

## **RECORD OF GWITHIAN CONSULTATION EVENT – Friday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

### **Attendees for Parish Council:**

Councillor Brian Pocock – Chairman and Gwithian Ward Member  
Councillor Tyrone Homes – Gwithian Ward Member  
Mrs Claire Thomson – Administration Assistant

### **Introduction (Cllr Pocock)**

The introduction of the new National Planning Policy Framework and the Government's Localism Act, together with the devolution of some Cornwall Council services to Town and Parish Councils, highlight the potential for quite significant changes to the parish of Gwinear-Gwithian.

The purpose of holding this consultation event was not only to inform our parishioners of these changes but to gauge the level of local support to assist the Parish Council in determining whether to engage with Cornwall Council and local landowners in a bid to help shape future development within our parish.

In terms of Gwithian, future changes/development may possibly include - new chalets and/or extensions to existing chalets at Gwithian Towans, expansion of the Towans SSSI, changes to the car park, alterations to and/or expansion of the toilet block, enhancement of the beach access etc.

### **The Neighbourhood Development Plan (Cllr Homes)**

Policies TM5 and TM8 of the former Penwith Local Plan seek to protect the special character of the Gwithian Towans and the Towans area from inappropriate development. Cornwall Council, when they became the Local Planning Authority, saved these policies and as such all new development is currently assessed against their criteria together with all other material planning considerations.

The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which has now come into force, continues to protect designated areas (such as Areas of Outstanding National Beauty, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Parks etc.) but states that "saved policies" such as TM5 and TM8 will continue to require material consideration (when assessing new development) but only for the next 12 months and then only if not contradictory to the principles of the NPPF.

The protection that policies TM5 and TM8 currently afford to Gwithian Towans and the Towans area could therefore be lost.

The NPPF also takes a localist approach to providing a buffer of housing supply over a 5 year period. For our parish, it is envisaged that we would need to accommodate between 87 and 300 houses (exact figures to be determined). Again, what impact would this have on Gwithian and the Towans area, as well as the remaining Gwithian and Gwinear wards?

One means of protection could be through a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). This would be produced by the Parish Council in full consultation with the local community which, once in force, would shape the type of development considered acceptable for our area. A NDP could not resist development but could identify the type and nature of development that we as a community would consider acceptable, the criteria of which though, would need to conform with Cornwall Council's Core Strategy (Local Plan) and the NPPF.

The production of a NDP however has the potential to be costly and could take time, and the issues of funding and sourcing manpower are key. Cornwall Council would also need involvement and would make decisions at key stages along the way. In addition, a NDP would be subject to a referendum and the support of 50% of the Parishes electorate would be required for it to be pursued.

### **Questions / Opinions**

*The following questions/opinions numbered and highlighted in bold were asked by parishioners attending the meeting:*

- 1. Gwithian is designated a Conservation Area, Area of Great Historic Value etc., will these remain?**

Yes, areas designated as being of specific importance (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, SSSI's etc.) will continue to be afforded with the same level of protection through the NPPF. Conservation Areas will only be afforded protection if Cornwall Council is willing to preserve them, as they do at present.

- 2. In Somerset the presumption for development appears to override everything; the need to protect our area is key**

- 3. With regards to a "referendum" is the support of 50% of rate payers or voters required?**

It is understood that this refers to "voters", 50% of the electorate, but this would be investigated.

- 4. Would the cost to develop a NDP be a one-off payment?**

There would be initial set up costs to produce the NDP and additional costs to renew the NDP every 5 years, although less expenditure is envisaged for the renewal.

- 5. Are you saying it will be necessary to have the NDP in place within 12 months?**

It would probably take more than 12 months to undertake the process of producing a NDP from conception to examination and the plan coming into force, but we'd wish to work to as short a timescale as possible. Planning Officers have a requirement to take into consideration sections of a NDP once it is clear what is to be included, so they need to be part of the process from the beginning.

