

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

ASHINGTON & BLYTH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council** held at Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre, Woodhorn Road, Newbiggin by the Sea, NE64 6HG on Wednesday, 12 June 2019 at 5:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor G Webb
(Chair, in the chair for items 1, 2 and 6)

Councillor J Lang
(Planning Vice-Chair, in the chair for items 3 - 5)

MEMBERS

D Campbell
G Davey
S Davey
B Gallacher
J J Gobin
K Nisbet

K Parry
M Purvis
J Reid
E Simpson
T Wilson

OFFICERS

M Bulman
D Lathan
E Millar-McMeeken
R Murfin
J Murphy
K Norris

Lawyer
Senior Environmental Health Officer
Senior Planning Officer
Director of Planning
Principal Planning Officer
Democratic Services Officer

Public: 28
Press: 1

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cartie, Grimshaw and Rickerby.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Ashington & Blyth Local Area Council held on Wednesday, 15 May 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

At this point in the meeting Councilor Gobin referred to minute 07, page 3 in which it was stated that a written update would be provided to him on the proposed works regarding the road into Cambois. This had not been done, so Democratic Services would follow it up.

Councillor Nisbet also referred minute 07, page 3 and said she had not heard anything back regarding her concerns about the Home Zone area in Cowpen Quay. Democratic Services would also follow this up.

14. DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Vice Chair requested members to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications. The procedure at planning committees was appended for information. (Report attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix A.)

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

15. 19/00039/FUL - Demolition of the existing outbuildings and construction of 92 new homes with associated access, parking, landscaping and infrastructure, along with the extension and renovation of the existing Clubhouse, erection of new outbuildings, new areas of hardstanding and alterations to the landscaping of the Golf Course. (Report attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix B.)

Euan Millar-McMeeken, Senior Planning Officer, introduced the above application and provided the following updates:

At the time of the report being sent to Democratic Services, the offer from the applicant in respect of the required s106 contributions was significantly less than that requested by the Council. The agents for the scheme had since confirmed that the full amount, as set out at paragraph 7.89 of the report, would be provided if the application was approved. For clarity that included 17% affordable housing provision (16 units) and the full contribution of £589,900 towards education, health care and ecological mitigation.

The applicants had stated that, despite these contributions, the items identified in the supporting information submitted with the application with regards to the improvements to the golf club, facilities and course, could still be provided.

Plans had been updated and submitted to reflect the change in affordable housing provision (a copy of which was tabled at the meeting and filed with the signed Minutes of the meeting). The addition of two affordable houses, both bungalows, and the alteration of one other house type on site was proposed but that did not change the overall number of units proposed, which remained at 92. Furthermore,

the changes did not introduce any significant changes that would require re-consultation or delay consideration of the application.

As such, it was recommended that the second reason for refusal be removed.

It was stressed, however, that the provision of the full S106 contribution did not change the recommendation nor did it add weight to the planning balance as the applicants were now offering what was expected. This position was not considered to be an outweighing benefit but policy compliant.

Reference was made to section 4 of the report, Consultee Responses, which on page 5 stated that no response had been received from Blyth Town Council then on page 6 indicated their support. On a point of clarification it was noted that a letter of support from Blyth Town Council had been received as a representation but was not part of the consultation process.

The Senior Planning Officer then summarised the report and provided a slide presentation.

Ian Henderson spoke in support of the application and his comments included the following points:

- He had been part of Blyth Golf Club since he was a boy and had joined the committee at a time when the club was a loss making facility. Some tough decisions had been made and, with a remodelled plan, the club was now breaking even, but still had an overdraft which it could not pay off.
- The committee had come up with a drastic way to create revenue, 2 ½ years ago it devised a plan to potentially put houses on the site and went on to find a buyer.
- The site was not in the open countryside, it was on the end of Plessey Road and had previously been supported by Northumberland County Council (NCC).
- This investment would sustain Blyth Golf Club for the long term and there was a detailed business plan in place.
- People would use the facility, not just for golf, but as an extended community facility.
- The Golf Club had been in existence for 150 years and the proposal would sustain it for the long term.
- Barclays Bank had continued to prop up the club but if this application was not successful the club was staring at closure and, if that happened, the land would be subject to vandalism and fall into disrepair.
- Approval of the application was so important for the town of Blyth.

