

Community Group Meeting  
Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 24 November 2015 6.30pm  
At Gravel Hill Farm Board Room

**Those present**

John Chaplin, Storey's Way Residents Association (Chair)  
Brian Bromwich, (On behalf of Christine Bromwich from Girton Baptist Church)  
Ian Grant, Conduit Head Road (part)  
Jane Firman, Conduit Head Road  
Bob Dawson, Nineteen Acre Field Residents Association (NAFRA)  
Mary Wheater, Windsor Road Residents Association (WIRE)  
Sue Finer, Storey's Way Residents Association  
Valerie Holt, Castle Ward Councillor

**University**

Heather Topel (HT)  
Biky Wan  
Mike Dean – MD Ecology - Project Ecologist

**Apologies**

Douglas DeLacey, Girton Ward Councillor  
Thomas Bygott, Girton Ward Councillor  
Ann Mullinger, WIRE  
Helen Hutchinson, WIRE  
Morcom Lunt, North Newnham Residents Association  
Janet Bunker, Parish of the Ascension Church  
Lynda Harford, County Councillor  
Lucy Nethsingha, County Councillor  
Christine Bromwich, Girton Baptist Church  
Sarah Christensen, Lansdowne Road  
Aaron Walker, NAFRA

**1. WELCOME INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed the group. Introductions were made and apologies were presented.

**2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as accurate.

Bob Dawson (BD) raised a point of topics that are not covered on the agenda, a matter arising being that housing types on the boundary was of interest for discussion. He outlined that NAFRA had a problem with the development on the perimeter in particular with the mix of detached, semi-detached and terraced properties for the market housing and had received correspondence from the Chair of the NWCD Syndicate (the Project's governing body), Alexander Johnston, who said that the team would be committed to discussing with NAFRA at the relevant time about housing proposals in the 19 Acre Field area – the detail of which would be six-nine months away. Heather Topel (HT) agreed and added that part of the housing discussion would be covered in the update of the meeting (Parcels known as M1 and M2) but others would not (Parcels known as S1 and S2 and anything beyond Phase 1) because the detail of designs was currently not in place.

**3. UPDATE ON THE PROJECT**

Heather Topel gave an update on the project since the last meeting. Key points included:

- The School opened in September 2015 and currently had 111 pupils in Reception and Years 1 and 2. The school will grow gradually, opening up the next year group with each academic year. The admissions procedure was set by the County Council and the admission procedure for 2016-17 has begun. The

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catchment for the school is drawn tightly to be the development site and West Cambridge. If neighbours have concerns about the catchment then these should be raised with the County Council. Within the School there is a piece of Public Art in the cloister of the courtyard which has pictures of the sky taken from around the world on the Summer solstice – a launch of the artwork is expected when the school is complete but no date has been set yet.

- The site is coming together and the aerial images show the Western Edge with footpaths, the energy centre, student accommodation and University homes under construction. The student accommodation is due to open next year. There are aerials and live pictures of the site on the website.
- There are two developers working with the University who are developing the first 400 market homes. Hill (working on parcels M1 and M2) received planning permission from the JDCC planning committee last week. Their scheme includes three apartment buildings as well as terraced, semi-detached and detached homes. Their market suite is expected to open in Summer 2016 and located on the new road, with occupations in 2017. Hill's scheme has a boundary with one property on Huntingdon Road.

Countryside is the other developer and they are working on parcels S1 and S2. They will have a mix of small apartments, semi-detached, detached and terraced homes. Their programme is in delay at the moment due to technical matters related to design such as the distance from the underground bins which may result in some changes: therefore they have not submitted their proposals for planning. We can discuss this at the next meeting – either by inviting the developers back or we will update you, depending on the nature of the changes.

Additionally, there are two new parcels for residential development that are progressing which are located closely to the local centre. These will be sale apartments by developers and these partners are currently being identified. They will go through the design stages and consultation.

After this, we might look at areas near Huntingdon Road beside the Horse Chestnut Avenue and the nineteen acre field area – This may be beyond the six-nine month timescale that had been previously mentioned.

