

# SEMINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

## Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 27 July 2016 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

### Present.

Councillor Robert Oglesby (Chairman) and Councillors P Bowyer, R Robinson, W Scott, P Smith, C Wade and the Clerk, Roger Coleman.

There were eight members of the public present initially.

### *Clerk's Note.*

*The Chairman took some items out of sequence but they are shown here to accord with the Agenda.*

### 1. **Apologies.**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Cllrs. Lockwood, Rimmer and Smyth.

### 2. **Declaration of Interests.**

There were no interests declared.

### 3. **Minutes of the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting held on 20 July 2016.**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record. The Chairman signed the minutes.

### 4. **Adjournment.**

The Chairman adjourned the meeting for members of the public to raise any matters of interest.

The Chairman reconvened the meeting.

### 5. **Semington Allotments.**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Robert House gave a presentation on how Hilperton Parish Council had developed an allotment garden in Hilperton. The purpose of the presentation was to inform Semington Parish Councillors of the process adopted by Hilperton to enable Semington to do the same, or similar, when establishing allotment plots on the Hannick Homes development.

### 6. **Planning.**

a. The following planning application was considered by the Parish Council:

16/05783/OUT	Land to the North of Pound Lane	The erection of 75 dwellings including 30% affordable homes, with ancillary public open space and play areas and access from Pound Lane (Outline Application relating to access).	New
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The Council noted that the previous Parish Council meeting held on 20 July had prompted the public to raise a number of points of objection to this planning application. Cllr. Scott gave a summary of the proposed comments to be sent to Wiltshire Council by the Parish Council that included the points raised by the public at that meeting.

The Parish Council **resolved** to object to this proposed development and it **resolved** to send comments to Wiltshire Council as shown at ANNEX A, attached to these minutes.

Cllr. Wade stated that he had taken photographs of the congestion evident in Pound Lane on a daily basis including the very time when the applicant (Richborough Estates) undertook their own traffic survey. He commented that the photographs contradicted the statements made by

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Clerk to Semington Parish Council

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Richborough Estates and confirmed that there were very significant highway problems in relation to this planning application. He stated that he will send these photographs to Wiltshire Council with a narrative as further evidence of very significant highway problems.

b. The Clerk advised the Council that representatives from 'framptons' will be attending the Parish Council meeting to be held on 14 September to present details of their proposed housing development in Semington.

c. The Council had received further planning applications to consider (see below) since 20 July 2016 and the Council **resolved** to send comments to Wiltshire Council as shown in italics:

16/06564/OUT	Land North of 554 Canal Bridge	Outline application relating to access – Erection of two detached dwellings and new access.	NEW
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*The Council objects to this proposed development for the following reason: 'It is inappropriate development in the countryside'.*

16/06639/FUL	Independent Living Centre, St Georges Road	Change of use of part of the premises (first floor, east end), from offices (Class B1) to Chiropractic Clinic (Class D1) with internal partition work.	NEW
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*The Council supports this proposed development.*

16/07164/LBC	Independent Living Centre, St Georges Road	Internal alterations to facilitate change of use of part of the premises (first floor, east end), from offices (Class B1) to Chiropractic Clinic (Class D1).	NEW
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*The Council supports this proposed development.*

### 7. Finance.

a. The Clerk reported that the Council had received an invoice for £140 from Code Water Solutions.

b. The Council **resolved** that this invoice be paid.

### 8. Any Other Business.

Cllr. Scott stated that the Parish Council should seek greater engagement with those responsible for developing the Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, namely Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council because its contents may directly affect the Civil Parish of Semington.

Cllr. Wade asked that the subject of 'an allotment sub-Committee' be added to the Agenda for the next meeting.

On behalf of the Parish Council Cllr. Wade thanked West Wiltshire Crematorium for purchasing the land adjacent to the crematorium/Football Pitch, so protecting green space at the village boundary, which will benefit the parishioners of Semington.