**6. If the Parish Council is unable to secure external grant funding, how would the NDP be budgeted for?**

We would need to rely on people putting in time free of charge. We may need to increase the precept if paid personnel were required, but parishioners would be consulted first. We must remember future development will not only affect Gwithian, the remainder of the Parish would also be under pressure against sporadic development, the Gwinear conservation area for instance.

**7. If the NDP is to be for the entire parish, would the rest of the parish agree to its provision at a referendum?**

Consultation would start with the Towans area and would spread to other communities. It is hoped, through consultation, that other areas would see the protection and benefit that a NDP would afford.

**8. How would you engage local people?**

It would be undertaken in a series of small steps, the first being to establish support. We'd continue to promote, engage and consult at every step, until we are happy that more than 50% of the community are on board.

**9. Do you have to have a NDP to have a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO)?**

No, you can have one or the other, or both. Orders are specific to a certain area; you could potentially have 5 or 6 NDO's relating to differing individual areas as well as the overall NDP for the Parish.

**10. Could you have a NDO to protect the nature reserve for instance?**

Yes. Cornwall Council has current policies for the protection of nature reserves, but can this be relied on to be retained in the future? We could seek protection through the NDP or a NDO.

**11. It was mentioned that Gwithian Towans could possibly accommodate one or two more houses, where?**

Morrop's Field in the middle, or the overgrown areas to the rear of Sunset Surf Café. The question is whether in a years time the community is happy to have uncontrolled development (without the protection of TM5, TM8) or appropriate development with control over the detailing, afforded through the NDP?

**12. Would the Hockin Trust as landowner have any input?**

Future generations of the Hockin Trust may reappraise the Towans for the potential for real-estate investment. The NDP gives the Parish the opportunity to work with land owners and local developers in a positive manner to achieve better development for the future. Cornwall Council have run the car park on the Towans for many years but have not invested in it. The Trust's approach to the way its land is managed may change in the future.

**13. Mr Bennett of the Hockin Trust has previously implied that he has no interest in extending the SSSI, have there been discussions between the Hockin Trust and the Parish Council?**

If we are to go forward with a NDP, the community will collectively need to form an opinion on the expansion of the SSSI; the Hockin Trust will have their own view. If the expansion of the SSSI goes ahead it may scupper plans for the improvement of the toilet block and beach access.

**14. Cornwall Council own part of the SSSI, landownership is not wholly with the Hockin Trust. Natural England have been very instrumental in trying to extend the SSSI, it would be disgraceful if this area was not protected.**

It is agreed Cornwall Council own most of the land within the SSSI, but ultimately the decision of the SSSI's extension is with Natural England.

At this point the following question was put to the meeting by the Chair, Cllr Pocock: ***“is a NDP a tool that the community would wish the Parish Council to pursue in a bid to preserve the Towans in line with what policies TM5 and TM8 have done historically?”*** A show of hands followed and identified unanimous support.

**15. You will be spending either private funding or public money, what happens if the Government changes within the next 2/3 years?**

We have no knowledge of the future, but any work undertaken into gathering evidence would be a worthwhile cause for any future scheme. Localism is growing and the devolution of services to a local level is likely to happen.

**16. What is the likelihood that Cornwall Council will hand over the running of the car park to the Parish Council?**

They are unlikely and probably unwilling to lose the management of the car park, but the Hockin Trust are the land owner.

**17. Are you establishing a dialogue with the Hockin Trust?**

Yes. The Parish Council would also like to set up an income stream to provide for a Towans Ranger to oversee the Towans and Gwithian Green and are looking into ways of achieving this.

**18. The Countryside Ranger is very good.**

Yes, but not a Parish Council employee. It is not the intention of the Parish Council to increase the precept for this project, but to find a separate means of income to finance it.

**19. Would funds come from the solar panel farm and its community contribution?**

Potentially. Low Carbon Solar could, in the future, sell their investment so the Parish Council are seeking to ensure all community contributions are put into a trust so they are not lost. Contributions are made at the end of each financial year and are to be

used to fund projects for the good of the community; a Towans Ranger could be one of these.

**Closure**

At 21:30 the consultation event drew to a close with sincere thanks to all those who had attended.