

## **Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley Parish Council Update on Potton Road Old Tree Nursery site**

As a result of surveyors visiting the Old Tree Nursery recently, there has been some speculation on social media about what is being planned. I hope that this update will clarify the position but if you have any further questions, please contact the Parish Council on 'wrestlingworth@aol.com' or come along to the next Parish Council Meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> October (7.30pm at Memorial Hall). A session during the Open Forum at the beginning of the meeting will be set aside to answer any questions that residents may have on this matter.

### **Background Information**

In 2013 the Parish Council commissioned Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity to undertake a Housing Needs Survey across the parish. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: to assess the need of local people for affordable housing, which would be required in order to bring forward a Rural Exception Site (RES) development; and to inform the Parish Council of the needs of local people for other types of housing. This, in turn, would help the Parish Council to comment on planning applications as they came forward. The Survey identified a need for 4 units in the short term and a further 4 during the following 20 years, units to be smaller occupancy, affordable housing.

A Rural Exception Site is one that is outside, but adjacent to, the Settlement Envelope of a village or parish. It is an exception to the normal planning rules and would not set any kind of precedent for other future development. These homes would be for people who either currently live or work in the parish or have a link to the parish through family connections but cannot afford to buy here on the open market. There are also criteria relating to income. Such homes would be available to local people in perpetuity.

The Housing Needs Survey Report can be found on the Parish Council website  
<http://www.wrestlingworthandcockaynehatley-pc.gov.uk/Housing%20Needs%20Survey%202013.pdf>

In 2014, the Parish Council identified that the aspiration in the Parish Plan to provide allotments had not been progressed, and they initiated a project to find a suitable site. It was agreed that the Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Old Tree Nursery site in Potton Rd, which had not been in use for a number of years, would be an ideal site, and the Parish Council should approach CBC to secure a long term lease on the site. Both of the above initiatives were used in formulating appropriate policies in the Neighbourhood Plan, the final draft of which the Parish Council recently submitted to CBC after this had been widely consulted on.

### **Subsequent Events.**

The approaches made to CBC in regard to the lease of the Old Tree Nursery for allotments were met with no response despite numerous follow ups. Members of the Parish Council then met with CBC to find out how the 2013 Housing Needs Survey Report could be taken forward. At that meeting it was ascertained that the reason none of the Council officers approached were prepared to engage on the Old Tree Nursery site for allotments was because the CBC Assets team had earmarked the site for future development.

Two sites were identified by residents taking part in the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire with the potential to become Rural Exception Sites. These were the Old Tree Nursery and the small annexed piece of land adjacent to Twin Elms in Hatley Road, Wrestlingworth. Further consultation during the development of the Neighbourhood Plan firmly identified the Old Tree Nursery as the preferred site. On this basis the Parish Council agreed that it had a mandate to pursue this site with CBC to meet the need shown in the Housing Needs Survey Report, whilst still advocating that part of it could be used for allotments. CBC was not prepared to agree to allotments on the site.

The Parish Council therefore agreed that a RES development on the Old Tree Nursery should be proposed to CBC on the proviso that the adjoining fallow land be leased to the Parish Council in order to provide allotments to

local residents, the intention being that this would be a long term lease and therefore minimise the risk of further development. After numerous follow ups with a number of CBC managers in the Housing, Planning and Asset teams the Parish Council were advised recently that this proposal had been approved within CBC. We are now actively engaged with the CBC officers in drawing up the plans for the RES dwellings and the lease for the allotments. It should be noted that the current work is the pre-planning stage and the resulting plans are still subject to the full planning approval process and consultation activities before it can be confirmed they will proceed. The recent visit of surveyors is part of the pre-planning process.

I apologise for the length of this update but as you can see, it is a complex situation. I hope this helps clarify the current position.

Robin Barratt  
Chairman, Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley Parish Council.