Cllr. Robinson reported that he had attended the CATG meeting held on 21 July and that the subject of improved safety measures for Littlemarsh/A361 was not on the Agenda. Notwithstanding this, he commented that it was evident from the meeting that there were no available funds from the CATG for safety measures such as a lower speed limit or a pedestrian crossing. Any funding would have to be provided by the Parish Council and such funding, according to the Clerk, could be in excess of £20,000. Cllr. Robinson stated that he would raise the subject again at the next CATG meeting.

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Cllr. Robinson added that the grass verges between the crematorium and the roundabout needed cutting and the hedges at the roundabout that were obscuring sight lines needed cutting back. He stated that he and Cllr. Smyth intended undertaking this latter task.

In answer to a query from Cllr. Robinson, the Parish Council agreed to the request for the installation of a sign showing the location of the Independent Living Centre.

The meeting concluded at 9.30pm.

R A Oglesby  
Chairman, Semington Parish Council

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## ANNEX A

### Application 16/05783/OUT – Semington Parish Council’s position

The Parish Council wishes Semington to retain the character of a small village community and to stay the sort of place where people like to live. Our opposition to this development is influenced by this view, and is informed by comments made by villagers at a Parish Council meeting on July 20<sup>th</sup>.

Wiltshire Council’s Core Strategy says that development in large and small villages will be limited to that needed to help meet the housing needs of settlements and to improve employment opportunities, services and facilities. This proposal does none of this, and we think that any limited benefits that might accrue from the proposal are far outweighed by its harmful impacts and dangers. Our conclusion is that the planning balance comes down strongly against these proposals, and we ask Wiltshire Council to reject the application on five planning grounds:

1. The inappropriate scale of the development
2. The negative impact on the countryside and the Kennet & Avon Canal
3. Totally unsuitable highways access
4. Sewerage and flooding problems
5. The lack of consultation with the village community

Our reasons for opposing this development are summarized here, and are set out in detail on subsequent pages.

#### The inappropriate scale of the development

- i. There is already outline planning permission for 24 homes on a greenfield site in the village which will increase the number of dwellings in the community to around 425. The Parish Council approved this development because [i] it was supported by villagers and [ii] catered for the extra housing identified in the 2014 Wiltshire Council Semington housing needs survey. Thus, housing need in the village is fully catered for and additional homes are not needed. Nothing in the developer’s case shows otherwise.
- ii. This development would increase the number of houses in the village by some 19% to around 500. Wiltshire Council’s housing development plan calls for only 130 houses to be built in the villages in the Melksham area, and it seems unreasonable that around 80% of these (75 + 24 out of 130) should be built in one small village.
- iii. There is no gain to the village by this development; only the loss of a much-used greenspace and agricultural land.

#### The negative impact on the countryside and the Kennet & Avon Canal

- i. In 1989 WWDC said that the development of these fields would set an undesirable precedent for the further development of the enclosed land to the north-west of the village, and would “constitute a most undesirable physical and visual intrusion in an otherwise attractive and unspoilt rural area, to the particular detriment of the setting of the adjacent canal amenity feature.” This area (and the canal) remain “attractive and unspoilt”.
- ii. At present, the canal flows through the countryside with Semington in the distance. Under these proposals, it would flow close to a much expanded village.
- iii. This will be a serious loss of amenity and experience for all canal users, and we think that this development would significantly harm this nationally important heritage asset.

#### Totally unsuitable highways access

- i. The developers say that Pound Lane is wide enough to allow traffic to pass, but the large indents and tyre marks on the grass verge by the school illustrate otherwise.
- ii. In 1989 WWDC said that Pound Lane was “unsuitable and inadequate” to cater for the additional traffic generated by a smaller residential development on the same fields because of its narrowness. As, some 27 years later, the road is still narrow near the school, and traffic and parking on the road has increased considerably, it must still be unsuitable.

