

Report of Council Working Group on future Town Development

1. Chipping Norton Town Council propose that the only new land allocation for housing in the new 2016 Local Plan should be the Castle View/Chestnuts/Ambulance Station site.

Based on an analysis of recent data we estimate that between Jan 2007 and Dec 2016 approx 518 homes should be built in Chipping Norton. Of these 89 have already been completed so far this year. Another 198 – still to be built - have received Planning permission. 80 have been scheduled in the current Local Plan at Cromwell Park. That leaves 141 still to be planned for which land allocations need to be made during the period.

“Windfall” sites have been running at very high figures recently and we expect this trend to continue as developers search out pockets of land in the town and properties of public agencies become available. We conservatively estimate “windfall” applications at 80 during the period up to 2016. The balance of homes required (61) could surely be accommodated on the Castle View/Chestnuts/Ambulance Station site – although the Planners determination of acceptable densities and boundaries will obviously affect the final outcome.

These housing figures imply a growth in the town’s population from 5972 in 2001 to around 7500 in 2020 - an increase of 25%. This compares with recently published figures from the National Statistics Office which forecast a national population growth of around 12-13% over the same period. 25% as a level of growth for the town seems just about sustainable as far as local services and traffic is concerned, but unless urgent action is taken on the jobs front, the present imbalance of jobs to housing will become significantly worse (see Para 4 below)

2. Chipping Norton Town Council recommend that much greater attention should be paid to preserving the traditional character of the town and specifically that no development of the Burgage Plots should be considered until a detailed review of the Conservation Area and a Character Assessment has been carried out.

There is growing concern among residents that some recent developments risk damaging the character of the town. Civic amenities have been handed over to housing and that trend looks set to continue. The new phenomenon of “garden grabbing” attracts great hostility. The demolition of one family house to provide eight flats not only harms the traditional environment but is providing more and more living space which is unsuitable for young families. People’s main worry is the residential density being permitted – and even encouraged by government guidelines. These concerns apply to the central conservation area but also to other characterful areas like The Leys and Churchill Road.

Much of the centre of Chipping Norton is designated as a Conservation area. However it is not clear what exactly it is that we are conserving. English Heritage say...“*Local authorities need to develop policies which clearly identify what features of the (conservation) area should be preserved or enhanced, and set out how this can be done. Character appraisals will also identify areas where enhancement through development may be desirable*”

The Burgage Plots site is so significant that before any plans for it can be considered a detailed review of the Conservation Area is called for which clearly identifies the specific features which should be conserved and a design brief agreed for the style of any development.

3. Chipping Norton Town Council strongly believe that the Hospital buildings and site should be retained for community use – primarily as a Youth Centre and possibly a Library. We have some innovative ideas about how this might be achieved which we would like to discuss urgently with the Planners.

The Town needs to find sites or provision for a number of important civic amenities. Our full wish list is: A new Youth Centre, A new Library, A drop-in centre for Senior Citizens, An Information Centre, A Tourist Office, a Youth Theatre space, An Arts Centre, A Picnic Area, A Bus Terminal A relocation site for the Ace Centre. Access to more pitches for junior football teams.

Important Town Centre sites have already become vacant as public agencies have centralised (ambulance, OCC Social Services and NHS Trust) Others are scheduled to follow (Hospital and Care home) and perhaps others in the future (GP surgeries, Police?,) It is difficult for the community to accept that each of these buildings is sold for intensive residential development to optimise a return to the public agency involved – particularly when the community has urgent needs and when sites like

the Hospital were bequeathed to the town in the first place. These sites are irreplaceable and – if possible – at least some should be retained for civic use

As far as the Castle View and Hospital site is concerned. We are not clear what the situation will be if the demolition of Chestnuts or the old Hospital Building is proposed (both within the Conservation area and presumably subject to Policy BE6). The Planners' attitude to this would have a huge impact on the value of these sites and therefore, their potential availability for community use.

The Town Council believes very strongly that the Hospital buildings should be kept for use as a Youth Centre. Several of the other amenities on our wish list (possibly including the library) might be able to be accommodated there as well. The Council has some tentative proposals as to how this ambitious project might be achieved and funded – with the co-operation of the County and District. We would like to discuss these ideas with the Planners urgently.

4. Chipping Norton Town Council strongly recommend that the Town Council and WODC should form a Partnership with a commercial operator to develop a new business park of starter units on the land at Greystones.

