

Stoke Hammond



a thankful village

Bragenham Side Project



History to date

Bragenham Side Project

With the village having grown dramatically during the past 5 years, many new residents will be unaware of the Parish Council (PC) task, with respect to the land on Bragenham Side, whilst existing residents will be awaiting an update. The land is next to the Community Centre and opposite the sports field.

As we all look forward to an end to the pandemic, the beginning of Spring and the impending council elections, we thought we were overdue providing an update on the project and how we see this moving ahead in the future.

History

Pre 2018

Section 106 agreements are negotiated between a developer and the County Council to help make new home schemes more attractive to communities. The funds created can be used to help recreational, sports and social activities. In 2015 the Parish Council were informed by Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) that the growth in the parish entitled them to make a bid for money to support appropriate projects.

A decision was taken to purchase the land behind the community centre, owned by Bucks CC, and for the play area to be expanded to include the MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) and the outdoor gym equipment. An on line poll of the local community supported this initiative. The purchase of the land was completed in February 2017 and the new playground equipment installed and successfully opened in March 2017.

During 2016 the PC became aware that the land adjacent to the community centre was available for sale from the owners. At that time there was a belief that upwards of £1.25m in Section 106 monies was available. In September 2016, the PC authorised the purchase of the land, as a first stage in significantly improving the sports and social facilities available to our fast growing local community. During the ensuing

negotiations with the owner, AVDC informed the parish council that funds would only be available if the land use was changed from agricultural to recreational. Consequently a planning application was submitted and change of use confirmed in October 2017. Completion on the purchase took place in November 2017 and Section 106 funds released to the Parish Council.

In February 2018, a questionnaire was issued to every house in the village providing a range of ideas for which the new land could be used. It asked villagers to rate the ideas or add any ideas they felt were more appropriate. In total 111 replies were received representing 10.8% of the village households at that time. This was considered sufficient to move ahead with the project. It was announced at the May 2018 Parish Annual General Meeting that a multi purpose village hall was the preferred option but other considerations such as a tennis court, bowling green, multi use sports field, amphitheatre, sports track, rebound wall, and skate park were not being ruled out. It was stated that the next stage would be to prepare an architects vision for the project.

During 2018/2019

In June 2018 architects were appointed and the initial vision plan, plus outline costs, provided via the working group to the Parish Council in November.

Between December 2018 and April 2019 a number of issues became apparent that caused significant delays to the project. An agreement had been reached with the Community Association to allow access over the land they owned. Whilst this initially seemed straightforward, it became apparent that there were highways issues and despite discussions with Bucks County Council in June these issues couldn't be overcome. During July and October discussions took place with a number of highways consultants and one was appointed in November 2018 to provide a detailed report.

A more significant, and possibly overriding, issue arose at the beginning of 2019. The expected availability of funds was

discovered to be significantly lower than expected. The largest amount of money available would be related to the development at Newton Leys South. This is S106 money that resides within Milton Keynes Council(MKC) because the Stoke Hammond Parishioners in Bucks only represent 1/3rd of the site. It therefore meant an application would need to be made to MKC rather than AVDC and opened up a completely different challenge. In addition, if these funds were to be accessed, the Newton Leys residents would need to be involved in any future decisions on how that money was spent. Ignoring the Newton Leys element, meant that as at Jan 2021 the S106 money available in AVDC for Stoke Hammond is approximately £175k, although there is known potential for this to increase to £550k.

2020 to date

In January 2020 the Highways consultant report was received with a plan and estimate to provide car parking and access to the new land with an outline cost of £200k, and another £250k to provide services. It was clear, that even with this cost, there was a significant shortfall in available funds before considering the multi purpose hall itself.

The remainder of 2020 was seriously impacted by the pandemic allowing little scope for any major progression to the overall plan or in addressing the financial shortfall. One idea that has been progressed however was to determine the scope of extending the additional community association building as a way of delivering some of the desired requirements at a reduced cost.

The Way Ahead

It seems appropriate now to once again revisit the local communities needs. Those funds that are available exist because of the developments in the past 5 years during which the village has grown by 30%. We think it essential to look for a new more extensive mandate from the village before taking any further action.

