



# Minutes of Graven Hill Residents' Association (GHRA)

## Committee Meeting with Residents present

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 @ 19:30 hrs @ Littlebury Hotel, Bicester

### Attendees:

#### **GHRA**

Karen Sims (KS) Chair, Christine Clynes (CC) Secretary, Sam Omotayo (SO) Treasurer, Damien Maguire (DM), Helen Baker (HB), James Adeyemi (JA), Nichole Dean (ND), Simon Loo (SL).

#### **Cherwell DC (CDC) for part of meeting**

Steve Jorden

#### **Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) for part of meeting**

Karen Curtin, Gemma Davis

#### **Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) for part of meeting**

Jacqui Cox, Gargi Holland, Eric Stephenson

### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

KS welcomed the meeting participants and announced that the meeting was microphone recorded for minute purposes only. Other recordings by participants were not allowed. KS reminded participants of the meeting etiquette which was to be respectful of each other. Every resident had the right to their views which should be respected and considered and personal remarks about residents and stakeholders were not appropriate.

Apologies: Rhys Williams

### **2. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 26.01.2022 were agreed as a true record.**

### **3. GHRA 2022 Focus**

KS explained that the Committee decided in the autumn to focus on certain areas, play to the strengths of the committee members and spread the load in order to add more value for the residents. Various sub-groups were set up around communication, technology, community, finance and engagement with stakeholders. In particular, we focussed on enhanced communications with residents as well as direct engagement with the critical stakeholders we engage with. KS informed the meeting that we had three of these stakeholders present at today's meeting (Cherwell District Council, Graven Hill Village Development Company and Oxford County Council Transport) but explained that this was not a dedicated stakeholder meeting. Instead, stakeholders would give updates, take questions and then leave the meeting. There would also be updates on Living City and Bromford and the direct communications the GHRA have facilitated with them and the Residents.

### **4. Cherwell District Council (CDC) Update and Q&A (slides provided)**

Steve Jordan introduced himself as the Corporate Director for Commercial Developments, Ethics and Investment at both CDC and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). He explained that they were currently going through a de-coupling stage which meant that he would shortly give up his responsibilities for Graven Hill as he would be transitioning back to the County sometime soon.

He explained that he wanted to cover some of the questions in the introduction that residents had submitted in advance. He said that he was aware that there were some concerns amongst the residents, particular surrounding governance, which he wanted to address as best he could.

Steve Jordan set out the CDC shareholder objectives as follows:

- Promote self & custom build & deliver a disruptive product: Steve Jordan explained that the Graven Hill project started around October 2012 when CDC wanted to look at the housing market and how they could improve and influence it. CDC realised that there was a strong need for house building and CDC applied to Government for grant funding to enable them to buy the GH site from the MOD. A full business plan was published in March 2014 with the aim to promote custom and self-build and to become a market disrupter and do something different. He felt that GH is achieving that objective.
- CDC also had to deliver revenue and maximise return on investment to be able to repay the loan for the land. However, CDC was taking less of a return on investment than a traditional developer would take in recognition that they wanted to disrupt the market and achieve something different.
- Freeing up public land for housing: Graven Hill had become CDC's largest housing development and was contributing to economic growth by bringing people and external investment into the area.
- Another objective was to look at the wider commercial opportunities, particularly surrounding the employment land, opening retail units, the school and a pub. This was all part of Graven Hill and how CDC could add social value into its developments.

Steve Jordan stated that the above objectives were under review because the market had significantly changed and Covid also had an impact. It was therefore right and proper that CDC reviewed its objectives. Steve Jordan informed residents that a strategic review of GHVDC had taken place on the 31<sup>st</sup> March and a further meeting was scheduled for June/July to ensure that GHVDC remained on track to deliver what CDC wanted to achieve.

In terms of Governance, Steve Jordan explained that GHVDC was a publicly owned company. CDC was the sole shareholder and there was a requirement around increased scrutiny because GHVDC was Council owned and because of the planning process. Steve Jordan explained that his role did not include planning.

