

Minutes of the Environment & Planning Meeting held on 22nd February 2024 at 6.45pm

Present: Cllr Moss, Cllr Irven, Cllr Murphy, Cllr Westcott, and Cllr Whetlor

In attendance: Jo Grellier - Town Clerk, Annie Robinson – Deputy Clerk Town Clerk, and 10 members of the public

Before meeting commenced, having given notice to speak during the public participation section, 2 members of the public addressed the committee regarding items 3/37/23/025 & 3/37/23/027.

24/80B To Receive Apologies for Absence: (LGA 1972, section 85 (1))
Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'apologies given by Cllrs Campbell and Richards are approved'**. Seconded by Cllr Westcot. Carried.

24/81B To receive any Declaration of Interests under Watchet Town Council's Code of Conduct (adopted on 9 July 2012) issued in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 SI No: 1464

Name	Minute no	Description of Interest	Personal & Prejudicial	Action
Cllr Murphy Cllr Whetlor	3/37/23/025 3/37/23.027	Lobbied by public	Personal	Cllrs remained in the room and took part in the discussion.
Cllr Irven	3/37/23/025 3/37/23.027	Letter from Conservation Society but not lobbied	Personal	Cllrs remained in the room and took part in the discussion.

24/82B To receive and sign the minutes of the previous Environment and Planning meeting - (17th January 2024) and adopt the Resolutions and Recommendations contained therein. (LGA 1972, SCH12 Para 41 (1) - *(Paperwork circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 1)*)
Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2024 are a true and accurate record'**. Seconded Cllr Murphy. Carried.

Cllr Whetlor proposed that **'planning applications 3/37/23/025 & 3/37/23/027 are moved up the agenda to be discussed as the next item'**. Seconded by acclaim.

3/37/23/025 1 - 3 Malt House Court, Swain Street, Watchet
Variation to a S106 on application 3/37/08/034 to amend tenure of affordable housing from affordable rent to discount market sales

3/37/23/027 2 - 3 Mill Street Bakery, Mill Street, Watchet, TA23 0FA
Variation to a S106 on application 3/37/12/014 to amend tenure of affordable housing from affordable rent to discount market sales

A discussion ensued on both applications as one. The Committee expressed it's disgust and outrage at the treatment of the tenants in the Acorn properties and also it's disbelief at the numerous errors committed by Somerset Council planning department and Acorn Housing.

Cllr Murphy proposed that **'WTC will contact the 2 outstanding Community land Trusts, and 7 housing providers that have yet to respond to Acorn to ask if they would consider taking on the properties. The following statement from WTC is submitted on the Somerset Council Planning Portal, and published on WTC Social Media platforms to raise awareness of the issues involved with this planning application:**

Watchet Town Council strongly object to these applications.

1 The applications have been wrongly logged by Somerset Council and the site notices have been posted with inaccurate information.

LAW

- In the case of 025, the property logged is 1 Malthouse Court when it is in fact, 1,2 & 3 Malthouse Court. The site notice posted in the street shows this incorrect information.
 - In the case of 027, the properties logged are 2 & 3 Mill Street when it should be 2 & 3 Mill Street Bakery. The site notice posted in the street shows this incorrect information. In addition, the location map on the portal compounds the error as it clearly shows 2 & 3 Mill Street instead of 2 & 3 Mill Street Bakery.
- In view of this, Watchet Town Council request that the applications be withdrawn and resubmitted giving the correct information so that there can be a more informed public consultation on the proposals.

2 Watchet Town Council heard from tenants of the properties.

- The first they heard that they might be evicted is when they saw the site notices in the street.
 - There has been no consultation by Acorn Properties with their tenants. This is most deplorable, and we consider, unethical.
 - The interests of the tenants have not been considered in these applications. The Somerset Council Affordable Housing Consultee (AHC) comments that "The application(s) should be updated to include a proposal on how the affected tenants will be rehoused to prevent homelessness."
- We believe Somerset Council should refuse these applications because approving them would render Watchet residents homeless at a time of housing shortage.

3 Watchet Town Council understand that several of the tenants have health issues likely to have been made worse by the threat of eviction and homelessness.

We consider that the application should include an Equalities Impact Assessment as required under the 2010 Equalities Act before such an application can be approved.

