



Minutes of Graven Hill Residents' Association (GHRA)

Formal Committee Meeting (via Zoom)

Wednesday 4th August 2021 @ 19:30 hrs

Attendance:

Chair:	Philip Sore (PS)
Secretary:	Christine Clynes (CC)
Treasurer:	Sam Omotayo (SO)
General Committee:	Helen Baker (HB) Susan Weston (SW) Stephen Aggett (SA) Simon Kirkman (SK) Eleanor Smith (ES) Max Dias-Gunawardena (MDG) Karen Sims (KS)

In addition to the committee members, 45 residents and Cllr Dan Sames logged into the meeting

1. Apologies:

Cllr Miller and Cllr Cotter

2. Minutes of Formal Committee Meeting held on 02/06/21 were agreed as a true record.

3. Matters arising from Committee Meeting not on the agenda

3.1 Post Box

PS informed the meeting that we had received an update from Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) on 25th May that the license had now been sorted by GHVDC's solicitors. Royal Mail informed us that there would now be a lead-in period of 16 weeks which means that the post box should arrive some time in September.

3.2 Access to Foundation Square from the main site

PS informed the meeting that GHVDC stated on the 25th May that "as works were due to start on the Western Spine Road there would be lots of earth moving and GHVDC was not willing to put a pedestrian route on a construction site as health and safety was the main priority". This position was reiterated at the GHVDC liaison meeting held on 27th July. GHVDC had written to residents of Foundation Square and would be meeting with them this week.

3.3 Recycling facilities

PS confirmed that glass recycling containers had been positioned on the service road to the car park for Block E25 at the entrance to Graven Hill.

3.4 Opening of play park areas

PS confirmed that all but one of the play areas were now open with the exception of the one located alongside Westacott Road which GHVDC said would be opened once it had received practical completion from Cherwell DC. The date was currently still unknown.

3.5 Watering of new tree saplings

PS explained that some concern had been expressed by residents that newly planted trees were not being watered. GHVDC had now confirmed that they were increasing the watering regime in

response to the recent warm weather and that they were aware of some dead or dying saplings which would be replaced in October.

4. Finance

SO stated that there were no significant matters to report.

PS informed the meeting that GHVDC had drafted a Sponsorship Agreement. There were some questions and queries about this agreement and the committee would need to decide if we should negotiate and sign up to the agreement now or wait until after the AGM in September when we would potentially have a new committee. SO felt that it would be okay to wait until September, especially as there were some terms that he felt would need to be amended. PS therefore proposed that committee members should email any concerns they may have and/or request any clarifications they require from GHVDC. This could then put to GHVDC and would enable the new Committee to finalise. The committee voted to proceed on this basis.

Action Point: PS to collate committee responses and communicate to GHVDC.

5. GHRA Events Group

HB confirmed that sadly the Olympic Sports Day had to be cancelled due to extended Covid restrictions. The plan now was to combine this event with a summer BBQ due to be held on 4th September on Chadwick Place Green. Further details would follow shortly. As far as future events were concerned, we were planning to have Halloween the same as last year as it worked really well. There would be a Remembrance Service in November and Christmas plans were still being put into place.

SO asked about the flags placed around the development and HB explained that because we couldn't have the Olympic event, we decided to place a flag trail representing the 38 nationalities of our residents living on Graven Hill. Residents were encouraged via Facebook to identify as many flags as possible and answers would be published on Facebook after the Olympics closing ceremony. KS thanked everybody who helped to arrange the flag trail and encouraged residents to participate.

HB also mentioned that we were currently running a photo competition which closes on 31st August and encouraged all residents to submit up to five photographs in landscape format showing Graven Hill through the Seasons. CC confirmed that there were prizes for adults and children to be won.

HB thanked everybody who gets involved with organising events and encouraged residents to join our group of volunteers.

6. Timeframe for community facilities

PS informed the meeting that there had been no update on the commercial units since the last liaison meeting. GHVDC undertook to let us know if there was going to be anything to report.

With reference to the pub, GHVDC stated in the liaison meeting that a pub was not viable pre or post pandemic for phase 1 and that they would re-visit the pub at a later stage, possibly in Phase 2. Moving on from that, GHVDC had now said that the site previously allocated for the pub would now become a nursery and residential location and that they were looking to include another refreshment area within the commercial units. GHVDC would consider the inclusion of a pub in the future if interest and viability improved.