In addition lessons have undoubtedly been learnt through the last 5 years that would ensure a fresh approach is managed more effectively. This will be aided by the information that has already been obtained about the Bragenham Side locality. A new Parish Council will be elected in May 2021, Coronavirus permitting, we would like to be able to give them a fresh perspective from the local community so they can quickly get up and running.

We are proposing therefore to have a number of zoom meetings to allow parishioners to: -

1. Question the Council
2. Gain the strength of support and enthusiasm for moving forward with the overall project.
3. To recruit people with relevant experience and time to join a professional project group who can lead on behalf of the local community.

The meeting will also be able to gauge an early view of whether the community needs remain the same, as in 2015 or whether they have changed with the passage of time, growth in numbers and change in demographics. This will ultimately need to be properly addressed by an early work package managed by the new project team.

We also propose this be a far more holistic approach involving not just the Parish Council but with representation from the Community Association, The Sports Club, Newton Leys Residents and any other significantly sized local groups representing Stoke Hammond/ Newton Leys parish residents. The overall objective has always been to provide something that benefits the maximum numbers of parishioners and therefore requires much greater involvement than we have been able to achieve to date.

The village meeting would ideally have been held in person, but with the current pandemic this unfortunately is not possible, as we aim to complete this activity by the end of April.

If anyone has any early thoughts on the above approach, please do bring them to the attention of the Parish Clerk and we will endeavor to take any points on board.

Questions and Answers

Q1 How is money allocated by the County Council ?

A1. Developers agree an amount of money to be given to the District/Unitary Council per development. The money is tied to the parish in which the development took place . The Parish has to provide details on what the money will be spent on and they then have a fixed period normally 10 years to make a claim against that reason. If the money is not claimed at the end of the 10-year period, it goes back to the developer.

Q2. How much has the Parish Council spent on the project to date?

A2. The cost of the land was £85k, which was recovered from the S106 fund. A further £8.5k has been spent on Architects fees and the Highways report. In addition we have contracted a feasibility study into extending the existing Community Centre building for a fee of £3.6k. Provided this expenditure can be linked to a completed project that is entitled to S106 funding , the costs can be reclaimed. Failure to complete a project mean the costs would be covered by the Parish Council funds raised largely via the precept.

Q3. Who made the decision and why to buy this land?

A3. The Parish Council were made aware in 2015 that the land, formerly owned by the local family who had previously donated the recreation ground, was available for sale. The Parish Council discussed and agreed this was a sensible use of S106 funds. The spend was authorised by the Parish Council at a meeting in September 2016.

Q4. How much did the land purchases cost and how were the prices set?

A4. The land on the curtilage of the Community Centre cost £36k and the Bragenham site purchase £85k, all covered by S106 money. For the Community Centre purchase, a price was agreed between Bucks CC and the Parish Council and the cost approved by AVDC as part of their process to release the 106 funds.

Similarly the price for the Bragenham Side land was agreed with the owners and the price vetted by AVDC before release of the funds. In addition, the MUGA and associated sports equipment cost a further £72k.

Q5. Why has it taken so long to involve the village again?

A5. The project started with good intentions and the outline vision for a new Village hall was delivered in November 2018, within 6 months of the village questionnaire. For the whole of 2019 the council got bogged down in issues they couldn't resolve and on reflection, lacked the resources to make any significant progress. The Council was also reduced to only 4 councillors and a change in Parish Clerk in April 2020 and the 3 new councillors only joined in November 2020. This current update would have occurred in early 2020 but with everyone focused on the pandemic it seemed inappropriate until now.

We want to provide an opportunity for as many parishioners as possible to ask questions and get involved so have scheduled two Zoom meetings in April. This is clearly different from holding a meeting in the Community Centre so would ask people to register their interest in attending with Jo Simond, the Parish Clerk, by using

Parish Clerk email :

clerk.stokehammondpc@gmail.com

If demand is significant we will schedule additional zoom meetings.

ZOOM MEETING DATES

Tuesday 13th April 2021 at 7.30pm

Thursday 22nd April 2021 at 7.30pm