

Wells Neighbourhood Plan Working Party

Minutes – Extraordinary meeting

Friday 18th May 2023 11am via Zoom

Present:

Roger Arguile (RA-Chair), Cheryl Curtis (CC), Lindsay Dew (LD), David Fennell (DF), John Edwards (JE), Nichola Holmes (NH), Andrea Long (AL), Peter Rainsford (PR)

1. **Apologies:** None, although CC had intermittent access via Smartphone from France.

2. **Minutes of last meeting, 9.5.23**

Still in preparation. Also awaiting notes from NH on the 24.4.23 meeting of WNPWP & Iain Withington of NNDC.

3. **Matters arising**

Discussion of WNS4 on Principal Residence in view of the Holkham Estate's response of 11.5.23 to the 7point proposals from the working party, sent 13.4.23 (as appended to wp minutes 9.5.23). The text of policy WNS4 must be finalised to enable the submission draft of Wells NP to be printed in time for WTC consideration at their next meeting on June 5th. Also relevant to today's extraordinary meeting are the two documents received by WTC on 16.5.23 from Armstrong Rigg on behalf of Holkham Estate, which have been shared with the wp: the 'Design and Access Statement' and the 'Statement of Community Involvement' in respect of land adjacent to Ashburton Close.

The status of Holkham's Policy++ with NNDC is still unclear but planning permission has been submitted (as yet unvalidated) for the 23 dwelling development of Ashburton Close as follows: 10 open market dwellings; 3 private rent; 2 shared ownership; 4 social rent; 4 allocated to Homes for Wells.

AL commented that the extra benefit to the Wells community is the HfW allocation, if it is achieved at the time of development.

PR and RA spoke to Peter Mitchell (PM) at the WTC meeting on May 15th. PM reported that Holkham expects more than 50% of the 23 properties to be for "residential use" and the rental stock would be for full time residence. PM reiterated that the Trustees are still opposed to the proposed Principal Residence policy.

Armstrong Rigg Planning will present the Holkham proposals for the Holkham Rd./Mill Rd. development of 51 dwellings to WTC at their meeting on July 3rd.

RA drew to the wp's attention an email received from PM at 10.59am today, just as the working party were starting this meeting. He read it out; text follows.

From: Peter Mitchell [mailto:p.mitchell@holkham.co.uk]

Sent: 18 May 2023 10:59

To: Roger Arguile

Subject: Wells Neighbourhood Plan

Dear Roger and Neighbourhood Plan Working Group colleagues,

I drew encouragement from the update Roger and Peter gave to the town council meeting on Monday night. It sounded like we are closing in on a shared basis for moving forward, and the prize of doing so is hopefully now within our reach.

I think there is a majority view that an agreement between the NPWG and Holkham on the key issues is the best way forward. But there is not yet clarity on how to reconcile the consultation-led desire to retain PRP in some guise with this being an obstacle for a shared plan.

I sense there is also a suspicion about whether Holkham can be trusted to deliver, and a nervousness about process. This is spilling over into an unwillingness to discuss solutions and instead leading towards the possibility of a stance on PRP and on the Triangle Site being printed into a hardcopy draft NP which hasn't been shared with me.

My strong preference is to find a way through this which leads us to a shared housing plan which is attractive to you, to me, to the ballot-participants and to Holkham's Trustees. We all have the option to proceed without agreement, to stick to separate positions, and some of what we can achieve in a shared plan may be salvageable, but it will be a missed opportunity and turn a huge positive into a tricky year or two.

If encouragement is needed that the prize is within reach, I would highlight how far we have come already. Since the start of the discussions between Holkham and the WG:

- Holkham has moved from early concept discussions about adding new properties for Homes for Wells onto the edge of a potential site at Warham Road, to having 'Policy Plus Plus' shared, supported by our Trustees and by HfW, and embedded in the thinking at the two allocated sites at Ashburton Close and Mill Road.

- We have broken new ground at NNDC in securing their Planning Team's support to include Homes for Wells in the allocation of new-build housing operating their own local list for intermediate rent tenants.

- We have moved from wondering how much Holkham would charge the site developer to lift the covenant at the triangle site, to the brink of having Holkham facilitate this without charge, and

- Some of the WTC and NPWG have, I believe, been receptive to 'Policy Plus Plus' as a valid and constructive response to the housing challenges in Wells.

