

Tarporley Parish Council

Informal Meeting with Representatives of Royal British Legion to discuss the future of the British Legion Club and Associated land. Monday 23rd March 2015 - Tarporley Community Centre.

Present :

Parish Council - Gill Clough, James Blackford (allotment holder), Richard Statham, Elaine Chapman, Graham Lees (Tarporley Primary School Governor), Victoria Adshead (Tarporley Primary School Governor).

Royal British Legion, Property Section - Laurence Herring.

Savills, Town Planner - Adam Key.

Clerk - Ann Wright.

Cllr. Gill Clough chaired the meeting.

The following items were discussed:-

It was asked what the plans are for the club building and land now the club has closed.

Adam Keys confirmed the site (club house, car park, allotments and bowling green) make up a substantial site in the centre of Tarporley.

He hoped this would be the first of a number of meetings to find a way of moving the site forward.

He stated that the site ticks a number of planning boxes and its development could make development on the edges of the village less likely.

Laurence Herring confirmed the British Legion is a charity not a property developer. Over recent years the social club scene has declined, over the last 5 years 200 clubs have closed as a result the RBL has had to look at their property holdings in a new way. The RBL has had discussions with CW&C over the last two years regarding their land holdings and the Local Plan. Two thirds of RBL clubs are making a loss. RBL has a responsibility to make sure property is sold at market value as money raised supports the charities beneficiaries. To sell land at below market value for a developer then to make a large profit from the land would lead to criticism.

The intention is to sell the site at market value as dictated by the market, as it is not the purpose of the RBL to provide allotments and bowling greens but to support ex-servicemen. Restrictive covenants would be put on the land so that profits from future sales of the land would come to RBL.

A report on the club building in October 2014 showed the building was in need of £100,000 of repairs.

Ownership

It was confirmed that RBL owns the whole site including the access road, club house, car park, allotments and bowling green.

A Trust would handle rental and income from the sale of the site and is governed by the charity commission. Mr Herring confirmed that copies of these documents can be made available to the Parish Council.

It was noted there are no footpaths across the site, however there is a footway along one side of the car park which it was understood is outside the RBLs ownership.

The club is now closed.

The car park is leased to CW&C, on a rolling three months lease.

Agreements are being drawn up with individual allotment holders, these are short term agreements, an agreement is also being drawn up with the bowling club.

Community Use & Parking

It was noted the allotments and bowling green are well used.

The car park and dropping off point for the school is a crucial priority for the village.

The school has installed a 'safe' gate to provide access to the school at start and finish times, the school has no parking and there is no pavement to reach it.

It was recognised that the village needs must be managed.

Parking is a big issue in Tarporley as recognised in the draft neighbourhood plan.

This impacts not only residents of Tarporley but also the surrounding villages who rely on Tarporley for shops and services including the doctors.

Parking issues have been exasperated by over the last 18 months by civil enforcement of parking for the first time. The enforcement and the general lack of parking have been given as a reason for the butchers closing on the High Street.

The RBL car park is well used throughout the day as reflected by the September 2014 survey available on the Parish Council's website

(<http://www.tarporley.org.uk/htdocs/publications.htm>) the report stated Tarporley requires an additional 70 parking spaces to meet current needs without taking into account future developments.

RBL Funding & Organisation

It was asked where the rental income goes from the car park. It was confirmed that since 2010 funds go into a RBL central property management department. This was introduced due to failures in the system of clubs and charitable branches handling money.

It was noted that members of the Tarporley RBL had always worked extremely hard to support the club and branch.

It was confirmed that Savills are investigating the market and the possibilities for selling the site.

It was asked if there was any way to retain the car park, allotments and car park.

It was asked if RBL would consider selling the different parts of the site off separately. It was stated this might be a possibility however RBL would want to sell it all off at the same time.

Planning Issues

Mr Key stated that in planning terms the site is a good one given Tarporley's status as a key service centre and is identified for growth, it is in a central location and includes previously developed land. Although it includes the allotments and car park these are not public land. These factors all need to be taken in account when assessing the value of the site.

It was suggested that there is a need for affordable 1 or 2 bedroom houses and studio flats in Tarporley.

It was emphasized that the loss of community facilities needs to be considered with the school access being of the highest priority.

Mr Herring confirmed that in pre-application talks with CW&C regarding 8 sites throughout the Borough that the loss of the car park would not be a material planning matter as the car park could be closed at anytime without permission.

It was suggested that the bowling green and allotments are well protected by the CW&C Local Plan and saved policies of the Vale Royal Plan and as such would be difficult to develop without community support.

Tarporley Parish Council

A councillor stated that it was their opinion that the community might support the loss of some allotment land for development if this allowed the retention of the car park and school access.

It was suggested by Mr Key that the site could be identified in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, recognising the club has closed and that there are a number of issues to be considered and that the future of the site is under review. Providing flexibility towards the site in the future.

It was stated that the Neighbourhood Plan steering group would be unlikely to soften the plan which included parts of the site as green open space although it was noted the plan does have mechanisms which allow for change.

It was noted that Tarporley as a whole has had a positive stance towards sustainable development and schemes which benefit the village as such Tarporley is in a strong position when commenting on planning applications at all stages including as appeals.

It was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan and Parish Council has a strong mandate from the community to protect green open spaces within Tarporley, however negotiations could take place for the benefit of the village.

Brook Road

It was asked what the arrangements had been made regarding the Brook Road field. It was explained that this land was in the process of being transferred to the Parish Council and would be run by a board of trustees. Groundwork's are currently running a consultation on the use of the field which is designated for outdoor sport and recreation.

Tarporley Primary School

It was noted in the past that alternative sites had been looked at for the school but had not been pursued. The school was rated good with outstanding features by Ofsted in November. The school is nearly full and there have been discussions about the number of forms being increased. It was noted that the building does not meet all the current standards including 2 portacabin classrooms which are over ten years old. The school has aspirations to develop an onsite nursery.

It was noted the school has had discussions with CW&C regarding the schools possible growth and also the access through the car park.

It was noted that the retirement complex neighbouring the RBL site requires redevelopment and could possibly considered in any overall development, the site is owned by Weaver Vale Housing Association.

It was emphasized that the bowling green and allotments are important community assets and are valued by the Village.

The Car Park and access to the school area essential.

Next Steps

Savill's will make a submission to on the draft neighbourhood plan before the 30th March deadline. It is not yet clear how the site will be developed.

Looking to work in partnership.

It was agreed the clerk will contact Adam Key at the beginning of May to arrange another meeting.

Tarporley Parish Council

It was agreed the clerk should invite the Ward Councillor, Parish Council representatives, Andrew Jameson (CW&C), Graham Lees and Victoria Adshead as School Governors.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting.