

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RIDGEPOINT HOMES AND THEALE PARISHIONERS

Minutes of the meeting of representatives of Ridgepoint Homes Ltd, Theale Parish councillors, and Theale residents which took place in the Peter Gooch Room, Pavilion, Englefield Road, Theale, RG7 5AS on Wednesday 29th September 2021.

Representatives of Ridgepoint Homes Ltd present: Nick McEntyre (managing director), Jon Regent (operations director), Emma Runesson (planning manager)

Meeting chaired by: Cllr Paul Clifford (Theale Parish Council)

Others present: Cllr Alan Macro (district councillor) and approximately 25 members of public, including 5 parish councillors

Minutes: Paul Manley (clerk to Theale Parish Council)

Meeting started 7:30pm

1. Introduction

Cllr Paul Clifford introduced Nick, Jon and Emma and thanked those present for attending.

Nick introduced Ridgepoint Homes (RH). The focus of the meeting was phase 1 of the Lakeside development, ie 11 housing units at the end of St Ives Close. RH has only possessed the land for a few months. Other phases of the development are still in the early design stages.

Cllr Paul Clifford asked that RH address the disruption to and concerns of residents around the construction phase.

2. Presentation by Ridgepoint Homes

Site has long planning history over many years. Outline application of 325 units is the main consent for the site against which RH will be submitting reserved matters consents. Phase 1 is for 7 units with access via St Ives Close. This access has been approved by the West Berkshire Council (WBC). RH has submitted application for 11 units instead. The access can sustain more than 11 dwellings. The parking standard of the proposed units is higher than required and all 'on plot' to mitigate impact on St Ives Close.

Why has the number of units increased from 7 to 11? RH has not pushed numbers as far as they could have. 11 units in the way they are developed is sustainable with a *de minimus* traffic impact. The total outline permission for 325 has remained unchanged – only the distribution has changed.

The 11 dwellings are slightly smaller than the consent for 7 units to make them more affordable for families. All bespoke house designs, suited to lakeside environment and an improvement on what was originally approved.

Cllr Paul Clifford raised concerns over access by St Ives Close, including obstacles such as hedgerow, grass verges, and trees with sentimental concern. What would RH do about this? RH stated it would be hard to discuss specifics this evening. Would need to engage on individual points to make access during construction work. Approved access plan is the 'reality', and what RH is required to work to under the planning consent.

[RH will send their presentation slides for publication on the parish council website]

3. Questions from members of the public (MoP)

a. MoP: Concerns over **health and safety** for access during construction.

RH: Will have to create construction environmental management plan to manage this safely as part of the overall planning consent. RH will review the access situation and

- consider if construction traffic could access using main entrance. If we can technically and it is viable, we will.
- b. MoP: Plan has changed from **7 to 11 units** and something else. Can you clarify?
- RH: There was approved outline application for 325, then reserved matters application for 7 units submitted previously – RH was not involved with this consent. RH then acquired land and now wants to increase this to 11 units. This is reserve matters, ie the detailed plans which come under the “umbrella outline” consent.
- c. MoP: Why have you stripped out lots of **trees**, in advance of something which isn't yet approved, or even necessary.
- RH: Necessary for topographical survey and details of the tree removal have been previously approved by WBC under outline permission.
- MoP: Will you remove any more trees?
- RH: Tree officer has asked for two to be left, but more may be left.
- d. MoP: Strongly object to 11 houses as they are too close to my house. Why 3 storeys? Windows will overlook my property. The parking arrangement is ridiculous. Why not use other access and save St Ives Close?
- RH: They are not 3 storeys, but 2 storeys with loft conversions.
- MoP: How many bedrooms will the units have? Concerns it is overcrowded.
- RH: Floor plans are available to view on the planning porta. The properties have 4–5 bedrooms.
- RH: We do not expect all to like the development, but do not want to antagonise and welcome comments.
- e. Cllr Zoe Fenwick: What research have you done on **housing needs**? Parish council did survey and found need for affordable social housing – 1- and 2-bedroom – for low-income families to stay in this area.
- RH: Bulk of outline 325 houses is 2- and 3-bedroom, more affordable dwellings. 41 affordable dwellings will be delivered across whole development in partnership with housing association, as agreed by WBC.
- f. Cllr Zoe Fenwick: Has there been a recent **ecological survey** since last one 15 years ago? You have removed trees during nesting season (nightingales, nightjars), and broken a green corridor.
- RH: Employed ecologist and tree specialist before commencing work. Did not remove any trees or vegetation without these considerations. Went about it in the correct way.
- Cllr Iain Hopcroft: Thank you for taking the time to come tonight. Vegetation clearing did actually happen during nesting season. People took recordings of nightingale song before scrub was cleared.
- RH: Ecologist authorised their actions.
- Cllr Iain Hopcroft: Are you happy to work with the community to make site as environmentally friendly as possible?
- RH: We are amenable to dialogue. Will take on board what we can and be honest with what we cannot. We are required by the outline planning consent to implement an ecology management plan for south-east corner of woodland. We look to increase the net biodiversity of the whole site.
- MoP: Will this footpath through the south-east woodland of ecological significant not hamper biodiversity? Theale has lots of history, residents are upset. You won't be able to get construction vehicles down St Ives.