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- iii. In February 2016, the St George's School chair of governors wrote to the Parish Council about the existing dangers of Pound Lane, saying that it would only take a minor moment of distraction or lapse of concentration, and a child could be hit by a car. We agree with this judgement but think that this development would make accidents much more likely.
- iv. The developer's traffic data are [i] invalid, and [ii] make baseless assumptions about future use of public transport. Our conservative estimate is that there will be at least an additional 54,000 vehicle movements down Pound Lane each year from residential use alone; more likely, it will be twice that number.
- v. Speed is not an issue down Pound Lane; rather, it is the presence of a school, the narrow road, tight junctions, parked cars, and poor sight lines and visibility. The developer's proposals will not change any of this.

### **Sewerage and flooding problems**

- i. Sewage problems are common within the village, particularly in houses adjacent to the fields proposed for development where issues of poor sewage flows, and back-flows into houses, have been reported to Wessex Water on numerous recent occasions. The developer says that there is no record of historical flooding occurring on the site, but this is not the case as the larger of the two fields floods regularly.
- ii. A rule of thumb for assessing the capacity of a 150mm foul sewer pipe is that it will support 150 dwellings, and we think that 75 additional houses will overload the existing system by around 30%.

### **The lack of consultation with the village community**

- i. We deplore the way that the village has been treated by the developers.
- ii. There was plenty of time for the developers to consult villagers and the Parish Council, and they were invited to a meeting where they might have outlined their proposals as part of an open agenda with villagers present. In turning this invitation down, the developers wrote: "In our experience meetings with Parish Councillors in public are counterproductive as they don't tend to be forums in which we are necessarily able to provide detailed information properly." They did not even send their plans to everyone in the village.
- iii. It is misleading for the developers to say that the reasons that they could not hold a community engagement event were beyond their control. We think that there was no consultation with villagers because it's their policy not to do so, and because they were in a hurry to have the application considered by Wiltshire Council before it has a five year supply of deliverable housing sites in place.

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## Application 16/05783/OUT – Semington Parish Council’s detailed arguments

### 1. The inappropriate scale of the development

If permission is granted for this development, the number of houses in the village will increase by around 19% to some 500 dwellings. In their design and access paper Richborough present historical schematic maps to present the historic growth of Semington. It groups development into 2 main periods of around 60 years (1900 to 1958) and 50 years (1959 to 2010). It follows that the combination of the Hannick Homes development and this one would exceed the scale of development in each of these 50 and 60-year periods.

Wiltshire Council’s Core Strategy says that development in large and small villages will be limited to that needed to help meet the housing needs of settlements and to improve employment opportunities, services and facilities. The proposed development does none of this. The developer argues that their plans constitute “sustainable development”, but this is only in terms of the national picture: “the country’s desperate need for additional housing”. They do not consider the sustainable development of Semington as a village community; for example, there will be no additional employment opportunities or services in the village. The developers cannot demonstrate a “desperate need” for housing in the village; indeed, they cannot demonstrate any need at all because it is already being met. In his first email to the Parish Council, Richborough’s Robert Mitchell wrote this:

“I notice that an application was recently submitted by Hannick Homes which if successful would possibly provide some of the growth requirements for the village”.

This is an acknowledgement by Richborough that local housing need is a significant factor in planning applications, although the case they present in their submission does not mention this.

For this reason, the proposed development needs to be seen in the context of current village house-building. Hannick Homes has outline planning permission for the erection of 24 homes on a greenfield site in the village between St George’s Court and The Knaps, and is currently negotiating the Section 106 agreement with Wiltshire Council. This will increase the number of dwellings in the village to around 425.

The Parish Council gave their approval for this development, after extensive consultations with Hannick Homes, because it was clearly supported by villagers, and because it met housing need within the village identified in the 2014 Wiltshire Council Semington housing needs survey. The Hannick Homes proposals were influenced by the housing needs survey, and then modified following direct feedback from villagers during a public consultation. The housing needs survey showed that, before the Hannick Homes development, there was a moderate on-going need for housing in Semington, and that villagers wanted there to be small-scale development of family and retirement accommodation. There is evidence of this village support on Wiltshire Council’s website. For example:

“This is a great addition to our village with a balance of housing that is much needed.”

“I am totally in favour of this development especially with the [provision] of more affordable housing and allotments, this keeps our village vital and allows more families to live and contribute to the village.”