Steve Jordan said that it was important that CDC had a funding agreement with GHVDC which sets out what GHVDC was expected to do with the money it had received from CDC and how that money was returned to CDC to help fund front line services. Other governance aspects were:

- A shareholder committee which consists of three elected members. Cllr Barry Wood is the Chair of this committee and Steve Jordan explained that he worked closely with Cllr Wood to provide professional advice, hold GHVDC accountable for their performance and the information they provided to CDC, making sure that CDC was clear what was happening, the direction of travel and how GHVDC was delivering against their business plan.
- A Shareholder Liaison Group consisting of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), a Section 151 Officer who was a qualified accountant who had oversight of the finances and publishes an annual report to ensure that CDC conducts its business properly and is financially viable. The Monitoring Officer, who is CDC's chief legal officer, was also part of the Shareholder Liaison Group and monitored CDC's decisions and governance arrangements to ensure that decisions taken were legal.
- Regular and robust reporting to the Shareholder Committee and the Shareholder Liaison Group was generally through:
  - The annual accounts.
  - Funding agreement with covenants in place setting out what was required.
  - Annual business plan which goes through a decision making and approval process.
  - Externally and internally Audited Financial Statements.

- Strategic review which looks at risks and lessons learned.
- Approval of development plans through the highly regulated planning process.

Steve Jordan said that the GHVDC Board and Leadership Team was delivering in line with objectives set and approved business plans.

Picking up on some of the questions, Steve Jordan said that there were questions around the objectives which were very clear and there was going to be a review of the objectives to see if they were still the ones that members wanted to go by or tweak them.

There was also a question about the Shareholder Committee only focusing on profit. Steve Jordan said that this was not the case. CDC look at build rates and quality as well as GHVDC meeting objectives. GHVDC need to make a profit in order to make a return on investment on public money spent on the development.

There was also a question around the leadership of GHVDC not having managed to deliver self and custom build. Steve Jordan said that he disagreed. He accepted that this may not be what residents had envisaged, but GHVDC was still the market leader in the county. Steve Jordan felt that self-build had proved more challenging than what was envisaged several years ago. Custom build seems to be going well. GHVDC had struggled to find local suppliers who could deliver at scale, but that had been problematic and meant that GHVDC needed to look further afield. From CDC's point of view, they can see self and custom build going ahead, albeit a lot slower than anticipated.

Finally, Steve Jordan talked about the "disrupting the market" concept by delivering something different. He said that GHVDC had been very effective in disrupting the market, although there needed to be flexibility as market conditions change over the years. CDC was currently seeing those changes with supply chain problems and inflation higher than it was ever before. Grand Designs had raised the profile of Graven Hill nationally and CDC was frequently approached by other Councils to find out how to deliver a project like Graven Hill. Steve Jordan feels that there was no great secret, what was important was perhaps a willingness to be brave and take some higher risks, having strong governance and clear priorities to deliver against.

## **5. Graven Hill Village Development Company (GHVDC) update and Q&A (slides provided)**

Karen Curtin explained that the purpose of the session was to provide a quick whistle stop tour of what the key changes had been since January and also to pick up some of the questions that had been pre-submitted. She informed the meeting that some pre-submitted questions had already been answered in the recent newsletter. She asked for a show of hands to determine what type of homes the residents present at the meeting had bought and it transpired that the majority of the residents present were self-builders.

The first question Karen Curtin wanted to address was what had happened since the meeting in January. The February newsletter contained a detailed overview of what GHVDC would do to improve engagement with the residents and it also picked up some of the key areas. Some of the key things GHVDC were asked to look at was resident engagement (making sure that GHVDC were available to residents), also looking at how Bromford, Seven Invest, and Living City tied into the engagement strategy. As Karen Sims had already mentioned, there had been some engagement.

Karen Curtin further stated that GHVDC had given a commitment in the newsletter to give updates on any queries that came up. The February newsletter focused on the self-build market, why the design is what it is, looking at some of the challenges GHVDC had had, picking up on the Masterplan changes to relocate some community facilities. As a result of this, there had been a meeting on the Community Centre and GHVDC had also had a number of other engagements with residents.

Karen Curtin said that GHVDC had probably not been good in engaging about the various planning applications in the past, so they had put together a planning bulletin which would be published on a monthly basis. This was to make residents aware of the planning applications going through. Karen Curtin gave the residents the following update on completions achieved up to the end of the last financial year:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total	Total %	Reservations
Self-Build (Golden Brick)	3	21	28	31	23	14	120	28%	42
New Homes (Custom)			28	32	24	34	118	27%	24
New Homes (Apartment)					48	56	104	24%	26
Affordable (SO & Rental)			49	44			93	21%	
	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>435</b>		<b>92</b>

Karen Curtin pointed out that the total occupations currently stood at 404 as 31 self-builders had not yet finished their houses or had not yet achieved Building Regulation sign off.