The job deficit arising from the Parker Knoll closure has not been closed. Office space is available in the town and will become even more plentiful as the Parker Knoll site is developed and CETA builds its new HQ. However, blue collar workers are traveling to nearby towns for work and there is a continuing need for manual and semi-skilled jobs since a significant number of young people in the town leave school without requisite GCSEs. Work of this kind is not readily available and what jobs do exist are often filled by East European workers. The present Industrial Estates house a preponderance of offices, warehouses and retail units. There continues to be a complete lack of small industrial starter units. Encouraging the provision of such units is probably the most significant contribution local councils can make towards facilitating the creation of more local blue-collar jobs. (This issue was clearly identified in the Appraisal of five years ago).

We strongly recommend that the Town Council and WODC should form a Partnership with a commercial operator to develop a new business park of starter units on the land at Greystones. In the meantime we urge Planners to resist even more strongly applications to convert employment premises to residential use. We simply cannot afford to let the jobs/homes balance get any worse.

5. The Burgage Plots site probably represents a last opportunity to increase the number of retail premises in our growing town

The town shopping centre of small, specialist shops alongside a good range of practical and useful retailers makes Chippy an attractive and convenient shopping experience for locals and – very importantly – for people from nearby villages. For local shoppers there are some retail gaps – men's clothing, a sports shop and children's clothes and shoes being the most commonly mentioned – and it is a pity that the two big supermarkets are not more competitive (on quality and price) with the best retailers in Banbury and Witney. For shoppers from the villages faster access to very short term parking would be a major improvement. But by and large Chippy is doing alright on the retail front – with a steady turnover in ownership and regular refurbishments which provide continuing interest. The Town Council remains convinced that a major out of town supermarket would be extremely harmful to the viability of the town centre and would strongly oppose such a development.

We are much less successful in attracting visitors and tourists. However, it is always reassuring that most visitors who do somehow find us tend to be very complimentary about the town (and this should be even more the case now that we have some fantastic new loos!). We need to publicise ourselves better. And we need to take advantage of those times when visitors are in town (like during the Pantomime season and Christmas Late Night Shopping) to make sure they are made to feel welcome and know what's on offer. Hopefully the recent appointment of a Marketing Manager will help this process along.

The town is still noticeably expanding so it is unfortunate that there has recently been a loss of three trading outlets to residential use – each application strongly opposed by the Town Council. We should resist this trend and be looking instead for new retail opportunities. Many of our new citizens are more affluent and many are used to smart urban standards. They have money to spend in local shops if what they want is available. There is a view that the Burgage Plots site probably represents a last opportunity to expand the commercial heart of the town and cater to changing lifestyles. Has the time come for a small mall or walk-through precinct linked with new parking provision – of the kind which seems to have been very successful in Broadway and many other small towns. The prospect of a new traffic-free core – offering an attractive context for pavement cafes, patisseries, craft shops and smart

home improvement outlets (with some examples of Public Art on display) – is surely worth serious consideration as an alternative to another gated collection of mews houses. Why should Witney have all the sophistication?

Developing the Burgage Plots for retail use would also provide the opportunity to create an area for staff parking as well as a service road to the back of the Topside shops - hence alleviating the difficulties of Topside deliveries and parking [never fully resolved from the original Town Centre Improvement Scheme].

6. Chipping Norton Town Council believe that a mandatory weight limit imposed on both "A" roads through the town is the only solution to the serious congestion and pollution problems.

The noise, pollution and danger which HGVs create continues to be a matter of huge concern for local residents. The Town Council made important representations recently during the preparation by Halcrows of the OCC Transport Plan and to the Local Planning Inspector during his enquiry into the Local Plan – consistently arguing for a weight restriction through the town centre.

AQMA proposals are due now and could have serious implications for the future development of the Town Centre. We would be strongly opposed to any one-way or tidal flow schemes, since we have current experience of the chaos such traffic engineering produces. We also oppose a by-pass.

Now that alternative HGV routes are in place and the A44 lorry route from Oxford to Evesham should soon be signposted, we urge that the District and County Councils actively pursue the question of getting a weight restriction introduced through Chipping Norton on both the A44 and A361.

The increasing number of local bus services and their popularity means that at various times of day West Street (where all the bus stops are) becomes seriously congested and often blocked. This is on top of the HGV emissions and air quality problem. We believe the time has come to try and identify a Central Point away from the main thoroughfares where all bus routes could arrive and depart. In particular we believe that the New Street Car Park could have such a potential role.

Parking continues to be a serious problem and is getting worse each year as there is more development in the Town Centre. We would like to re-examine the issue of a Residents Parking Scheme – particularly for Spring Street, Market Street and West Street residents

Background papers providing more detail are available.