RH: Granted St Ives is not the best access, there are issues. Will look at other possibilities. Regarding the footpath, need to look at details of least detrimental route through woodland. This woodland path that connects to the station is something WBC is requires as part of the outline consent, not something RH has offered, given the significant cost. Will also benefit people who live there as they will have access to Station Road.

- g. MoP: Your presentation came across as very assertive. Will you **compensate the village** in any way?

Cllr Paul Clifford: Developers are obliged to pay CIL payment, some of which feeds back to parish council for expenditure to benefit the community.

RH: We don't intend to be assertive, but honest and straightforward given the existing planning consents.

- h. MoP: I live at the Ramblers, a bungalow at the end of St Ives Close, so would border 5 of new houses. I and my neighbours are all bungalows, but **new houses not in keeping** with this. 11 units are taller than original 7, which we originally thought would be a positive impact on the village.

RH: Understand you will feel affected by development. We wanted to provide similar level of accommodation across all units. It is based on housing need. These units are low-density compared with other proposed housing in the development.

MoP: I am comparing with the existing houses in St Ives Close, not others in the development.

RH: Understand and respect that. We feel this is correct density of development.

MoP: We have issue with height and style, both of which are out of keeping.

RH: Design looks harsher on the projector screen. We will consider comments regarding heights.

- i. MoP: Is the **lake** getting smaller in successive plans?

RH: No, remains the same size.

- j. MoP: Concern over **traffic on roundabout** [A4 / A340 / The Green] for expected increase in traffic exiting village.

RH: 325 units has already been approved by WBC with 1 approved access point.

- k. Cllr Mel Paul: Proposed **parking arrangement** is 'pants'. Even by removing trees in St Ives Close, it is not wide enough for 2-way traffic. Nobody will be able to park outside existing properties. Rubbish lorries currently must reverse as there is so little room.

RH: We do a check before moving onto site to ensure we can deliver what is required within our land ownership and we can. Highway Authority audits the plans and this access arrangement is approved.

- l. MoP: You've failed in your **communication with the public**. You were asked to come here tonight; you didn't want to yourself. There is also a difficulty in accessing plans on the planning portal, especially for more senior residents.

RH: Will send plans to parish council for promulgation. We will address individual concerns.

MoP: How many cars are envisaged per house?

RH: There will be 3 parking spaces per house, above the minimum required by WBC.

Cllr Paul Clifford thanked RH for coming and listening and hoped they would take the feedback on board. Many other developers would not have done so. RH agreed to set up a communication strategy for communication with the public.

- m. Cllr Zoe Fenwick: What are you doing to safeguard houses from risk of **flooding**?

RH: Outline permission included a flood risk assessment which reveals no flooding on a macro level. Yet to be determined is a surface water drainage strategy. Once done, this will be submitted and reviewed by WBC and environment agency as part of the planning conditions.

MoP: But I moved into my property [on St Ives Close] which has a medium risk of ground water flooding.

RH: The flood risk assessment revealed this was not a flood risk.

MoP: But if you are removing green areas, there will be less run-off.

RH: This is to be addressed in the surface water drainage strategy.

- n. Cllr Katie Gash, on behalf of a resident on The Green: Concern over **increased noise** from A4 with loss of trees.

RH: Will look to see if we can get road screens put up as soon as possible. New buildings will also act as noise barrier.

MoP: We are also now exposed to halogen lights on dual carriageway.

RH: We will meet with people and try to address concerns.

- o. MoP: Who will **own St Ives Close** after development?

RH: Plan for local authority to take over ownership.

4. Conclusion

Cllr Paul Clifford thanked all for attending, including RH. He asked residents to submit comments on planning applications via the planning portal website. He asked RH to communicate with the parish council with the clerk. Communications with the parish council would be put on the parish council website for all to see.

Meeting ended 8:43pm.