Karen Curtin said that four questions were submitted by residents concerning self-build. She confirmed that while it was the original intention to provide self-build at scale, this had proven more challenging than originally anticipated. When the original plan was drawn up, there wasn't a market or processes to copy (GHVDC was setting the trend and learning as they went). There were also challenges with material prices, the types of contractors that have been available, issues with foundations (GHVDC were trying to increase this supply chain), the global pandemic and Brexit. She confirmed that GHVDC still wanted to be successful in self-build and that they were doing a lot of things behind the scenes to promote it.

Residents were asking about the land prices and how GHVDC were pricing the land. This question was answered in September and was all about the value of the plots, looking at all the constituent parts of it and making sure that the land was valued at the right level, so that somebody with a house and someone with a plot could be sure that GHVDC were not de-valuing the area. A house and a plot all had the same planning obligations. Unlike some smaller developments, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) didn't apply to Graven Hill as GHVDC were delivering at scale and therefore were subject to Section 106 obligations which were quite hard.

Another question was what could be done to make it simpler and could we learn from others? Karen Curtin explained that there wasn't an A to Z.

In terms of pricing, Karen Curtin explained that there were incentives given at different stages of the project. For those who bought plots at the early stages, there was an incentive given. Now the prices had to be driven by the market levels. Prospective purchasers were not saying that they weren't going to build at Graven Hill because of the price, but there were a number of factors that come into play. If it was just price, this would be something that GHVDC would look at. In terms of subsidising self-build, GHVDC needed to abide by State Aid regulations which meant that they could not subsidise self-build. There was also a funding agreement which GHVDC had to deliver within,

which meant that they needed to make sure that they got the right level of income for the right level of product.

Another question was if it could be made easier for self-builders to live on site by allowing the parking of caravans. Karen Curtin explained that at the very early stages of the project there was some stakeholder feedback on this issue and as a result it wasn't allowed then and it isn't encouraged by the Planning Authority. However, in the new 3b phase, the intention is for the foundations of the self-build plots to go through in three groups and GHVDC would explore how they could work with the self-builders to share welfare facilities. Karen Curtin hoped that this would be successful as GHVDC were launching some new plots at the weekend.

Apartments had proved popular to the investors and the home purchaser markets. They provided high density housing which, in terms of Graven Hill, had brought high levels of occupations. Having the apartments and custom build homes enables GHVDC to achieve the Section 106 triggers sooner. Karen Curtin acknowledged that this was different to what GHVDC set out to do, but they needed to meet market demand and make sure that they were bringing the development and its amenities along.

There were some questions relating to contractors. Karen Curtin explained that GHVDC had been unlucky with some contractors which tended to be SMEs. Also, the custom market was a very big area of housing growth and most contractors like to do "eat, sleep and repeat" where large volumes of the same house types were being built. Contractors also didn't like change as they find it difficult and don't bid for the business. Karen Curtin explained that GHVDC were currently working with the Government, CDC and Custom Build Homes to see if they could get to a configurator model to enable them to build true custom homes.

In terms of design, Karen Curtin said that answers had been provided in the newsletter, but suffice to say that GHVDC had so far worked with eight designers and that they would be using a lot more going forward. As part of a critical friend review, GHVDC had asked some different architects to have a look at the scheme and they would feed their feedback into the strategic review that was mentioned by Steve Jordan.

Karen Curtin said that GHVDC was looking at bringing in modern methods of construction. She was aware that a large number of residents had chosen Danwood homes, a very good, customisable product which was built in a factory. Karen Curtin said that it would be good to do more of this, but the UK suppliers GHVDC have so far approached only wanted to deliver non-customisable houses. Karen Curtin said that GHVDC were still looking at using MMC for the later phases of affordable homes and that they were also engaging with more registered providers to see if they were able to provide some unique products for Graven Hill.

A question was asked if there were the right resources and self-build expertise at Graven Hill. Karen Curtin said that all the expertise to do with self-build at scale was at GHVDC. To facilitate the self-build journey, GHVDC had developed the Local Development Order which enabled self-builders to get planning permission in eight weeks, the design code, the plot passport and the purchaser manual. There were lots of people who approached GHVDC to see if they could use these resources for their own schemes. Clearly, GHVDC could always do with more resources. Karen Curtin said that they were currently recruiting for a new Construction Director. In terms of having the skills for self and custom build, GHVDC would always keep resources under review, but its people are passionate in delivering disruptive products at Graven Hill.