PS said that he was aware that following the recent planning applications for the nursery and pub there had been quite a lot of chatter on Facebook and he invited questions and comments from residents. Below are the main questions and comments that were raised by residents:

- a) Is the planning application going to replace the proposed nursery already planned or is it for an additional nursery? PS explained that the application was to move the nursery to the pub site and build flats on the old nursery site. However, there didn't appear to be a planning application in place yet for the nursery on the old pub site.
- b) Anger was expressed that planning permission was applied for without any consultation with the residents. There was a clear commitment by GHVDC that there was going to be a pub in the village and that this was still being promoted on the GH website. Furthermore, what is the logic for moving the nursery? There has been no consultation whatsoever. It was felt that there should be more dialogue with Graven Hill and there should be a strong objection to both planning applications. PS asked SK and HB if there had been any further discussions apart from what was stated in the minutes of the last liaison meeting. SK explained that GHVDC stated at the liaison meeting that there wasn't any commercial viability in the current climate and that current occupation numbers wouldn't support a pub. Therefore, there was no commercial interest. SK further said that it was requested that if GHVDC decided to repurpose the site, there should still be a pub elsewhere in the village as it was the centre of village life and GHVDC had committed to it. GHVDC agreed that this was an expectation that residents had and that they would need to fulfil it. GHVDC also discussed the possibility of having a pub on the fringes rather than in the village centre and away from residential housing.
- c) The point was raised that this move went against the masterplan and probably needed a change of the land designation from A to residential. The view was expressed that trust had been lost in GHVDC, particularly as they had simply decided to swap the pub with a nursery and build flats on the nursery site. Both the nursery and pub sites are areas that were allocated to community facilities and once houses/flats are built on it, the community will never get it back.
- d) Regret was expressed about the loss of a pub in the village centre, but there was particular concern about building flats on the old nursery site without any consultation whatsoever. Tancred Grove was already used as a rat run and is very narrow and not suitable to take more traffic from the flats. Why were residents not consulted?
- e) The point was made that GHVDC stated that a pub was not viable at present, but there was no commitment of where else a pub was going to be. The stage had been reached where GHVDC could not be trusted as they did not fulfil their promises and marketing commitments. More information was required.
- f) The view was expressed that GHVDC showed a complete lack of integrity and could no longer be trusted. Most residents had bought into this community and were prepared to wait for community facilities to be built, but GHVDC are now changing their minds and are doing things differently. They can therefore no longer be trusted without legal reassurances of what their plans are for the provision of a pub. Furthermore, GHVDC are not sharing any information with residents who had therefore no idea how hard GHVDC had tried to secure interest in the pub site or whether it just suited them to kick the can down the road and create a bit more cash flow in the short term.
- g) It was pointed out that there was a masterplan which placed community facilities in certain places for a reason. To move the nursery and the pub would change the dynamics of the village centre. Somebody in the past had done a lot of work and applied great thought to create a masterplan for Graven Hill. Why move the nursery which was presumably located near the community centre for a reason? Furthermore, people had bought houses based on the masterplan and a masterplan shouldn't be changed on a whim.
- h) Residents had bought plots and houses based on a dream that GHVDC had sold to us and the pub played a small but significant part in that. A pub draws people together and is an important, if not essential, part of developing a village community. The problem residents got is that we are dealing with Councillors and Council workers who are not entrepreneurial. They probably see that their business plan is failing on Graven Hill, so they are juggling plots around and try to make the finances work. We are victims of that and we need to find a clear route to them to express our distrust and disappointment with the disrespectful way GHVDC are behaving towards their residents. We are trying to build a community and they are not. If they keep saying "no", social media is a good route

to the heart of the issue, presumably money, to broadcast that GHVDC are not what they purport to be. This would hit them hard financially, so they have to listen to us.