“I am in support of this sustainable development which will address the housing needs of those connected to the village. At present there are a number of families who wish to reside in the village but have been priced out. With the addition of up to 24 homes including 3 for social rent and 4 for intermediate housing. I believe it is important that if the number of dwellings developed on the site reduces that it is those that are for open market that reduce.”

It is the Parish Council’s view that housing need in the village will be fully catered for by the St George’s Road development, and that additional homes are not needed. We note that nothing in the developer’s case shows otherwise. Incidentally, the proposal’s ‘Assessment of current and future sustainability’ report is misleading as the 24 Hannick Homes houses are only listed as

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Clerk to Semington Parish Council

Chairman’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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“pending” whereas at the time this report was written, they had outline planning permission. Further, the proposals ignore the increase in traveller sites in the village in their calculations of recent housing development.

Wiltshire Council’s core strategy indicates that 2,306 homes need to be built in the Melksham Community Area [MCA] between 2006 and 2026. 1,308 were completed up to 2014 leaving around 1,100 to be built. As it is clear that an additional 1,600 homes are currently in various stages of planning or building, this suggests that the 2026 target for the MCA will be exceeded well ahead of time. As Semington village is part of the MCA, housing supply in Melksham as a whole is a significant factor in determining whether any proposal for additional housing in Semington is needed or appropriate – over and above that which is actually needed to meet any village demand. Another factor is that the housing development plan calls for only 130 houses to be built in the villages in the Melksham area, and it seems unreasonable that around 80% of these (75 + 24 out of 130) should be built in one small village. We do not think that this can be termed “sustainable”.

In terms of sustainable development more widely (which is about far more than housing supply), it is unclear how the village benefits from what is proposed, apart from more houses, cars, and road dangers. The developers propose that some parts of the development be “a major new recreational facility”, but it has no idea whether this is what villagers want. This proposal represents the replacement of an older recreational space by a new one + 75 houses (cars, etc). We know that sustainable development involves trades-off, but do not think that this is a good one from the village community’s perspective. Prior to its ploughing on April 27<sup>th</sup>, one part of the proposal, Great Lees Field, had been used every day by villagers since at least the second world war. Data recently gathered for a village green application showed that the use of Great Lees Field was both regular and frequent. 26% of respondents said they used it every day, 47% every week, and 12% every month. Over 30 different activities were identified. This use of this by the village was in tune with agricultural practice and the rhythm of the seasons, as there were both seasonal activities, for example, which fit in around grass cutting for silage, and the more frequent activities that people undertake with their families (or on their own) more or less all the time. Many villagers regret this loss of amenity, and there is also the loss of agricultural land and biodiversity to consider.

We think that the application should be refused on the grounds that local housing need is already being catered for and that what is proposed will change the village character of Semington for the worse.

### **2. The negative impact on the countryside and the Kennet & Avon Canal**

Wiltshire Council’s core strategy says that the Kennet and Avon Canal is a significant asset within Wiltshire’s sustainable transport and green infrastructure network, and that the canal’s landscape and natural environment will be protected and enhanced through its core policies. The land proposed for development was the subject of a planning application in 1989 which was refused by West Wiltshire District Council [W89/1008]. One of the reasons that WWDC gave for refusing a previous application for these fields was that:

“The development of this site would set an undesirable precedent for the further development of the enclosed land to the north-west, and would constitute a most undesirable physical and visual intrusion in an otherwise attractive and unspoilt rural area, to the particular detriment of the setting of the adjacent canal amenity feature.”

This area remains “attractive and unspoilt”. At present, those using the Kennet and Avon see Semington in the distance across fields, and so the canal is seen to flow through the countryside. Under these proposals, the canal would flow in close proximity to an expanded village. This will constitute a serious loss of amenity and experience for all canal users. The drawings provided by the developers show houses about 4 times as close to the canal as they now are.