Karen Curtin also pointed out that there was also the employment land which they needed to drive forward.

In terms of the infrastructure, there was a question when the temporary mast near the apartments would be changed. The mast was put up because the construction of the new flats may have caused

some interference with the internet and Sky TV. The temporary mast would be replaced by something of a similar size.

The Gateway Park would remain closed until the western spine road was completed. However, GHVDC was working with the LPA to see if part of it could be opened up once the new health hub was constructed. Karen Curtin said that the Gateway Park was probably created too soon but when GHVDC bought the land for the development, the development had outline planning permission for 1,900 traditional homes and the Section 106 and all the triggers were based on a traditional delivery. This was changed by GHVDC to service and custom plots which come at a different trajectory.

Karen Curtin acknowledged that there were a number of defects that GHVDC had not dealt with quickly enough. She was aware that this was a protracted process and this was not something that GHVDC was proud of. Since January, GHVDC had been talking to a number of groups to ascertain what could be done and what the root causes were and what GHVDC could do to fix the defects. She was aware that there was a concern that GHVDC was not going to fix the defects. She assured the residents that these defects would be fixed. The new Construction Director had the resolution of defects high on his list and to ensure that GHVDC did not encounter the same issues with any contractors GHVDC use going forward.

In terms of Customer Service, Karen Curtin said that all developers had to deal with snagging. Gemma Davis and her team were looking at snagging and with the new Construction Director, Grant Gibson, who would come to the next meeting, GHVDC were hoping to improve snagging. There was a problem with the supply chain and getting parts such as replacement doors, windows and materials and that had added to the ongoing delays, but GHVDC hoped to improve that going forward.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, GHVDC heard the residents clearly in January. There had been 72 engagements with residents over the past four months and there would be more coming forward.

Karen Curtin then explained that GHVDC had an outline planning consent for 1,900 units which expires in August of this year. Because of the delays with self and custom build, GHVDC would not be able to get all that consented by that time. GHVDC were therefore looking to split the application and deliver x number of units and then come forward with a new application to deliver the balance. GHVDC had Section 106 contributions, and the Deed of Variation is trying to work out how much of the S106 contribution would be delivered with the first, say, 800 units and how many would be delivered with the balance. Within that, GHVDC were required to do what was called a viability report. There was a report that was done which looked at what GHVDC were delivering compared to other developers. GHVDC knew that they had to accept a lower margin than volume house builders. CDC was happy for GHVDC to do that and had provided debt finance to GHVDC. In other words, what the viability report was saying was that if GHVDC were a traditional developer, they would look to achieve more profit and if there was more profit, there would be more money available for community infrastructure. GHVDC were seeking comments from both District Council and County Council in terms of the amount of Section 106 that should be paid, but this had no relevance to the financial viability of the company.

The question was also asked if CDC would bring in another developer. The purpose of the viability analysis feeds into the strategy and it would not necessarily be another developer who would come in. It was the product mix that was currently delivered by the development company that would need to change. Considerations would be if there was a way of increasing units, increasing density, delivering completed homes quicker and bringing on self-build sooner. The question to be considered was if all the Section 106 contributions that were in the original plan were still relevant for a site of Graven Hill's size. Once this was sorted over the summer, GHVDC would then bring in a new application for the balance of the units, and this would be subject to formal consultation, to be carried out by an external company, and the residents would be one of the stakeholder groups and would have the opportunity to help determine what the plan would look like going forward.

Karen Curtin assured the residents that GHVDC had not given up on self-build. In fact, it was GHVDC that was pushing the Government to provide more incentives to self and custom builders and to look again at VAT rules. She thanked residents for being part of building the profile of Graven Hill by taking part in Grand Designs The Street. The TV programme resulted in a lot of interest in self-build plots. She also thanked those who were going to attend the Build It Live exhibition and talking to prospective customers about their self-build journey.