- i) Surprise was expressed at the appearance of the planning applications without any prior discussion or notification. In terms of the nursery, considerable work had been done by some residents to input into the design of the community centre and how it would effectively link with the nursery in terms of creating common areas between the two buildings. All this has now presumably been disregarded without even giving the residents advance warning of the nursery being moved to a different site. We were sold a masterplan which showed a pub in the village centre. Some time ago, GHVDC even erected a sign on the pub site which said "Village Pub", so it was heavily used in their marketing and to pull prospective buyers in. As GHVDC choose not to communicate with residents, we have no idea if other community facilities have been explored for this site instead of a pub, such as a restaurant, a bistro, a tea room or somewhere where there is space for the community to gather during the day and in the evenings without going off site.
- j) The question was asked if the Residents Association were going to object to the two planning applications or was the expectation that there would be just individual complaints? PS responded that individual responses were going to be very important. The committee would have to have a discussion on how to proceed and had to be mindful to represent all the residents to ensure that we submit a fair representation of the views of the whole Graven Hill community.
- k) It was felt that a very good point had been made about using social media. We have now reached the point where everything seems to be so backhanded and frustrating and residents are not consulted. How can we use the general media to get our voices heard? Graven Hill sold the development as a revolutionary opportunity of a housing and community development when it actually turned out to be just a housing development with zero being done for the community. As a community we have put up with an awful lot and have still made massive strides to build our own community without any facilities and GHVDC have to recognise that we still have a lot to achieve as a community if we are given the facilities. There was a strong feeling that media and the press should be involved because we are not being listened to by GHVDC.
- l) It was felt that we needed to find a way to have a common voice. What is the driving objective and mandate of GHVDC? It's an offshoot of the Council, it is believed that it is ostensibly a not-for-profit organisation and there is reason to question the actions of GHVDC, not only with regard to their original plan and vision which now appears to be mis-sold to residents, but are they still delivering on the Council-driven objectives for the good of the community and for Bicester. There could be a potential for a mismatch between the leadership of GHVDC and the actual objectives of the project.
- m) Agreement was expressed with all of the above. However, we should hold off with involving social media and the press in favour of having another attempt to engage in a constructive conversation with GHVDC. All of us live here for a variety of reasons and the community spirit is part of it. What we don't want to do is to go too early with negative press which might prevent more people from moving to Graven Hill. We should have another attempt to talk about this matter with a collective voice. This would give GHVDC another chance to listen to our voice and take appropriate action.
- n) We were sold the idea of us having various community facilities, the pub being one of them. If we could be absolutely reassured that a pub would be located elsewhere and where that would be, that would help. With reference to the press, the feeling was expressed that if there was no change, we would have to go to the press and take our complaints further. There is also a TV programme being filmed at the moment where residents are being interviewed and asked for their opinions.

PS invited Cllr Dan Sames to comment on what had been said by the residents. Cllr Sames expressed the view that from his own experience of living at Langford, a pub was absolutely essential for helping to create a community and be part of a community focus, as is a community hall, both of which Langford have got. From conversations he had had with Karen Curtin, there was still an appetite to have a pub at Graven Hill and the site would be identified to come in subsequent phases. The details of where that would be had not yet been decided but he was pretty sure that a pub would be forthcoming. That said, GHVDC had to make sure that the pub was marketed in the best opportunities. During COVID times, people had been very reticent to start new businesses, especially a new pub when lots of pubs are being

closed. He explained that he had chatted with a couple of local landlords himself to see if they would be interested in pursuing a pub at Graven Hill. He said that he had had some positive reactions but part of this depended on lease terms and occupancy levels. He felt that one thing we need to be aware of was that Section 106 undertakings require a certain level of occupancy before community facilities could be built. Current occupancy levels were not sufficiently attractive for potential investors.

The viability or otherwise of the pub at this moment was a moot point as the issue was much more than a community space which had been allocated on the masterplan and which is now being turned into more housing. There are plenty of other spaces that could be used for more housing. The feeling was that GHVDC could no longer be believed. We have no retail units and the school has been delayed until 2023. These are all broken promises and now the pub is being taken away from the village centre. We need to formally complain to GHVDC and relevant Councillors about the lack of communication and object to the planning applications. Cllr Sames informed the meeting that there were negotiations in place to create other community spaces on Graven Hill within the commercial spaces.

A resident commented that if GHVDC approached the pub situation on the basis that it was a binary solution (i.e. this is the price – take it or leave it) then they were unlikely to get any takers. This was where the entrepreneurial element comes into it. There are mechanisms in place to spread payments, defer payments, set up a joint partnership that would enable somebody to come in and occupy the pub and provide the facility that GHVDC had committed to. The resident also agreed that we should hold off involving social media and the press, but we need to be aware that this opportunity exists as a last resort as it could be the only leverage we have if GHVDC continue to ignore the residents.

A resident voiced the opinion that the plans to move the pub to another site away from the village centre was going to reduce the viability of a pub. It didn't make sense as there was a masterplan for a reason. Just as self-builders had to keep to the design principles for our houses, GHVDC need to keep to the design principles of the masterplan.