4 These applications seek to change properties from "social rented" to "discounted market sales" - sales at a 20% discount from market value.

- The AHC states that "This is not acceptable" and that "...they should be sold at no more than 50% of the Open Market Value in perpetuity". Watchet Town Council agrees with this.

5 Under the terms of the Section 106 agreement made as a condition of granting planning permission, these properties were secured as affordable units, to be "social rented". Watchet Town Council consider that it is not the case as contended by the applicant that this "no longer serves a useful purpose" as there is a shortage of "social rented" properties in Watchet.

- This is evidenced by the AHC who reports that 36 of the 69 households registered on Homefinder Somerset and wishing to live in Watchet require a 1 bed property and 19/69 require a 2-bed home. Therefore, Watchet Town Council consider that paragraph 020 of the National Planning Practice Guidance on Planning Obligations is not satisfied as contended by the applicant.

6 The applicant has sought to find an approved social rental provider to manage the properties as agreed under the S106 agreement.

- They started looking in May 2023 and have concluded less than a year later that "all reasonable avenues of enquiry have now been exhausted."
- The applicant reports that 24 registered providers were contacted but only 17 responses were received. 7 providers - some 30% of those contacted - have not responded, including some who already have properties in Watchet. We consider that not all reasonable avenues of enquiry have been exhausted as required by the aforementioned para 020.

7 Reference is made in the applicant's submission that "... enquiries (were) made to the Community Land Trust." Their response is not reported.

- Watchet Town Council are aware of at least three CLTs in Somerset including a recently formed CLT - Base for Life Watchet CIC.
- We support approaches made by BFLW to Acorn Properties and any other CLT or Registered Provider that may come forward so that these properties may continue to be "social rented". Watchet Town Council would support a decision by Somerset Council to take on the properties themselves to enable their "social rented" status to be preserved.

In conclusion, we urge that Somerset Council do all within their power, including refusal of the applications to prevent Watchet residents becoming homeless'. Cllr Irven seconded. Carried.

9 Members of the Public left the meeting at 7.09pm

24/83B Double Yellow Line project:

- (i) Update and recommendation (*Paperwork circulated to members prior to the meeting via Appendix 2*)
The Clerk tabled a consultation letter to residents affected for approval. A discussion ensued.

Cllr Irven proposed that *'the Clerks recommended letter of consultation is approved with Committee members commitment to aid with delivery'*.

Cllr Murphy seconded. Carried.

Cllr Irven thanked the office staff, Cllr Murphy & Somerset Highways for their efforts.

24/84B Watchet Coastal Working Group:

- (i) Update - No update to date.

24/85B To address items received from the planning authority requiring attention prior to the next Somerset Council planning meetings. No others received.

24/86B Councillor Surgeries:

Nothing to report to this committee actioned at Full Council.

LAW

24/87B **Entran Transport Road Traffic Analysis Parsonage Farm**
Cllr Irven advised Entran has been contacted after approval by Full Council to use up to £5000 earmarked reserves for traffic analysis for Parsonage Farm. Clerk has signed papers to begin process today. Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the Committee endorse signing of the papers and begin process'**. Cllr Whetlor seconded. Carried. Cllr Whetlor thanked Cllr Irven for his effort and report.

Plans received for discussion

T/37/24/002 **21 Rangoon Road, Watchet, TA23 0TS**
Application to carry out management works to one poplar tree included in West Somerset District Tree Preservation Order T/3/86 on land to the east of 21 Rangoon Road, Watchet
Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the Committee recommend approval'**. Cllr Westcot seconded. Carried.

T/37/24/001 **19 Rangoon Road, Watchet, TA23 0TS**
Application to carry out management works to one poplar tree included in West Somerset District Tree Preservation Order T/3/86 on land to the east of 19 Rangoon Road, Watchet
Cllr Murphy proposed that **'the Committee recommend approval'**. Cllr Westcot seconded. Carried.

24/88B **Matters for the next meeting**

- West Somerset Housing Emergency
- Liaise with Clerk

Cllr Whetlor as Chair of the Committee thanked the Clerk & Deputy Clerk for their efforts since taking on their new posts at this very challenging time.

The meeting closed at 7.29pm

Signed..... *L A Whetlor*

Date..... *21st March 2024*