- The next major milestone would be the opening of the student accommodation next year.

Q: Will there be retirement accommodation? (Valerie Holt)

A: The University will be going to the market next year for the senior living facility. The details on facility will depend on the model that the operator will offer but there will be a level of care that is provided in the senior living. All homes will be built to lifetime homes standard which allow for modifications for individuals to make as their lives change. (HT)

Q: When will the Ridgeway open? (Sue Finer)

A: The earliest opening of the Ridgeway exit at Storey's Way will be September 2016. (HT)

Q: When will the Madingley Road works be finished? (John Chaplin) And when will the Huntingdon Road works be finished? (Sue Finer)

A: On both roads, BT as a third-party need to complete works before the University's contractor, Skanska, can finish. Roadworks cannot be undertaken in daytime during December because of the Christmas restrictions determined by the County Council which mean that the works by Skanska will be complete in January 2016. The completion of the works on the road may help the traffic movement on Madingley and Huntingdon Roads but the through-route on the site will not be open until 2017. (HT)

Q: Could you comment from the Project's point of view on the recent press coverage about the financial overruns – are they true, what are the implications for the project and what are the implications for stakeholders? The press queried the management of the project and with the unforeseeable costs and the affordability of the key worker homes being restricted – is there only one place the development could go - it is not a cheap development and there is a worry that it is less of a mix and balance of community as it will get

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more expensive. Will [the second report] be raised again at Senate House? (Bob Dawson).

A: Like all projects that are a similar scale, there have been some problems which have resulted in some projected cost overruns. What we experienced was that in the later construction contracts that were let, construction cost inflation has gone beyond the projected costs and this was beyond our predictions. There were also issues with a contractor that were unforeseen. The University has undertaken an audit and that is going through its governance processes – many of the comments in the press are taken from individuals of the University; not the University itself. There are consequences for the governance and management of the project. The audit report is two-stage and December will see the second part of that which will be for the University to consider and there will be a University view on the matter. On affordability, we do not yet know if the financial parameters will change. It is not our understanding that the vision will be compromised. In identifying the potential cost overruns, the team looked at options to resolve this but these were deemed unpalatable and there is not the desire to dilute the vision or reduce the scope. The nature of the relationship with developers does not change and their contractual agreements have been set with no indication to renegotiate. Their house prices will be set next year and they are not looking to restrict sales prices or target particular people. The University is looking at affordability in particular affordable homes for purchase through the City Deal. The second part of the Audit Report may be published in the Reporter, although we are unclear if it will be raised as a Discussion in Senate House. (HT)

#### **4. ECOLOGY PRESENTATION BY MIKE DEAN, PROJECT ECOLOGIST**

Mike Dean gave a presentation on the ecology and biodiversity of the development site. Key points included:

The development site was previously intensely farmed land, mostly arable but with some areas of pasture. It included some hedgerows – largely species poor and gappy, although some species rich hedgerows were recorded in the southern parts of the site (which are being retained). In biodiversity terms the majority of the site was considered to be of relatively low ecological value.

There are some habitat features in the site which are of more significant ecological importance such as the Veteran Oak Tree, small woodlands, the avenue of Horse Chestnut trees and the Washpit Brook.

The surveys that informed the Environment Impact Assessment for the development found that the site supported a number of species of importance for conservation, as well as protected species, including:

- Brown Hares – large numbers were present across the whole site
- Badgers – there are numerous setts on site, which fluctuate in their levels of use; their status and location is likely to have been determined by previous farming practices. It is likely that there are two separate social groups of badgers using the site
- White Letter Hair Streak Butterflies - a species reliant on Elm trees, and recorded in the southern part of the site.
- Great Crested Newts (GCN) - a European Protected Species and a key constraint to the design of the scheme. The population breeds within two off-site ponds (one in the Park and Ride and one between Conduit Head Road and Lansdowne Road). The GCN breed in the ponds in spring and use terrestrial habitat during the remainder of the year, including for hibernation over winter – they may use some of the land within the site boundaries during this part of their lifecycle. Extensive surveys in four different years with different methodologies recorded a maximum of one GCN in the pond at the Park and Ride. This pond was probably colonised by GCNs from the pond between Conduit Head Road and Lansdowne Road, where there is a more established population.