CSR – GHVDC had listened to residents in terms of the charity sponsorship and had engaged with some residents about other community initiatives, one of which could be a pop-up pub. GHVDC was also looking to see if there may be an opportunity for GHVDC to help with other initiatives. Karen Curtin invited residents to talk to GHVDC if they had any ideas/requests. There were also plans in place to have a family fun day on the 10<sup>th</sup> September organised by Careys.

Retail Centre: two units were at “legals”. One of them was Fresh Club with a café, a licensed operation and a beauty provision, and the other one was a dentist. Interest in the other two units had been low, but GHVDC have decided to invest in the shop fronts in an effort to improve the kerb appeal.

The nursery has now moved to a new site and a planning application was in the process of being submitted. GHVDC were hoping to issue a press release about the nursery next week.

The pub was being actively promoted. GHVDC has had some interest in the site for other opportunities, but GHVDC turned them down as they were still committed to having a pub at Graven Hill.

In terms of Section 106 obligations, GHVDC was in the process of building new infrastructure and the new Pioneer Roundabout. Affordable housing and parks had already been delivered.

Community Centre: GHVDC had met with CDC and were awaiting feedback from Tom Darlington who was waiting to have discussions with the residents before he could feed back to GHVDC. At this stage, GHVDC was committed to deliver a community centre under Section 106, although they did not as yet know what the value was.

Finally, Karen Curtin informed the meeting that the school contract had been awarded. It would be formally announced tomorrow and work would commence in August. Oxfordshire County Council were still committed to open the school in September 2023 and that would be before Graven Hill would have reached the occupations that triggered the opening of the school, which was 550.

Karen Curtin then opened up the floor to questions:

- Paul Troop asked about Section 106. There was a concern that the amount of funding that had been set aside for the community centre wouldn't be delivered in phase 1 and some of the money would be held back to phase 2, therefore jeopardising the delivery of the community centre. He asked Karen Curtin if she could confirm that the community centre would be delivered in phase 1.  
Karen Curtin responded that GHVDC were committed to delivering the community centre but that they had not yet worked through what goes into what part of the application. She said that GHVDC were keen to provide a community centre. She said that she was aware of the residents' concerns but that she was unable to give a formal commitment at this time, especially as GHVDC was still awaiting CDC to provide a design and specification which they could then price.
- Paul Troop then mentioned that the Non-Executive Directors on the Board and Accountability Committee were all Conservative Councillors, some of whom had recently lost their seats or stepped down. He asked if it was time to have a more balanced representation amongst the Councillors rather than it being dominated by Conservative Councillors.

Steve Jordan replied by saying that this was a matter for the administration and not for the shareholders.

- Sam Omotayo said that he understood that GHVDC rejected some offers for the pub. He asked why the offers were rejected and were GHVDC's ambitions for the site too restrictive? Karen Curtin explained that the offers were rejected as they were land offers and not offers to build a pub. She confirmed that GHVDC were still considering one offer for a boutique hotel. In terms of being too restrictive, Karen Curtin said that the issues were market conditions, the investment required and the still relatively low footfall. Karen Curtin said that she was still fully committed to delivering a pub and was working with some residents to explore the possibility of a temporary community pub.
- Clare Lowe said that she was very interested in a temporary community pub and asked the question who Karen Curtin was working with to explore this possibility. Karen Curtin confirmed that she was working through the GHRA with a small working party.
- Damien Maguire asked how soon the remedial work on some of the houses was going to be completed. Karen Curtin responded that she wasn't sure as some of the problems were still being investigated. However, she was hoping that by the next residents' update she would be able to say that the majority of the legacy issues had been sorted out and that GHVDC had made improvements to their customer service.
- Damien Maguire also asked a question in relation to the architects which GHVDC were getting on board. Given that there were a number of architects already living on the site, were GHVDC planning on using their expertise? Karen Curtin responded that GHVDC were going to hold a day for architects and that it was hoped that some of the architects who were living on site would have the opportunity to contribute. She said that some of the resident architects were already providing services.
- Peter Clynes asked why the custom build houses currently under construction were not equipped with solar panels or air source heat pumps. He asked if GHVDC were looking at introducing these environmental factors. With the price of fuel going up, this would become more of an issue, particularly for those living in affordable housing. He added that it was much more cost effective to fit energy saving equipment at the build stage rather than having to retrofit later. Karen Curtin responded that GHVDC was looking at procuring enough power so that 80% of the rest of the homes to be built on Graven Hill would not need to rely on gas. This would enable them to instal air source heat pumps from phase 3b onwards. They would then also be looking at solar and electric car charging.