A planning inspector noted the following in her refusal of a recent appeal in Bollands Hill, Seend, [Appeal Decision APP/Y3940/W/15/3005078 ]

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This section of the Kennet and Avon Canal was built between 1796 and 1800 and formed part of a long distance transport network. It has considerable importance as evidence of the social history of the evolution of trade and transport links and the evolving skills and measures adopted to overcome physical obstacles. It is not statutorily listed but I have no doubt that it is a nationally important undesignated heritage asset and should be subject to the considerations in paragraph 135 of the Framework. This says that a judgment will be required having regard to the scale of any harm and the significance of the heritage asset.

It seems obvious that the proposed development would have an unacceptable visual impact on the landscape, and would be particularly visually prominent when viewed from the elevated canal and towpath. Our contention is that this proposed development significantly harms this nationally important heritage asset, and, with it, the visitor experience of the county of Wiltshire. Because of this, we think that the application should be rejected.

### 3. Totally unsuitable highways access

In 1989, one of the reasons given by West Wilts District Council for refusing the previous application for development on this land was that

“Pound Lane is unsuitable and inadequate to cater for the additional traffic generated by a residential development on this scale in respect of its width, which is only 4.5 metres, ... .”

In the 27 years since this judgment, the number of cars and vans using the lane has increased considerably. There has also been an increase in parked cars and vans on the lane because of the lack of other parking places, especially for the houses opposite the school. The lane is still 4.5m wide near to the school and the junctions with Somerset Way and Pound Close, and there is no alternative access. We do not think that what is proposed by the developer to overcome this will do so, as, in addition to an increased flow of traffic along a narrow road, there is the question of peak traffic at school opening and closing times. Here, it is not just a question of traffic movement, but of extensive additional parking along the lane as parents drive their children to and from school and turn around using the Pound Close, Somerset Way and Wessex Close junctions.

The risks to children in getting to and from the school buildings has been a concern for some years, and in February, 2016, the St George's School Chair of Governors approached the Parish Council about the safety of Pound Lane for pupils at the school. She wrote:

“As a school we actively encourage our pupils to arrive by foot, but this is not possible for all of them. Indeed, our growing number on roll means that a significant minority of pupils are not resident in the village, and unfortunately car is their only practicable means of arrival. These factors mean that there is an increase in pupil numbers crossing Pound Lane, and also an increase in the number of cars parking and turning around the junction of Pound Lane and Somerset Way, at the beginning and end of the school day. Car speeds are slow, and to date and to my knowledge there have been no adverse events, but it would only take a minor moment of distraction or lapse of concentration, and a child could be hit by a car.”

Such dangers must increase with any development. Further, as the school is at near full-capacity, it is likely that parents in any new housing will have to drive their children out of the village to schools elsewhere. As the school is now larger than in 1989, with more children and staff, additional traffic is generated because of this, including staff parking on the road.

Pound Lane is used on a daily basis for farm traffic, but contractors using large agricultural machines can no longer get safe access down the lane during weekdays, and there is clear evidence of large vehicles struggling to travel down Pound Lane. These include oil and biomass tankers, delivery and emergency vehicles, and waste collectors. The report asserts that deliveries should not be a problem as a typical van is 7.5 tonnes and there is no recognition of the seasonal heavy goods vehicles (up to 40 tonnes) bringing fuel deliveries. Such traffic needs to park for extended periods, with pipes trailed across the highway and pavement which causes pedestrians to have to walk on the road as delivery takes place. The developer's traffic survey identified none of this.

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Roger Coleman  
Clerk to Semington Parish Council

Chairman's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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The development which is now proposed is for about twice as many homes as proposed in 1989, adding hugely to the traffic burden on the lane. Because of the rural nature of the village and the poor (and diminishing) public transport every one of these homes would generate additional traffic. Currently, there are only 10 houses to the west of the entrance to the proposed development; the additional 75 houses proposed here increases this (and the potential flows of traffic) by 750%.