But we have two vital tasks still to do and I believe these need to be tackled before the next NP draft is finalised and presented to WTC for approval:

(i) to try to find a mutually acceptable treatment of any residency policies in the amended draft NP, and

(ii) to try to find a mutually acceptable terms under which Holkham will consent the development of the 'triangle site'.

The first task needs wisdom, awareness, careful thought and careful drafting. The second, I think, will slot into place relatively easily if the first is solved. It may not need much more than a professional check over the ideas already put forward done but the end-result needs to be clear enough to satisfy the Inspector's criteria for deliverability of the site.

So today I am writing to request that, say, two members of your group are encouraged to meet me next week and help me draft wording which I can then put forward to the NPWG in the hope that it can then be adopted in the amended draft NP on the tight timetable you have set for yourselves. I do not expect these individuals to negotiate on behalf of, or to speak on behalf of the wider NPWG, but to bring their wisdom to the process of finding a route I can then propose for the NPWG to consider and respond to.

I have in mind John E and Peter R - having seen both demonstrate the wisdom, awareness, etc that I could do with more of at this critical stage - but it's not for me to put criteria on this request for help. I have some ideas on these two tasks, but they will be better for this type of additional input.

I look forward to hearing your response to this suggestion.

Kind regards,

Peter

Discussion of this communication centred on its careful wording and how this affected the text of WNS4. There was unanimous agreement on the importance of the Principal Residence policy for the future of Wells. The inclusion of WELLS1 in the NP would enable WTC to propose CLT development of the site as specified in WNS2.

It was agreed to amend the wording of paragraph 5.76 to facilitate an exemption of emerging Local Plan sites W01/1 and W07/1 as defined in the NNDC LP submission version of May 2023. Site W07/1 at Holkham Road does not include the Mill Road Meadow CFS1, which Holkham put forward as an extra allocation during the NP Call for Sites in 2021. Under Wells NP policy WNS13, Local Green Space "g. Mill Road Meadow" makes provision for an access road only, on the eastern boundary of the meadow, adjacent to Holkham's 2019 development of 3 houses at the western end of Mill Road (see Appendix D). If allocation W07/1 is confirmed in the new LP, this would provide vehicular access for the new development from the A149 coast road, rather than Holkham Road.

RA to reply to PM declining his offer of meeting to discuss outstanding issues with two of the working party separately. Text of email follows.

From: WORKING PARTY

Subject: Wells Neighbourhood Plan- offer of talks

Date: 19 May 2023 at 09:28:04 BST

To: "'HOLKHAM ESTATE'"

Thank you for your very detailed and considered email. It just happens that we were in the middle of our meeting when it came through. I was therefore able to read it to the Working party members, some of whom had made strenuous efforts to attend at short notice. Although the Working Party did not have sight of the email, I read it several times and I think we were fully conversant with its terms.

I think we agree that there is a need to respect the issue of what you rightly call the consultation-led desire to retain PRP in such a way as to enable rather than impede the provision of needed housing in the town in which both the two sites identified in the Local Plan and the triangle will play their respective parts. We also agree with your two questions – residency policies and the terms of the development of the triangle. We spent yesterday morning hammering out a form of words which would deal with the first and trust as you say that if we have got that right, the second will follow seamlessly.

As to the method of achieving this, we agreed that, while grateful for your offer, we felt it right to work as a whole group, which is what we have done this morning. It is not just that we are required to deal with the respondents to the plan on an equal basis though we are. We do recognise that Holkham is a major player, along with NNDC, which is of course why we have engaged in correspondence and meetings post the consultation period. The clarification obtained since September has been enormously helpful. Our conversation on Monday was helpful too as was the Statement of Community Involvement sent by Armstrong Rigg which arrived yesterday and which we looked at in some detail today. But I think the extension of the process by sending two of our number to talk separately would not remove the need for further discussion by the Working Party, which might not be happy with some of the wording which would mean further delay and so on. We obviously hope that what we have produced today will be acceptable to the trustees. All members of the group made substantial contributions from their experience in the formulation of revised wording in the text of the Plan which I think is a strength. I am sure this is not the end of the road. I sincerely hope not. We have much to achieve in what I hope are our common aims.

PS Two particular questions arose: in the implementation of Policy Plus Plus who would own the Homes for Wells/Victory houses? Would Holkham retain ownership or would it pass to the respective associations? Likewise would the privately rented properties be let to Holkham employees only, to local people or on the open market? "