

Altrincham & Bowdon Civic Society
Registered charity No. 246145

Summary Minutes of the online Committee Meeting – 8.00pm 24th November 2020

Present:

Committee members: Judie Collins (Chair), Trevor Stone (Treasurer), Robert Redford, Richard Hagon (Sec), Paulina Lewis, David Eastwood B.A., Leslie Cupitt (Green Spaces Lead), Vivian Labaton MSc.

Co-opted Members : Angela Stone (Town Centre & Business Lead)

Guests: Mr Ken Garrity- President Altrincham Rotary Club, Mr.Martin Garrett a member,
Ms Sarah Marles –local resident and potential new member, Member Mr Philip Long of Groby Place.

Notes from the Chair

Meeting with Richard Roe on 27th regarding the future of Altrincham Town Hall.

David said he was concerned that the Chamber should be preserved for weddings and other functions and not used by the nursery. Chair said the nursery only wanted to use it for offices.

Angela said it was important that the Licence Facility for Marriages should be retained as it's the only place in Altrincham where such ceremonies can take place.

Altair.

Have reminded Darren yet again about a starting date. No response.

TMBC say they are ready to deliver CPOs on developers not going forward.

Important part of housing delivery.

THT town centre estate. Have reminded Sean that we need information particularly on New Street.

Planning

For current planning applications **see appendix 1.**

Paulina reported that the St.John's Church application was now in, but overall didn't think there was anything we could object to. There are no external alterations just the addition of a first floor inside. The developers have said they will retain important features inside the church.

Report from Philip Long on the proposed development at Parkfield 8 Groby Place, Altrincham

Philip gave the committee some background to the ongoing issues surrounding the proposed development of four houses at 8 Groby Place. There is a full summary and report in **Appendix 2**

AOB

Angela said she would be speaking to Stephen O'Malley about the Goose Green flooding.

Also the Town Centre Poppies this year raised £610 pounds for charity.

Chair said there was still a major problem with school children in the town centre and on the interchange in large groups and not social distancing.

Regarding the GMSF (Greater Manchester Spatial Framework) Leslie said that Stockport was due to vote on 3rd December but would vote it down. Angela said that Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Trafford and Bury were postponing their votes.

Appendix 1

PLANNING APPLICATIONS 26 October 2020 – 23 November 2020

102448/VAR/20 Refuse Depot, Wharf Road, Altrincham

102453/CND/20 16 Old Market Place, Altrincham

Application for approval of details reserved by conditions of grant of planning permission 97758/LBC/19. Conditions 7 (schedule, fixtures & fitting), 8 (demolition of internal masonry walls), 17 (joinery), 18 (internal wall and ceilings), 21 (internal openings, stairs etc) and 23 (fire and acoustics).

Note: Comments have been submitted by the Design Forum as these are technical matters. Part of the building has a cruck framework.

102130/LBC/20 4 Norman Road, Altrincham (Linotype Building)

102483/LBC/20 St John's Church, St John's Rd, Altrincham WA14 2NW

Listed building consent for change of use of St John's Church from use F1 (learning and non-residential institution) to use Class E (commercial business and service) with associated internal alterations and ancillary works.

Appendix 2

PARKFIELD – 8 GROBY PLACE, ALTRINCHAM WA14 4AL

HISTORY

Groby Place is one of the oldest roads in Altrincham and it has been included in the recently extended conservation area of the town. The Earl of Stamford's estate owned the land at the end of the cul-de-sac that now comprises only 12 properties. The road was originally built for 2 pairs of large Victorian semi-detached houses that are examples of the white brick from the brickworks that the then Earl of Stamford owned. It was a stipulation to use the brick that he would place when granting permission for houses being built on his land.

The land at 8 Groby Place originally was the home of Judge James Kinder whose son, Edward, was awarded the VC for his services in World War I. Local people of Dunham tell me that the Earl of Stamford built Parkfield in the 1950's, initially as a home for himself. I am told that he occupied the property for only a short while as he found it too small and moved back to live in the kitchen area of Dunham Massey Hall. It was then occupied by his estate manager.

John & Angela Madeley, the only tenants from March 1968 to Spring 2013, tell me that when they were interviewed by the Earl of Stamford for the tenancy, he told them that he had "watched the house being built, brick by brick" and that it was a special place for him, being so private, and hence the need to ensure the tenancy was going to the right people. The Earl of Stamford was a regular visitor to the property during his lifetime.

Over the years Groby Place was developed with the sale of the gardens of the Victorian semis so that the North East side was complete with 9 dwellings. In the early 1990's three more properties were built on the land opposite the second pair of semi-detached houses.