A resident replied to Cllr Sames' comment that the S106 required a certain level of occupancy before certain facilities could be provided. GHVDC knew about this all along, but they still designated the site to a pub regardless of when it would be built. In terms of the viability of a pub, GHVDC always knew that a pub would not be viable until there was a certain level of occupancy but they still wanted a pub to be there and told the residents where it was going to be. Furthermore, to build a pub in phase 2, the timing would be totally inappropriate as we would have to wait for the land to be delivered, the infrastructure to be built and for the plans to be approved. The resident told the meeting that they had spoken to some people and some were considering moving out of Graven Hill as they were not prepared to wait any longer for facilities that they had been promised, especially as it now looks as though a pub would not be built at all.

A resident came back to a previous comment that GHVDC suggested that it may be better to build the pub near the Health Centre. It was felt that this was not appropriate as it would advertise to traffic on the A41 that there was a pub close to Bicester Village and the pub would lose the sense of a community feel. It should be in the village centre as intended in the masterplan.

A resident asked for clarification of a comment made earlier about alternative facilities within the commercial space. PS referred to the liaison group minutes which refer to the inclusion of another refreshment area within the commercial units. No further details were available to GHRA. Cllr Sames explained that this information was commercially sensitive and could not be revealed until negotiations had been completed.

A resident raised the point that while GHVDC were taking a purely commercial view on the viability of the pub site, they were not taking a broad enough view on the purpose of the space and how it could be made to work for the community. Why are GHVDC not engaging with the community on how this space

should be used? It wouldn't necessarily have to be a pub seven days a week or the community could run the pub. Why are GHVDC not engaging with the community? They have a responsibility to the community who have bought property on the development on the basis of promises they are no longer keeping. GHVDC need to be transparent about their plans and start engaging with the residents and stop going behind people's backs. As long as GHVDC continue to be disrespectful and deceitful, they are going to lose people's hearts and interest in this place. The residents want to make this place a success and are being prevented from succeeding by GHVDC. Numerous residents agreed with these comments.

A resident wanted to put on record that there was no consultation either about the flats which GHVDC now plan to build on the old nursery site.

Cllr Sames was asked to respond in his role as Director of GHVDC to the allegation surrounding lack of consultation. He responded that all he could do was to take these comments back to GHVDC and make sure that the residents' concerns were discussed at GHVDC Board level. A resident asked Cllr Sames to tell the Board that GHVDC had an opportunity to engage with the residents to make Graven Hill a better place for everybody and to sell that vision on that basis. What GHVDC were doing at the moment, was to disenfranchise the community and acting unilaterally. Many residents were extremely annoyed about the current situation and there was now only a short time left for GHVDC to turn the ship around and start engaging with the community, become a partner of the residents' association or continue to plough their own furrow, diverging further from the residents. In the long run, this would no doubt be counter-productive for all concerned. Cllr Sames suggested that the other action residents could take was to make sure that Barry Wood as Leader of Cherwell District Council was aware of their concerns. Other contacts suggested were Tony Illot and Lucinda Wing who are both members of the Shareholders Committee and make sure that they were aware of the strength of feelings amongst the residents of Graven Hill.

A resident asked the question if this was a matter which should be raised with our MP. PS said that this was a consideration although GHRA had to be mindful that we needed to represent the views of all of the community.

CC voiced the opinion that the community at Graven Hill was strong and intact, but this was not because of GHVDC but despite of GHVDC. The danger was that if this behaviour carried on, GHVDC could break the community and she appealed to the community not to get disheartened by this. She also acknowledged that this may be one of the situations where the residents' association had to survey residents to give everybody the opportunity to comment, not just those of Facebook or at this meeting, before GHRA respond to the planning applications.

A resident asked Cllr Sames to clarify the planning process. In particular, they wanted to know in what order we should escalate this matter. If residents were to object to the planning applications individually and CDC planners then approve the applications, would we have a right to appeal? Cllr Sames explained that once a planning application was agreed, there was no right of appeal. There was only a right of appeal if a planning application was refused. Our best option was to communicate our point of view before the planning decision was made and to ask, for example, Cllr Lucinda Wing to speak at the Planning Committee and put forward the views of the Graven Hill community. The question was asked if this was a numbers game, in other words would be number of objections influence the decision making. Cllr Sames replied that this was not necessarily a numbers game. The planners would look very carefully at the planning policy and the Cherwell Local Plan which contained a section on Graven Hill and the design of the development. Planning decisions needed to be made in line with planning policy. If the community could highlight that planning policy was not being adhered to, then that should carry great weight with the planning committee. Cllr Sames was asked if his position was compromised as our Councillor and his position as Director of GHVDC. Cllr Sames responded that due to this situation, he could only advise on general planning processes but not on specific aspects. Cllr Wing would be a better person to approach.