Norman Jackson then spoken in support of the application and his comments included the following points:

- He was a proud resident of the County of Northumberland and a proud resident of the town of Blyth.
- There was nothing but closure all around them but people in Blyth were fighting back.

- The Golf Club needed the help of Councillors not just for Blyth but for the whole of the County.
- What if Blyth Golf Club was to close? The land was being maintained by the club and was a haven for wildlife including deer and squirrels which would disappear if the land was not maintained.
- He begged members to approve the application.

Bill Thompson, Blyth Rotary Club, also spoke in support of the application:

- The Rotary Club was a great user of the Golf Club, it held events there and had raised over £100,000 for charity.
- It would suffer greatly if the Golf Club was to close, as would the whole of Blyth.

Members' Questions

In response to questions the following information was provided:

- Policies to support previously developed land were not relevant because the land had been restored to green. It did not therefore meet the definition of previously developed land.
- Various parcels of land had covenants and ownership issues but these were not looked at when planning decisions were made as they were issues to be resolved by the landowner.
- The applicant was correct in that there had been some support for the scheme from NCC in the past when there had been an under delivery of housing numbers. However, the Council could now demonstrate a very healthy housing land supply, having the equivalent to 12.1 years supply of deliverable sites.
- In terms of Northumberland's housing delivery target, 230% of its housing requirement was currently being delivered so there was no strategic justification to move away from policy by granting permission in the open countryside.
- There were several sports clubs going through similar issues to Blyth Golf Club but proposals put forward had to demonstrate benefits to the site not just financial benefits for the club. This otherwise could be argued to apply to other areas of land in a golf club's ownership unrelated to the course.
- The revised affordable housing offer would provide 9 units for discounted market value, 7 units for affordable rent and 2 bungalows.
- The latest version of the Northumberland Local Plan had been submitted to the Government and settlement boundaries had been identified.
- Planning permission had already been granted for 22,000 houses in the county. If it was suggested that housing releases were needed and this site should be earmarked for housing, there logically should be an investigation into other possible sites.
- With regard to plans by Highways for the new Blyth Relief road, their plans would need to be tested against the Local Plan which was the statutory document for the English planning system.

Councillor Campbell moved that the application be approved.

The Solicitor advised that wording was needed for reasons to approve and approval would need to be subject to a Section 106 Agreement and conditions.

Councillor Campbell then moved that determination of the application be delegated to the Director of Planning for approval subject to the resolution and agreement of conditions by the Director of Planning, in conjunction with the Planning Vice Chair, and Section 106 Agreement in respect of 17% affordable housing, education contribution of £477,400, health contribution of £57,300 and ecology contribution of £55,200.

At that point the Solicitor stated that if conditions could not be agreed, the matter would have to come back before the committee.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Nisbet.

Debate followed and members comments included the following:

- There was a covenant on the land and concerns were raised that, if approval for housing was granted, the club may face further financial difficulties in the future and a precedent could be set to allow more housing.
- It was understood that, in law, the site was not defined as a brownfield site and must be thought of as virgin land but members knew it was not, it was surrounded by buildings and was not in the open countryside.
- The application seemed reasonable.
- If the application was not approved there would be a 100 acre site which could be turned into the biggest dumping ground in Northumberland and many species of wildlife would be threatened.
- Previously the site had properties on it and a chapel.
- The Golf Club was a valued amenity for people of all ages and backgrounds, it had been opened up to schools and was used, not just by the people of Blyth, but from all over Northumberland.
- There was a brand new housing estate less than a five minute walk away.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was unanimously agreed and it was:

RESOLVED that determination of the application be delegated to the Director of Planning for approval subject to the resolution and agreement of conditions by the Director of Planning, in conjunction with the Planning Vice Chair, and Section 106 Agreement in respect of 17% affordable housing, education contribution of £477,400, health contribution of £57,300 and ecology contribution of £55,200.

16. PLANNING APPEALS UPDATE

Members received information on the progress of planning appeals. (Report attached to the signed Minutes as Appendix C.)

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday, 10 July 2019 at Blyth Civic Centre - time to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 5:50 pm

Chair _____

Date _____