The initial application for planning permission of a number of units on the site of was refused in July 1989 on the basis:

“In the interests of vehicular and pedestrian safety, in particular because the proposal would generate additional traffic using the junction between Dunham Road and Groby Place which is substandard and is in close proximity to Loreto Preparatory School.”

Planning was eventually agreed for 3 houses in September 1990. Para 21 of the appeal states:

“The local residents are concerned about precedent. However, there is limited space for further development in Groby Place and each application must be dealt with on its merits, having regard to the Development Plan and all material considerations.”

Car usage has increased over the years and the 3 additional houses generated regular use of an additional 10 cars.

The National Trust appointed local agents around June 2013 to sell the site. The first the residents knew of the sale is when a number of favoured prospective buyers were shown around the site. One resident attempted to be included in the sale and was given an unacceptable timescale to participate. When asked about the trees on the site buyers were told there were no tree preservation orders in place and “you can do what you want”.

There are some important trees that form an integral part of the site as well as the area bordering the local park and school. An excellent specimen of Deciduous Cypress that was planted by the Earl of Stamford is one of a pair in the area, the other being in Loreto school grounds. When residents heard a rumour that prospective buyers were being told that there were no preservation orders on the site so they could do what they liked with it, the local tree preservation officer was informed of the risk and an emergency tree preservation order was placed on the entire site. The order was supported by all the local neighbours as well as the schools in the area that form a boundary to the site. It is ironic that the only objection was from The National Trust – “on the basis of the generality of the order and it was not tree specific.” This preservation order has now been made permanent and covers clusters of trees as well as individual trees.

Adverts subsequently appeared in local papers indicating that the site had been sold STC for £2.1m as well as another indicating sold STC for £3m.

The first preferred buyer was a reputable local developer McGoff & Byrne. They withdrew their interest when they realised that it would not be possible to undertake any development without the co-operation of the existing neighbours who throughout the process had been stating that their wish was for one dwelling and no further intensification of the road usage.

Informal advice was taken from Kath Ludlam a local planning expert who indicated that the strongest arguments for our case were:

- Lack of pavements on Groby Place
- Lack of width for 2 cars to pass
- Access onto Dunham Road was dangerous across pavements with schoolchildren
- Children playing on Groby Place
- Lack of street lighting

The site lay fallow for a number of years with numerous complaints to the police of damage from youths using it as a drugs den.

In August 2016 the National Trust wrote to all neighbours – “..... the Trust is pleased to announce the sale of the property to Gustav Bonnier”. Again, we were unaware of the site being advertised for sale and the letter is incorrect as we believe that all that has been “sold” is an “option” to buy the site subject to planning permission being granted.

In September 2016 neighbours met with Matthew Westbrook of Barnes Walker, Landscape Architects who had been appointed by Gustav Bonnier. The position of one house as the preferred option was maintained as was the importance of retaining the trees subject to the tree preservation order.

In May 2017 a public consultation was held at the Cresta Court Hotel. The proposal for 10 units was met with universal rejection. The site remained fallow for 2 further years with numerous complaints to the National Trust as regards security to the site.

In April 2019 we were informed that the responsibility for the site had been moved to the “Rural Asset Management Team” due to “its complexity and sale value”.

In May 2019 Steve Talling of the National Trust met with Jon Drape, Graham Alty & Philip Long. His initial response was to be confounded as to why the site wasn't first offered to the neighbours as he had a similar problem in his own village and why the option had been granted for 5 years. He appeared to be apologetic for the situation but said he was stuck with the contractual position.

In January 2020 we were given less than 24 hours notice of the proposed felling of a mature Beech tree (subject to the tree preservation order) that was deemed “dangerous” along with one other dead “dangerous” tree. 2 independent experts confirmed that the best solution was to leave a 20ft habitat stick that would solve the potential risk of a single branch. The tree was felled with undue haste and contractors left the site without dealing with the other dead “dangerous” tree. And so we arrive at November 2020 with a revised scheme from Gustav Bonnier for 4 units on Parkfield. What is disappointing is that throughout the process we have maintained that Groby Place is not suitable for any further intensification and a proposed purchaser for a single dwelling on the site has been trying to negotiate directly with the National Trust to purchase the site at market value.