Although the developer's transport survey confirms that mean speeds along Pound Lane are already around 20mph, they plan traffic calming measures. But speed is only one issue here; others are a narrow road and tight junctions with poor sight lines and visibility. Despite the favourable accident statistics, near misses with cars and pedestrians are common. The developers say that Pound Lane is wide enough to allow traffic to pass, but the large indents and tyre marks on the grass verge by the school illustrate otherwise. The proposed 20 mph speed restriction will do little to ameliorate the dangers, however, as it is already impossible to drive safely along the built-up part of Pound Lane at even 15 mph because of parked cars and vans. We note that in the proposed development, the 'village street' is to be 5.5m wide and 'residential streets' will be between 4.8m and 5.5m wide, all of which serves to emphasise the narrowness of Pound Lane.

The wide-scale use of public transport is key to the developer's arguments about Pound Lane's ability to cope safely with additional traffic. They say that:

"The layout of the development, together with the detailed design of streets, aims to ensure that walking and cycling are the more likely modes of choice over short distances, and that the ease of access to public transport will become a more attractive mode over longer distances. Connectivity to public transport will therefore be given greater priority. It will be a place that does not rely heavily upon the car as a primary mode of transport, provides opportunities to reduce pollution and congestion, and creates a more lively and varied area."

To help justify this optimism, the developers provide data on the frequency of local bus services, saying:

"The existing bus services offer good options for sustainable travel to employment locations as well as shopping, leisure and education purposes. ... The X34 provides a half-hourly service between Chippenham and Frome, providing links to Trowbridge and Melksham. Chippenham, Trowbridge and Melksham provide a number of employment, shopping and leisure opportunities."

However, the proposal incorrectly states that the X34 bus service is half-hourly throughout the day, whereas this is only the case between 1000 and 1500; outside these hours the service level varies from hour to hour. For example, there is no bus to Trowbridge between 0807 and 0908. This restricts its viability for commuting, and lack of early morning or evening services renders it unsuitable for shift workers. Further, data provided by the developers on departure and arrival times are incorrect, and we suspect an old timetable has been used.

In reality, the developers have absolutely no idea how much traffic the additional houses will generate, and so have to rely on estimates from existing data sets. Astonishingly, they argue that only 29 vehicles will be leaving the development in the peak period. However, given that public transport is not good (and getting worse), that there are 75 houses, that virtually everyone will need to travel to work outside the village, that more than one person per house will likely be doing this in separate cars in a proportion of the properties, then the figure of 29 seems far too low to be realistic.

We wonder if this error is because none of the TRICS data relied on to make these estimates is from a village context such as Semington. Rather, they are drawn from 'edge of town' and 'suburban' sites where public transport is likely to be much better than in a Wiltshire village. We note that only 4 of the 12 sets of data are from the south of England, and that 5 of the 12 date from 2008/09. We doubt their appropriateness, and all this casts serious doubt on the accuracy of the data presented to support the developer's case. This includes the local traffic surveys where some of the traffic data were collected when a significant proportion of children at the school were on a

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week-long school trip.

Although we cannot find estimates in the proposal about how many additional annual traffic journeys will be made as a result of building 75 houses, it seems reasonable (using the developer's own assumptions about who will live there) to suppose that each house will generate at least 1 return trip per day (commuting to work, shopping, leisure, culture, medical, school runs out of the village, etc). This sums to about 54,000 vehicle movements each year. Given that many of the houses will have more than one car with two or more people travelling to work each day (and not always in the same direction), and that census data says that 77% the current working population of Semington commute by car (and a further 3% by train), that figure might be a significant underestimation. Indeed, when the Department of Transport's 2014 National Traffic Survey data are taken into account, actual journey numbers could be double the 54,000 figure, even before any travel by non-residents into the development is taken into account. All these movements bring pollution, noise and dangers to those along Pound Lane, especially the hundred or so children and teachers at the school.

Our view is that Pound Lane is now even more "unsuitable and inadequate to cater for the additional traffic generated by a residential development on this scale", and because of this, permission to develop should be refused.

