated by NHDC divided by the area percentage. He stated he would also build a shop to service the community.

Mr Rand then took multiple questions.

Questions from the floor

How many homes would the Rands actually build?

- He repeated that it would be, as previously explained, number of houses divided by area percentage.

How would social housing be funded?

- Mr Rand did not know so looked to Cllr Morris for an answer. The more expensive houses built first would likely fund the building of the cheaper ones.
- Social homes would then be sold to the local authority at cost price, and the local authority would control their allocation.

Why were other sites not considered in other villages and what made Barkway so attractive to develop?

- Mr Rand stated this was not really a question for him to answer, but NHDC. The Draft Plan had not been ratified and NHDC had allocated the sites, not the Rands. Mr Rand stated that they had also put forward sites in Reed.

BK1 &2 - One person stated that the village had not been consulted on the suitability of those sites, and that she was unhappy at the prospect of lorries trundling down Periwinkle Close.

If 40% homes were to be sold to the Housing Association, then how could Rands state that homes would be allocated to Barkway residents?

- Mr Rand conceded that the Housing Association would allocate homes based on their criteria and that no he could not guarantee social homes for Barkway people.
- He stated Rands would be building smaller houses and more affordable houses.

When asked what the main consultees had said about Highways, services, and what did their reports contain?

- Mr Rand declined to make any comment or discuss these at the meeting, he stated that they would be published with the planning application and the public could read them then.

What would be done to provide better public transport for the presumably more in demand people living in the social housing?

- Mr Rand stated that as a result of the development, NHDC and the Parish Council would negotiate a Section 106 payment, and could then decide from this how to fund services. However Section 106 was negotiated after the planning application, so he could not comment further on how much this would be.

When asked what access roads would be created,

- Mr Rand stated the access road would be along the southern edge of his field to connect to McIntyre's, so that it could continue to Cambridge Road.

Asked if the other developer was in agreement with that –

- Mr Rand stated he had no communication with the other developer, that they were an agent for the McIntyre's estate and he had not spoken with them.

One person stated that 40% affordable homes was commendable, but it appeared that the Rands did not appear to be showing any responsibility to proportional building, (with regard to the village size).

- Mr Rand stated he thought their proposals were proportional and a good opportunity for the village.

When asked if 140 houses was “over the top”, Mr Rand responded by stating that NHDC had allocated the land and the number of houses to be built on it, not the Rands.

One person suggested volunteering to put a higher % of affordable housing which was outside of the Parish control and on a site where ½ of it was outside of the Rands control, seemed very difficult to justify. And then asked Cllr Morris, if it was justifiable to impose so many houses on Barkway – and of the 16,500 houses needed in NHDC how many of those would be social?

Cllr Morris said he did not know the answer to the question, but pointed out that he shared the Parish Council's concern that BK3 and the size of the developments, were disproportionate and inappropriate for Barkway.

When asked if the Rand's development would set a precedent for more development in the village, Cllr Morris stated that any new proposals would be taken on their merits, but yes, he did believe it would open the doors to other sites in the village.

When asked that if the BK3 development went ahead, was there any guarantee that they would block any other development in the village? Cllr Morris stated no. There were no guarantees of any such type.

It was stated to Mr Rand, so NHDC allocated this land based on the fact you proposed it, what is stopping you from un-proposing it?

- Mr Rand agreed that it was a true point and they could un-propose it if they wanted to.

A gentleman stated was morally acceptable to develop without any improvement to infrastructure? Did everyone feel it was acceptable there would be a likely increase in road accidents as a result of his development?

A young member asked what opportunities would there be for the children of the village.

- Mr Rand stated that if the application got approved, there would be a considerable Section 106 agreement which would provide money that the Parish could spend on the children in the village.

What attracted the Rand's to build such a large development rather than farm the land in perpetuity?

- Mr Rand stated that the capital return on farming the land was 0.8% and the return on development would be considerably more.

Would there be live-work units to enable employment to be created?

- Mr Rand said first of all they had to make a provisional planning application – an outline application for x number of units on the site, thereafter if this was accepted, a fine detailed application with each of the units, size, design etc. would have to be submitted.

It was pointed out that the emerging Neighbourhood plan had shown an expressed desire for social housing, but NHDC had informed the Parish that they could not dictate what percentage of new homes could be social. How would Mr Rand feel if NHDC insisted on a lower percentage of social homes?

- Mr Rand stated that he aimed to build 40% social homes, but if NHDC insisted on lower, then he would build fewer.

One person objected to so many social homes and that they could not be guaranteed to be not allocated to non-desirables and that she feared crime would increase as a result.

One person asked if the Parish Council had a plan to object and could inform everyone what they could say to object. Cllr Falaschi-Ray stated that the PC did intend to object, and were working on a plan, and that when a planning application was lodged, or BK 3 allocation went to public consultation the PC would inform the village on how to object.

One person asked if there had been any consideration to the additional sewerage, and that this would mean digging up gardens and paddocks along the length of the high street where the main sewers ran.

- Mr Rand stated that sewerage surveys had been conducted and conceded that considerable improvements to the sewerage system would be required. He declined to go further stating the documents would be available at the time of the planning application.

Cllr Morris was asked what the likelihood was of a school being built on the strip of land between Periwinkle Close and BK3

- Cllr Morris stated that this was highly unlikely indeed. The site was originally intended as a new school to merge Reed, Barley, Therfield and Barkway schools into one, at a time where rural needs were substantially different to how they are now.

One person asked if the whole of BK3 had been allocated for 140 houses, how many would be built on each site?

- Cllr Falaschi-Ray replied that the division of the site was about 60% Rands /40% McIntyres. The Rands site could therefore have approximately 90 houses. Mr Rand responded that in the Draft Local Plan the east side of BK3 is suggested for low density larger housing and that the western side is higher density, so more social and affordable housing, so the percentage of the housing may vary due to this. NHDC will give guidance.

When asked will it be more than 140, it could be up to 200 houses maybe?

- Cllr Morris replied that 140 was the maximum and it was more likely to be less than that.

One final comment came from a person who stated that he could understand that NHDC had a housing quota to meet and that Rand's wanted to develop their land to make money but could it be noted that all the residents chose to live in Barkway, a historical village surrounded by beautiful countryside. They did not choose to live next to a massive new housing development. He was concerned that a development of that proportion would totally alter the character of the village where the residents desired to live.

Cllr Falaschi-Ray closed the meeting at 8.35pm, thanking all who had attended.

Editor's Note: There is some social housing in the village plus social and shared equity ownership housing in Chapel Close.