The Proposed Development

The benefits of the proposed scheme are detailed as:

- Deliver new family homes in a sustainable and accessible location, in walking distance from Altrincham town centre
- Revitalise and repurpose a presently derelict and overgrown site – **entirely the fault of the National Trust with 7 years of inactivity**
- Help the Council to meet its housing need, and will contribute towards the identified shortfall in the supply of new homes locally – **the local housing need is not for further +£1m houses**
- Ensure that the site continues to make a positive contribution towards the character of the Conservation Area – **this can easily and be better achieved with one unit**
- Deliver new family homes which are built to the highest standard, using quality and complementary building materials – **there are numerous family homes in this price bracket on the market**
- Ensure that the proceeds raised from the sale of the site will be used solely for the benefit of Dunham Massey – **more easily achieved and would have been 7 years ago for one unit**
- Be liable for Community Infrastructure Levy, the monies of which will be invested into local community infrastructure – **equally achieved for one unit**
- Deliver economic benefits both during construction and once occupied which will have a direct impact on the local economy – **questionable statement from a group that is £1.8m insolvent**

Graham's points following June 2017 consultation:

There are two main concerns:

1 Conduct of the National Trust

- they are promoting a scheme with no concern for the environment or the surrounding area
- they are acting in a manner which will induce trespass and shows no concern for the right of neighbouring land owners
- they are refusing to provide information referred to at their consultation evening
- they are promoting a scheme when they have admitted they do not have access to the contents of the ecological survey, tree survey, bat survey, heritage assessment and traffic assessment: therefore they do not know what they are promoting (but they are promoting it anyway)

2 The Scheme Being Promoted

There are several concerns about the suggested development scheme, including:

- The private land/road of Groby Place will not support any great increase in traffic. There are numerous traffic related issues:
 - There are no pavements on the road and it is not wide enough for 2 cars to pass in many places;
 - A number of young children use the road as a play area as well as elderly pensioners - they share the space with passing cars;
 - The junction with Dunham Road is "sub-standard" and dangerous as regards visibility and will only get worse at school times, with the increase of schoolchildren from the associated development of North Cestrian. There is a dangerous mix of school children on foot, cars turning in and out of Groby Place and cars turning in and out of Loreto Prep at the same time, at rush hour.
 - If there were no other residents on Groby Place at the moment and Parkfield was proposed as a new development, the junction at the entrance to Loreto Prep would not be granted highways/planning permission in its own right - hence there is no justification in proposing a development which adds to the current resident numbers at a junction which would not be so permitted;
 - There is little lighting on the road, so at night the dangers to residents and school children walking home would be significantly increased by additional traffic;
 - Generally, there is chaos of traffic on Dunham Road and Groby Road around school drop-off and collection times;
 - National Trust/Gustav Bonnier have refused to disclose the Highways Report they refer to in the scheme billboards;
- The site has had only one house for many years - this building, whilst not architecturally significant, has a history that is significant. No explanation has been given as to its proposed demolition and National Trust/Gustav Bonnier have refused to disclose the Heritage Assessment referred to in their scheme billboards;
- There are a number of protected trees on the site - the National Trust/Gustav Bonnier plan ignores this, dismissing all but one of the Tree Preservation Orders without explanation; the Friends of John Leigh Park are concerned about removal of fauna;
- National Trust/Gustav Bonnier have refused to disclose the Tree Survey they refer to in their scheme billboards;
- When planning was last given on Groby Place it was only granted on appeal and on the basis that there was limited scope for any further development - planning decision 25/9/90 - the developments around the road have increased significantly since 1990 and so now more than ever there is no scope for the proposed Gustav Bonnier development;
- The National Trust/Gustav Bonnier plan leaves no/insufficient space for visitor parking. This would cause parking to "spill" back down Groby Place. This is not permitted as the road/land is privately owned. There is no right to park;
- The National Trust/Gustav Bonnier plan would mean no gardens for the apartment block - there is little/no outside space. This would mean recreation/play areas would "spill onto the tight vehicle routes. This is dangerous and again not permitted on what is private land;
- The suggested access into John Leigh Park is not acceptable - already with the site unoccupied we have a significantly increased number of trespassers using the road as a short cut to Altrincham town centre. It is private land and the existence of a potential cut through will encourage the idea that it is a public right of way, which it clearly is not. With so many new units as proposed this will be unmanageable and therefore the only option is to have no access point. Townfield Gardens have been through this experience and ultimately closed any access to John Leigh Park; any new development should "land lock" the border with John Leigh Park;
- There is no obvious connection between the proposed scheme/design and the fact it is within a conservation area;
- Ecology - the suggestion that a single bat roost was the only habitat find is difficult to believe as we have seen many bats, badgers, foxes, rabbits etc;
- National Trust/Gustav Bonnier have refused to disclose the Ecology Report referred to in the scheme billboards;
- the houses neighbouring the site are concerned about interference with their rights to light.

- there is not sufficient drainage (both surface water and sewers/underground drains) to support the National Trust/ Gustav Bonnier proposed development;
- No proposals have been made in relation to associated necessary provision, such as powered security gates the A56 end, lighting, road upkeep, drainage or traffic calming.

As discussed we are keen to discuss sensible proposals with the National Trust/potential developers, but the present suggested scheme is unacceptable.