KS concluded this part of the agenda by thanking GHVDC for their attendance and for paying for the meeting room.

## 6. **Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Bicester Transport Plans Update and Q&A (slides provided)**

Following several months of seeking updates for Residents, KS welcomed OCC staff to talk directly to the residents about the Bicester Transport Plans. Jacqui Cox opened this section by introducing herself as the Infrastructure Locality Lead at OCC dealing with Cherwell and West Oxfordshire. She also introduced Eric Stephens (Senior Transport Planner) and Gargi Holland (Transport Planner for Bicester). Jacqui Cox explained that they wanted to specifically talk about the London Road cycle improvements but also some of the wider schemes, should time allow.

She explained that OCC had some Section 106 contributions from GHVDC for cycle improvements along London Road costing £500K which the Council would need to spend. Due to inflation and much

higher costs, this amount of money was no longer sufficient to fund the whole project. There had been conversations with Bicester BUG and Councillors of how to raise more funds, and the good news was that OCC had been successful in a bid for additional funding which would be received in July.

She explained that OCC had been looking at different options on how active travel users could reach Bicester Town Centre. The most recent option under consideration was to use the underpass under the A41, along London Road with a parallel crossing on Talisman Roundabout. The problem had always been the ownership of the underpass but their engineers were making good progress in resolving this issue. She was interested to hear if residents were currently using this route and what their experiences were.

Christine Clynes explained that she frequently walked or cycled to town, but rather than cycling through the underpass and along London Road, she cycles through Langford Park. She mentioned that the underpass presented a safety problem, particularly through the winter months, as it was very dark and isolated with no lighting available and she asked if street lighting could be installed. Jacqui Cox confirmed that lighting was part of this scheme if it gets approval.

Stephen Aggett mentioned that the only way to walk or cycle to Tesco was to use A-roads and he asked when residents could expect a cycle and pedestrian route to Tesco and the Garden Centre. Jacqui Cox explained that such a facility had been on the books for some considerable time and that with new funding available, this was a good time to have a look at this request again.

Claire El Mouden asked whether it would be possible to build a bridge over the military railway to enable cyclists to have road-free access out of the development and cycle as far as Islip on bridleways. Graven Hill was currently bordered by fast roads and this would give residents, particularly children, easy and safe access to open countryside. Paul Troop added that there was already an existing crossing of the military railway to the west of the development where the new phase is currently being constructed. In order to use it, permission would be required from the MOD, but that would give direct cycle and pedestrian access to the western outskirts and places like Wendlebury.

Simon Loo explained that that his son would be starting Whitelands secondary school which is located to the west of Graven Hill. Currently there was no safe way for him to cycle to his new school. As the development grows, there would be more children who needed to make that journey and it would be very beneficial to have a safe way for these children to walk or cycle to school.

Jacqui Cox explained that OCC were hoping to do something quite quickly, in particular the parallel crossing. However, now that the additional funding was coming through in July (Tranche 3 of the Active Travel Fund), it seemed to make sense to combine the two pots of money and make a really good scheme. Jacqui Cox said that once she had spoken to Councillors, she would be happy to come back with an update for the residents.

Jacqui Cox also mentioned East West Rail (EWR) and the London Road crossing. OCC needed to understand what was going to happen with that crossing so that they didn't put in pedestrian and cycle ways which could then be ripped up again. EWR were expecting to make an announcement in the autumn.

Jacqui Cox further explained that part of the Tranche 3 funding would go towards the improvement of cycleways on the A41 and to investigate options to extend the cycleway to Ploughley Road and the Oxfordshire boundary.

Cllr Dan Sames asked if any funding had been sought from the developers of the office park to connect the park with Bicester Village Station, for cycling improvements generally and to cross the rail track. Jacqui Cox said she would find out what had been agreed.

Jacqui Cox also mentioned the possible plans for a new Bicester perimeter road. In order to build a new road, very clear evidence needed to be gathered why it was needed, particularly in the current climate or de-carbonising transport.

Paul Troop asked the question if Rodney House Roundabout could be improved. Jacqui Cox confirmed that OCC needed to take a look at this roundabout to see what may be done to improve it.