## 4. Sewerage and flooding problems

A rule of thumb for assessing the capacity of a 150mm foul sewer pipe is that it will support 150 dwellings, and we think that 75 additional houses will overload the existing system by around 30%. Indeed, in TCT's report for the developers on flood risk and drainage, an email from Wessex Water states that there is limited available capacity for additional development flows within the foul sewer as it drains north eastwards to Semington Brook pumping station, and that further assessment will be required to consider potential capacity improvements. It is not clear whether this judgment takes into account the building of 24 additional homes in the village for which there is already outline planning permission. If it does not, then the consultant's conclusions that the sewerage system can cope seems optimistic, at best. The proposal document says that Wessex Water will investigate capacity issues further to assess whether further improvements are necessary to the sewerage system. The Parish Council thinks that this should be carried out before planning consent is considered.

Further, the report says, "The risk from sewer flooding and pluvial runoff is low", yet, sewage problems are common within the village, particularly in houses adjacent to the fields proposed for development where issues of poor sewage flows, and back-flows, have been reported to Wessex Water on numerous recent occasions. The report also says: "There is no record of historical flooding occurring on the site", but this is not the case. The larger of the two fields floods regularly, which is why one of the reasons that there are no proposals to build houses along the northern edge of the field. As a villager says in her letter of objection to Wiltshire Council: "A deep ditch runs through our gardens that frequently has free-flowing water which comes off the waterlogged field." The fact that this consultant's report is silent on all this is of concern to us, and we think that these are also grounds to refer the application for further information and consideration.

## 5. The lack of consultation with the village community

We wish to begin our comments by correcting any impression given by the developers that there was no time to discuss their proposals with villagers. Quite the opposite is the case.

Richborough's Robert Mitchell approached the Parish Council on April 15<sup>th</sup> 2016, saying:

"I wondered if it would be possible to discuss housing matters privately with the Members and in particular a land interest we have within the village?"

The Parish Council responded on April 19<sup>th</sup> inviting the developers to a meeting of the Council (in April or May at their convenience) where they might have outlined their proposals as part of our open agenda with villagers present at the meeting. In turning this invitation down, Mr Mitchell wrote:

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“In our experience meetings with Parish Councillors in public are counterproductive as they don’t tend to be forums in which we are necessarily able to provide detailed information properly.”

It was subsequent to this that an informal meeting took place on May 12<sup>th</sup> when three parish councillors went to listen to what Richborough had to say. Richborough presented their arguments as to why Semington was the focus of development. They outlined their plans with illustrative material, but did not allow councillors to take any paperwork away. However, we think that the amount of detail provided to the councillors was sufficient to have been shared with the whole Council and with villagers.

We note that the leaflet which was circulated to some villagers in early July is misleading. First, it says that there were “informal discussions with parish councillors” which is not the case, as noted above. At the May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting three councillors went to hear what Richborough had to say, and to ask questions. This was the remit given to them by the Parish Council, and it was made clear to the Richborough team at the outset of the meeting. To say that these were “discussions” is not true. It is similarly misleading to say (as the leaflet does) that this meeting involved “consulting” the councillors. The Richborough team did ask the councillors present what the Parish Council might think of the proposals, but they declined to say as it was beyond their remit.

It is also misleading for Richborough to say that the reasons that they could not hold a community engagement event were beyond their control. Their initial approach to the Council on April 15<sup>th</sup> was two months before the submission of the planning application, and followed a considerable period of time spent on preparatory surveys etc, which began in February. We think that there was no consultation with villagers because Richborough were in a hurry to have the application considered by Wiltshire Council before it has a five year supply of deliverable housing sites in place. It is a further matter of regret that Richborough has not sent its ‘Development update’ leaflet to all properties in the village, restricting it to those houses near to Pound lane / Pound Close. Assuming that this was not a money-saving exercise, it illustrates how little Richborough understands Semington, where the community is the whole village.

All this was very disappointing to the Parish Council which has a well-founded reputation for being open to discussions with developers, as the experience of Hannick Homes illustrates. Because of this, we think that the approach from Richborough falls below the consultation standards expected of developers by Wiltshire Council, and ask that the application be withdrawn so that Richborough can consult properly before an application is resubmitted.

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