A resident expressed the view that it was hard to understand the logic of repurposing a community space to build a few more homes when there were plenty of space on the development to build another thousand houses. Surely, once occupation rates rise, a pub would become viable. Cllr Sames responded that this had to do with the financial modelling that GHVDC are currently undertaking and the pressures were on finances as they stand at the moment. GHVDC's overarching aim was to deliver results to the Council. He further explained that his priority as a Councillor was to shape a place and create a community. Cllr Sames said that he could not answer the question why this particular pub space had to be repurposed for building domestic dwellings, but he undertook to get back to the person who asked the question.

Action Point: **GHRA Committee to decide on actions to be taken in relation to the planning applications for the nursery and pub**

7. Proposed cycleways and footpaths

PS announced that there had been no updates on the cycleways and footpaths from Rodney House roundabout to the town centre or from Graven Hill to Tesco Extra / Bicester Avenue.

Action Point: **PS to chase an update on cycleways and footpaths**

8. Vehicle speeds

9. Car Parking

PS explained that residents were aware that Oxford County Council had raised a consultation on speed limits on Graven Hill and parking / waiting restrictions on Graven Hill Road, Austin Way, East/West Circular Road and Westacott Road. His initial concern was that OCC had not consulted with residents (we found out about the consultation from Cllr Cotter). When this was queried with OCC, they sent out letters to residents and extended the response deadline. Cllr Sames mentioned that it was important for individuals to respond to the consultation and express their views.

10. Any further updates following the most recent GHVDC liaison meeting

PS felt that most of the topics discussed at the liaison meeting had already been covered in this meeting. He did mention the GHRA's request to GHVDC to provide a defibrillator for the development. GHVDC said that they would be happy to consider this and that the funds could come out of the proposed sponsorship agreement.

11. Managed Areas on Graven Hill

ES informed the meeting that she was awaiting feedback from a Director of Living City. She said that she had emailed the two Directors of the Graven Hill Village Management Company (GHVMC) just to get an idea whether they would engage with residents by providing General Meetings, AGMs etc. The response was an emphatic "no" and they referred us to Living City who had answered some of her questions. ES explained that she was currently having email communication with a Director of Living City to find out who has responsibility for landscaping in the manged areas to enable residents to contact the relevant source.

ES informed the meeting that she had recently been invited to a meeting with the Kingsmere Residents Association. They were talking about the relationship with their managing agents and they had nothing but good things to say about them. ES explained that Living City were currently under contract until 2025 and it was hoped that there would be an opportunity to change agent at that time, if required. ES indicated that once she was in receipt of the information she had requested, she would organise a Zoom meeting with the residents living in the managed areas to provide the information and discuss any matters arising.

12. Any other business

HB, in her capacity as Community Minister for Graven Hill, informed the meeting of the following:

- The Graven Hill Toddler Group was up and running on Chadwick Green and was meeting every Wednesday from 10 to 11:30 during the summer holidays and would probably move to her house in September when the weather was less inviting.
- She had received funding to start a Gardening Club on Graven Hill
- She also had received funding to purchase a PA system for a Community Choir and had found somebody who would be prepared to run a Community Choir from September
- HB further announced that she was in the process of setting up a Mental Health Wellbeing Café which would be on Graven Hill and would be run by herself and anybody else who would be interested. The Café would also be available for the wider Bicester community.

HB asked anybody who would like to get involved with any of the above initiatives to contact her.

CC asked HB if any of the funding mentioned was provided by GHVDC. HB said that it was not. She did mention though that both the Town Council and District Council had been very generous. They had paid for a marquee, the PA system and were giving us £1,000 for the Gardening Club.

13. Process for residents to raise matters for the attention of the Residents' Association is via email to gravenhillresidents@gmail.com

14. Date of 2021 AGM: 15th September 2021

The meeting finished at 21:12 hrs

Signed as a true record

Philip Sore, Chair

Date:
