

Thoughts from Latchingdon Parish Council Vice Chairman, Mr Dale Symons

Latchingdon South Exhibition

In the New Year of 2014 a Landowner (Mr Hull) approached Latchingdon Parish Council (LPC) asking if he could attend the Parish Council Meeting to present his idea of developing his area of land next to Latchingdon Bowls Club. At the meeting the Landowner (MH), his Architect and the Developer gave a short presentation of their idea and how it would fit in with the development of the village.

In recent years, LPC have spent an increasing percentage of the council tax precept on the maintenance of the village hall. LPC have become increasingly aware of the age & deterioration of the village hall and it is struggling to find funding for refurbishment/replacement. As LPC owns the land adjacent to the proposed development it has become clear that there may be an option to work with the landowner (MH) by releasing the asset (land) owned by LPC to raise the funds necessary to build a new village hall. To maximise value of the LPC site it would require access through Mr Hulls proposed development and he agreed to waive access fees if the scheme was agreed.

At a request from LPC it was agreed that there should be an Open Meeting with the Parishioners of Latchingdon to discuss the idea of the development of the sites owned by LPC and Mr Hull. The Architect (Simon Butler-Finbow) suggested that for it to be an open and fair poll of public opinion there should be three Public Displays of the proposed development incorporating weekend and midweek evenings to make it easier for all to make their opinions known. This was arranged and leaflets regarding the Latchingdon South proposal were delivered to all households of Latchingdon Village along with information posted on the Latchingdon Parish Website and the Parish Notice boards.

The Latchingdon South Exhibition was held over a three week period with 119 residents attending the event.

Summary of Attendees:

	< 16	17-21	22-30	31-50	51-65	66-80	81+
Male	5	3	9	16	17	5	0
Female	10	4	7	18	20	4	1
Totals	15	7	16	34	37	9	1

Residents were invited to make comments about the Latchingdon South proposal. Comments sheets were provided at the Exhibition and attendees were advised that they could email their comments if that was easier.

Summary of Comments:

81% in favour of the proposed scheme.

13% against.

6 % made comments only.

Matters Raised:

- Scheme' location considered the best place for development in the village

- Scale and type of development acceptable (some requested that this should be the only development for the village for the foreseeable future)
- It was acknowledged that the village needed to grow
- Provision for a new Village Hall was supported (some suggested uses for the new facility – mainly indoor sports such as snooker)
- The new housing should be a traditional design and energy efficient
- The new Village Hall should be energy efficient
- The new homes should have a good level of parking provision
- Bungalows should be included in the proposed mix of new homes
- Affordable housing was welcomed (it should meet local needs)
- The open space shown on the Concept Plan should be used for more housing (given the quantum of space provided by the neighbouring existing playing fields)
- The open space shown on the Concept Plan should be moved adjacent to the existing playing fields
- The existing allotments should be retained and not developed
- Community facilities and infrastructure should be improved
- Local trades should be used on the scheme
- There should be provision made to link the scheme with “village walks”
- Vehicular access is acceptable and the opportunity to traffic calm the bend entering the village is welcomed
- Suggestion that speed cameras (or similar) should be introduced into the village along with more yellow lines and a speed limit of 20mph
- Concern with regard to the increase in traffic through the village, inadequate drainage and loss of open space if the scheme was to progress

The Latchingdon South Proposal is exactly that, a proposal. It is an idea, all comments and correspondence will be taken into account in the final decision and any further development of the sites. LPC are mindful that it would help Latchingdon Village replace its old 60/70 year old ‘high maintenance’, timber framed Village Hall and replace with a modern ‘low maintenance’, energy efficient Village Hall. There were concerns from LPC about the development of the site and the loss of playing field but it was felt that if the new hall could be designed around the idea of a Multi Use Sports Hall, this would lessen the impact and would give all weather access to some sporting activities.

LPC are mindful of the lack of affordable housing and it is a wish that if development is agreed all affordable housing would have a Latchingdon First policy. Not just for starter homes or homes for young families but also for the older

population who wish to downsize to a 2 bedroom bungalow/house (releasing a 3 or 4 bedroom house onto the market) but do not wish to leave the village they have lived in for the last 20 or more years

The Latchingdon South Proposal is exactly that, it is a joint proposal from LPC who own one site and Mr Hull who owns the other site. Mr Hull wishes to develop his site with or without the land owned by LPC. If it is decided to proceed jointly with a planning application, Mr Hull will still own his site and LPC will still own its site. A developer will buy the sites from Mr Hull & LPC at full market value and build the homes to the plans and agreements set in place by the planning application. With reference to the question about using a local developer for the plan, Mr Harding, the developer who has expressed an interest in buying the sites also attended the exhibitions and feels he is a local man. His father started their original building company in Burnham and built Latchingdon Primary School and also worked on the Council Houses opposite the Village Hall. After his father's retirement, Mr Harding went on to build in Althorne, Mayland, Tillingham, Southminster, and many more, he is about to start work on a site in Green Lanes off The Cobbins. Although he now lives in Long Melford his history is in this area, he used to live in Latchingdon, and he feels that any development in this area will involve sub contracting to local businesses.

This proposal has been given no special treatment. Any landowner who approaches LPC about development in the village is advised to hold an Exhibition to gauge public opinion prior to application. The Bridgemans Green Development held a one day exhibition and on the day it was obvious public opinion was against the development. Despite this the landowner submitted a planning application. LPC was inundated with objections/concerns but there were also some supporters and these were worried about the lack of affordable housing in the village and the dwindling numbers in Latchingdon School. LPC objected to this application because it was what the village as a whole wanted and the site was considered unsuitable due to flood risk and access onto an already busy road.

Maldon Districts Local Development Plan (LDP)

You may be aware that last year (2013) many District Councils failed to implement a 15 year housing plan, this was called the Local Development Plan, consultation was sought and a new plan was submitted this year (2014). The current LDP has been returned with several queries, but two main points are 'not enough houses' and 'too much development around Maldon, not enough in rural areas'. Until an LDP is agreed Maldon District Council cannot show an immediate 5 year land supply let alone the next 15 years. Developers know this and they are to appeal planning decision, with a high risk that the developers will win. Two applications for development in Latchingdon that have been refused this year by LPC & MDC are already in the process of appeal.

All villages in the Maldon District are under consideration. At one point Latchingdon was under consideration for a development of 700 houses in the draft proposal of the Local Development Plan (LDP). This was rejected due to the lack of infrastructure for a development of that size, however, until the LDP submitted by Maldon District Council (MDC) has been agreed with the government, no village is safe. Latchingdon is an attractive site for development, we have a School, Shops, Petrol Station, Post Office, Pub and easy access to main roads and public transport. This does not mean as a village we should resign ourselves to a mass development but we will have to accept some development. LPC have been proactive in this and are going through the process of submitting a Neighbourhood Plan (NP), this involves speaking to Landowners, Parishioners and Businesses, asking their views, offering ideas and the Village as a whole will vote on any final plan. That plan then has to be accepted by Maldon District Council before the plan is set in stone for the development of the village for the next 15 years. If anyone wishes to help the Neighbourhood Plan Committee in planning the future plan of our village you are welcome to join us.

As it happens, in last week's Maldon & Burnham (Thursday 19th June) there were 2 articles about the threat of development to Maldon District due to the lack and delays of a LDP, I have attached copies of the articles for you to read. We should not be fearful of objecting to a development. It is important that any development in our village is acceptable to the majority of villagers, and meets our needs, not just those of a developer wishing to cash in on the lack of LDP.

LPC have to listen to all people's views, for or against any development in the village, large or small, weigh the evidence and try to steer a course through these changing times. A NP would set out what we are willing to accept and what we want from it. Maybe by accepting some development now with an outcome that would have a benefit to the village it will give us enough time to have our own NP in place.

Latchingdon Parish Council

I joined LPC 18 months ago after a passing comment from the Parish Councillors as I made a representation for a development on our farm. LPC was short of a councillor and glibly asked if I would like to join. I initially dismissed the idea but after some time I thought 'Why not?', so I offered my time and was accepted for the role. In these last 18 months I have found my fellow councillors to be welcoming, hard working, knowledgeable and friendly. They give up a lot of their time to help run the Parish Council not only by attending meetings but by cleaning the Village Hall, Repairing Gates, Car Parks, Maintaining Play Areas, Footpaths and they attend many District & County Council meeting in their own time to find out how new rules/legislation are going to affect us. Parish Clerk, Sarah Sayer works beyond her remit to help keep things going and is always responding to queries, problems around the village. I am lucky to have met such kind, generous people and I hope the village can find the time to listen to LPC with open minds.