The construction of Phase 1 has required a considerable amount of ecological oversight in relation to these and other constraints, to ensure compliance with legislation and the Site-wide Biodiversity Strategy. For example:

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- GCNs - A license from Natural England was required to allow site clearance and construction for Phase 1. The new road onto the site from the Madingley Road Junction will bisect the two off-site ponds used by GCNs. Whilst the ponds that the GCN are in are not directly on the development site, a lot of effort has gone to help them and their migration – a new culvert has been constructed along the line of the Washpit Brook, with ledges and ramps on either side to allow the newts to move safely through; a permanent newt fence keeps them off the road. A temporary fence was put up prior to site clearance commencing, which prevents GCN and other amphibians from moving onto the construction site. It was also used to clear the site of newts – the principle is that the newts travel alongside the fence and fall into a bucket and can then be safely relocated outside the newt fence. The buckets were checked for newts on 30 consecutive days - not a single GCN was found, underlining the low importance of the site for them. Some sections of fence have been replaced with a more durable fence. When the fence was dug out, 5 GCN were caught (on the outside of the fence) and released into specially constructed refuge sites near the Park and Ride pond.
- Badgers – Most of the setts are unaffected by Phase 1, although a sett near Huntingdon Road was partly closed due to the location of the market homes, with gates and mesh to prevent them from re-entering the sett. This was done under a Natural England license. Badgers continue to move across the site, we have seen evidence of badgers moving directly across the middle of the Phase 1 construction site from their footprints.
- Birds - There are legal obligations to comply with for nesting birds during construction. Vegetation was removed outside of the nesting season. However, ground nesting birds are present and the construction site, including the areas of stored topsoil and subsoil provides the perfect habitat for particular species such as Skylarks, which nested on site before works commenced. Also, Little Ringed Plover is a species which enjoys wet habitats and nests on shingle and gravel pits that have been flooded – they were not previously seen on the development site but have been recorded since the topsoil was removed, as this has created ideal habitat for them. Bird scaring methods such as kites have been used to dissuade birds but are not 100% reliable. Extensive surveys have therefore been required to search for nests prior to works commencing. When nests have been found, they are protected. A Skylark nest was found in the area for the two-stage channel near to the M11 and works were delayed until the eggs hatched and the chicks left the nest. A Pied Wagtail nest was found in a pile of pallets within the construction site, and was cordoned off and left until the eggs had hatched and the birds had fledged.
- Bats - Brown Long-eared Bats are roosting in the roof of Gravel Hill Farm. During the construction works, care had to be taken to ensure that the works and modifications did not change the way that the bats roosted. Spaces had to be blocked off to prevent pigeons from coming in but that would allow bats in.
- Hedgehogs - Some abandoned baby Hedgehogs were found on site and taken to a rescue centre.

The site-wide strategy for the landscape and biodiversity is taking shape.

- There is a considerable area of wetland habitat being created within the Western Edge.
- We are trying to encourage Kingfishers to the site, which are charismatic and colourful, and will be putting in artificial nest sites to attract them. A Kingfisher was seen on site for the first time this summer.
- Additionally, we hope that Otters will be encouraged onto the wetlands of the site.
- The Water Vole is in decline in the UK and is a protected species. They were recorded on site in 2005 and 2007 but have not been recorded since then which is suspected to be because of the general decline. The new wetland habitat has been designed specifically to provide valuable habitat for Water Voles and it is hoped that this will attract them back.
- New grasslands that are species rich will be created and retained grassland will be improved through appropriate management. The Ridge and Furrow field was previously intensively grazed by cattle and

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of relatively low ecological value. It will be managed as a meadow to improve its botanical and invertebrate diversity.

- There will be new hedgerows planted (approximately 5km).
- There are new areas of woodland and orchard being planted. The trees within the Western Edge will be native species. A disease resistant form of Elm trees will also be planted.
- There will be new habitat for newts with two new ponds as well as swales.
- The major gain for biodiversity will be the bird nesting features on the site with nests on 25% of buildings (targeting Swifts, House Sparrows and Starlings). The new school has six Swift nest sites (small holes in the wall provide access to a purpose built cavity). In Spring/Summer next year we hope to play recorded Swift calls to attract the birds.
- New bat roosts will be placed in buildings such as the Cricket pavilion and utilities buildings near the Park and Ride, as well as bat boxes on trees.
- There will be ongoing management to benefit biodiversity. For example, some recent remedial works to remove dead wood from the Horse Chestnut trees on the avenue were undertaken under ecological supervision. The trees were checked for bats and birds prior to works, and branches with cavities that provide features for wildlife have been securely placed back up in one of the trees.

Q: The trees on the Chestnut Avenue went brown two weeks earlier and the University has planted new saplings – will you try and keep it as a Chestnut Tree Avenue? Is it pointless if they are getting worse? I don't want the trees removed, but I don't want branches to fall on people. (Valerie Holt)

A: The area near the Chestnut Avenue is likely to be in Phase 2 so the long term plans for the Avenue will be integrated into this detail and will be consulted on as part of the plans which were also of particular concern to NAFRA and in the same timescales. The management is short term for the time being but there will be a long term strategy. (HT) An arboriculturalist has been present on site to oversee all the works (Mike Dean).

Comment: The dieback of the leaves and the management of the trees are unrelated. It's good to have saplings of Chestnuts. (Jane Firman)

A: There is decay in a number of trees and there is a long term implication which is being dealt with by the University's Arboricultural Advisors.

Q: Are badgers and species being displaced from the site? Where are they going? (John Chaplin)

A: Badgers are sedentary and will be territorial. They are likely to remain on site, as there will be good foraging habitat for them, although there may be some reduction in the numbers of Badgers within each group over time. Foxes will stay on the site and are likely to do quite well, as a result of the development. Brown Hares are likely to be lost from the site altogether in the long-term, as the habitat is unlikely to be of particular value for them, although small numbers may continue to use the grassland within the Western edge. There will certainly be a reduction in numbers once the development has been completed, although this is likely to take place over such a long period of time that there will be a gradual reduction in breeding success, rather than individual animals being directly affected.

Q: I saw 30 brown hares so it will be sad to see them go. What about the muntjac deer? (Jane Firman)

A: There are Muntjac deer on site and there will probably be fewer as a result of the development – however, they will continue to use the open spaces, woodlands and green corridors. They are not a species of conservation.

Q: Are herons in the area being culled? (Ian Grant)

A: No. Herons use the site already - they sit in the middle of overgrown fields catching prey, as well as along the Washpit Brook. We suspect that we'll see more in the future because of the amount of wetland habitat being created in the Western Edge. Herons don't nest on site and the works therefore don't have any direct implications for them.

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Some species of birds will probably increase on site (House Sparrows, Starlings, Swifts, as well as other garden species), although there will be a decline in the numbers of farmland specialist species, such as Skylarks and Linnets.

Q: We have seen more magpies (Valerie Holt)

A: Yes. Along the Ridge and Furrow field there have been blackbirds nesting and magpies have removed their eggs. They are not a pleasant species.

#### 5. NEXT MEETING

A meeting will be targeted for February 2016. If members would like to suggestion topics of discussion then that would be welcome. Next year there would potentially be the update from the development partners and also an update on the Community Centre from the Joint Venture as the Centre Manager will be recruited next year.

#### 6: AOB

A request was made to meet at the School. HT explained that we had hoped to host this meeting at the School but it was felt that they needed the time to get used to their own environment before hosting others. It is hoped that in the new year a meeting could be accommodated and possibly earlier to see the building during the daytime.