

COMMUNITY HUB DEVELOPMENT – STATION ROAD

Background

You will be aware that in 2024 Woodside Group submitted a planning application to construct 20 affordable homes adjacent to the Banks Homes development on Station Road on an area designated as a 'community hub'. We responded to their application in October 2024 saying we had no objection to their plans.

A group of residents recently raised a petition objecting to this development, calling for it to be replaced with a convenience store/shop. They submitted their petition to the planning officer. The lady who began the petition asked me why the PC was supporting this application and in the light of the significant number of signatures gathered in the petition argued that the PC should withdraw its support. I assured her that it would be on our April agenda but I then discovered that the planning hearing was scheduled for 8th April.

I felt that the PC should be represented at that hearing. Reading the case officers report to the planning committee it was clear officers were minded to approve the scheme, albeit with some reluctance. The core issue is that outline planning consent was originally granted for the whole site in 2015 and in that application the area under discussion was designated a 'community hub', with the intention of attracting commercial premises to the area. According to an officers report at the time, inclusion of a community hub played a significant role in the developer gaining outline consent for both the hub and for construction of a significant number of dwellings to create a sustainable mixed-use development.

The case officers report recognises that approval of this scheme would put paid to the development of a community hub, stating, *"Whilst the community hub has not yet been constructed, its perceived loss to the local community is still a material consideration."* The developer provided written evidence that they have approached numerous retail outlets from tier 1 stores such as Sainsburys and tier 2 franchise stores such as Spar but none are interested in coming to the site, which would suggest their community hub plans were not commercially viable.

Planning Meeting

In addition to the planning officer, there were 4 presentations; the developer, Cllr David Hall, Cllr Phil Heaviside and myself. Two residents were present but did not speak.

These are the closing remarks of my presentation:

"So I am not here to argue for or against this application. On the one hand I want to voice the concern of some local residents that the loss of the proposed community hub means their desire to have additional shopping facilities in what is an expanding village may be thwarted, whilst at the same time recognising that a standard retail commercial model may not be appropriate for this site. If, having explored other community related options no viable alternative can be found for this community hub site, then the parish council would raise no objection to this application."

Members of the planning committee decided to reject the application on the grounds that the development of these 20 properties would not necessarily contribute a benefit to our community. Cllr Bell moved to reject the application and, with the exception of Cllr Kellet, the motion was carried. The developer gave notice he intends to appeal.

Where does that leave us, the PC, and the community at large?

Ian Diggory (12th April 2025)