Sam Omotayo asked if the £500K funding through the GHVDC Section 106 would be ringfenced for the London Road project and would Jacqui Cox be able to share timelines for the projects. Jacqui Cox confirmed that the Section 106 funding was normally allocated to specific projects., in this case London Road cycleway improvements. However, the additional funding had not been received yet, but she believed at this point that the delivery should be completed by the end of March of next year.

Clare Lowe emphasised how dangerous Rodney House roundabout was becoming as drivers frequently jumped red lights. Christine Clynes added that in her experience, the problem was that drivers were so busy watching the traffic in order to switch lanes, that they could easily miss red lights accidentally. Claire El Mouden also voiced her concern about the lights at the pedestrian crossing on the A41 immediately after joining the roundabout when coming from Graven Hill and how easily they were overlooked. Simon Loo asked if the number of accidents and the damage to the railings were reported and documented. Jacqui Cox confirmed that this was the case and if there were found to be safety concerns, the question of a redesign of the roundabout would be escalated to her team for funding availability.

Damien Maguire mentioned that deer tended to cross the A41 from Graven hill and he asked whether it may be possible to make a provision for wildlife to cross. Jacqui Cox said that new roads being built often had tunnels, but it may be very challenging from a funding point of view to do this retrospectively.

Rob Haxton asked the question if it would be possible to get the lighting for the A41 underpass installed before the onset of winter and before the eventual construction of a cycle and pedestrian paths.

Dan Sames asked about the possibility of connecting the underpass to Flanders Close. Jacqui Cox said that she would investigate.

OCC agreed to meet with the GH Residents once further progress had been made/for further input.

## **7. Other Stakeholder Updates**

- **Living City**

Nichole Dean introduced herself one of the members of the GHRA committee facilitating the direct engagement with Living City. She said that most residents who lived in the flat or managed areas were finding it difficult to get in touch with Living City and to get things done or clarified. As a result, the GHRA undertook to build the relationship with Living City and that they had now got Living City to agree to quarterly meetings with affected residents, split into managed areas and flats, to discuss outstanding issues. ND said that residents had now been given direct email addresses for Living City staff and a process had been put into place for residents to contact Living City direct with queries in the first instance and to escalate to GHRA, if required. KS added that Living City had been asked for an update on outstanding matters to present to residents at the meeting tonight, but no such update had been received.

- **Bromford**

James Adeyemi introduced himself as a resident and committee member who lived in one of the Bromford homes. He said that his move to Graven Hill in 2019 enabled him to move closer to his dream of building his own home. He encouraged residents who live in affordable homes to engage

with meetings such as this and for other residents to foster inclusivity and come together as a community. JA advised of a forthcoming meeting on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> June which had been specifically arranged by the GHRA for Bromford residents. It was being held by Zoom and JA encouraged Bromford residents to attend.

It was acknowledged that greater inclusivity within the GHRA would be preferable and there were concerns about possible plans by GHVDC to zone future construction in separate zones for affordable housing which would also not enhance inclusivity.

- OCC Community Facilities

Karen Sims informed the meeting that there were a number of residents in the room who had been working together to put together a survey for residents to express their views and wishes for the community centre. It was hoped that this survey would be circulated amongst residents shortly.

- Community First Oxfordshire

Rosie Phillips introduced herself as the Community Development Worker for Graven Hill and explained that she worked closely with Helen Baker, the community minister, and that her post was funded by Section 106 agreement, as were the running costs for the Community House, a small two-bedroom house located at 103 Graven Hill Road. The use of the community house was currently being provided to the community by Bromford. She explained that the Section 106 money that funded her post was due to expire next month but that her contract had been extended until September. She explained that negotiations were currently underway with CDC about the next Section 106 agreement and whether or not the community house was still wanted or required by the residents. If it was, somebody would need to manage the community house after her contract expired and the community would also need to fund the overheads. Rosie Phillips encouraged residents to decide whether or not the community still wanted a community house, especially in the absence of a community centre, and if the current house was big enough and/or fit for purpose. She explained that the community house was currently mainly used by the Wellbeing Café 103 which was organised and managed by Helen Baker for the wider Bicester community.

Claire El Mouden asked if there was any possibility of having space allocated for the community in the new school, once it was built and before it was fully utilised. Rosie Phillips advised the residents to speak to the Warriner Academy before the school was built to explore if this was a possibility.

Christine Clynes expressed concern about a comment made by Rosie Phillips that the community centre was still years away when the residents were categorically assured by GHVDC that the re-location of the community centre would not impact on the original delivery timeframe which was for construction to start prior to the occupation of 500 dwellings and to be transferred to CDC prior to the occupation of 600 dwellings. Rosie Phillips explained that her view was based on her experience how long it usually takes to plan and build a community centre.

## **8. GHRA Events Group Update**

Janis Best-Lane introduced herself as the Secretary of the GHRA Events Group and explained that the Events Group was currently operating without a Chair. She explained that the following events had already taken place this year:

- Easter Egg Hunt
- Jubilee Event which was not led by the Events Group but a space was provided and decorated

Future events in the planning were

- Summer BBQ on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> July
- Halloween
- Christmas Event

In addition, Careys were planning a Family Fun Day for Graven Hill residents on the 10<sup>th</sup> September.

Janis Best-Lane appealed for volunteers to join the group or provide ad hoc help for specific events. She explained that there was a volunteer spreadsheet open and available at the moment for the Summer BBQ. If anybody was interested, she asked to email [gravenhillevents@gmail.com](mailto:gravenhillevents@gmail.com) and ask for a link. She also asked to contact her if anybody was interested in taking on the vacant Chair position.

## 9. GHRA Updates

- Communications

Christine Clynes explained that the GHRA had agreed enhancing communication was important and summarised some changes recently made to the way the GHRA communicated with the residents.

- The main change was to set up a dedicated GHRA Facebook group. The new GHRA Facebook group would be a place for residents to engage with the GHRA committee and Events Group and it would be open to residents, self-builders, local councillors, businesses based on Graven Hill, representatives from GHVDC, Living City, Bromford and other stakeholders. The GHRA Group would be owned by the GHRA Chair and moderated by members of the GHRA committee. No longer would communications be made 'piggy-backing' via the Residents chat group, which would be eventually reserved exclusively for residents. The GHRA never has owned the Residents chat group (created before the GHRA was formed) and KS will review if the information on the group is clear.
- The GHRA had set up an email database to communicate updates on events, meetings, planning and other issues directly affecting residents. The list was powered by Mailchimp and residents were invited to subscribe.
- The GHRA website was currently being updated to add greater value to all residents.
- GHRA also introduced "Welcome" cards which are popped into letterboxes of new homes with contact details of the GHRA.

CC stated that the GHRA would still be using flyers to communicate important announcements and news such as annual general meetings, planning alerts, surveys etc, but would try to keep these to a minimum. A request to consider an 'opt-out' to flyers would be reviewed.

- Finance

Sam Omotayo confirmed that the GHRA were holding about £4,000 in its bank account which were raised through a mixture of sponsorships and money raised by the community. Sam said that the GHRA was looking at other ways of raising money including applying for grants and doing fundraising activities. The money was being used to promote the aims and the purpose of the GHRA. At the moment, the GHRA was looking at investments for a PA system and equipment to support community events.

Residents were encouraged to look out for fundraising opportunities and to help where possible.

- Defibrillator / EV Charging

Damien Maguire told the residents that there were currently no plans to introduce public EV charging at the Graven Hill site. Damien explained that fitting chargers to lampposts would be a problem as there was only a certain amount of power currently available for the site and additional EV chargers would increase the demand beyond the power that is available. However, Damien said that this would change over time as more power would be made available throughout Bicester and Graven Hill.

With reference to defibrillators, Damien confirmed that he had spoken to several Councillors to find out if there were any schemes which would enable us to instal a defibrillator at Graven Hill. He was awaiting confirmation of what could be done.

- GH Support to Ukraine

Simon Loo informed the residents that he had been in touch with a Bicester group which supported refugees from several countries (not just the Ukraine). He said that there was currently an urgent need to settle refugees from Afghanistan. Simon is still waiting to hear how the various groups around Bicester who are in touch with CDC on how to resettle refugees were moving forward. He said he wanted to encourage residents to be generous towards refugees and if any residents had any particular ideas and requests, they should contact the GHRA to see how we may be able to help.

- Key Dates

Community Centre survey to be published shortly.

Bromford meeting to be held on Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> of June as advised by James Adeyemi.

#### **10. Any other Business**

None that hadn't already been covered elsewhere.

The meeting finished at 21:40 hrs.

Signed as a true record

Karen Sims (Chair)

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Date

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Minutes to be officially approved at next committee meeting with residents present.