

Questions over plan for 24 homes on former Hurst Show site

EXCLUSIVE

By SUE CORCORAN

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RESIDENTS are trying to work out what their village society will think about a new plan to build up to 24 homes on the old site of Hurst Show.

Recently 90 people packed Hurst Parish Council's meeting where they heard about the proposal for Willowmead field between Hurst primary school and village hall.

Edward Butler-Ellis, on behalf of Helmsley Land and land owner Penny Clayden, said he would be delivering leaflets to central Hurst, asking for villagers' views on the plan.

It's hoped to ask for outline planning permission early next year, he said. The consultation details are at www.consult-hurst.co.uk. Wokingham Borough Council does its own consultation when deciding whether to give planning permissions.

Hurst Village Society, which comments on planning applications, was unable to give a view at the moment on the plan described at the parish council.

Some residents have discovered that the society told Wokingham Borough Council in January that Willowmead field is suitable for development. Sixteen homes had been suggested.

Willowmead, plus a smaller field (for three houses) in Whistley Green, should be developed, the society said. But land north west of Hogmoor Lane (for 12 homes) was unsuitable for development. Willowmead should be built on as an alternative to the plan near Hogmoor Lane.

They were commenting on WBC's draft local plan update revised growth strategy. The final local plan will be used to select areas for future building up to the year 2036.

HVS's comments to WBC, published among other planning documents on the HVS website, include: "HVS would ... wish to take this opportunity to comment on ... Land North of Orchard Road [Willowmead], Hurst. This [is] an ideal opportunity for The Society to promote this site for inclusion in The Local Plan Update as suitable for future development as an alternative to Site 5HU030 [north west of Hogmoor Lane] which we believe should be excluded."

The society's support in January for building on Willowmead puts them in conflict with residents who want to see the green space retained.

Hurst Neighbourhood Plan Working Group told WBC in the same Draft Plan consultation that building on Willowmead would be outside the village development limits, affect the historic character of Hurst and it was valuable open space.

Villagers have suggested the field should become Local Green Space, giving it protections from development. Protect Hurst Action Group says houses on Willowmead would be unsustainable as the village has limited facilities. The field was outside the parish's development limit.

And they are worried that pony, William, the



POPULAR: William the pony in Willowmead field, Hurst *Picture: Sue Corcoran*

long-term and popular resident of Willowmead field, could be made homeless.

"They've asked where the horse would go," said Mr Butler-Ellis. "I hadn't appreciated how much people have enjoyed seeing him there. I will speak to Penny (the landowner) to understand what the future would be for William, where he might be able to go."

William's owner Sue Scorer said: "I haven't got anywhere for him to go if the planning permission goes ahead."

"He used to spend some of the year in the [nearby] triangle of land at Sawpit Road, but that's no longer available because houses are going to be built there. I'd like to hear from anyone who could help find him a field."

Many children and other passers-by stop at William's field to talk to him.

Mr Butler-Ellis said he had heard varying opinions from residents about the Willowmead proposals.

Wokingham Today asked the village society for their view on the recent proposal for up to 24 homes at Willowmead.

On behalf of Hurst Village Society John Osborne said: "The Society always responds in a timely and professional manner to significant planning issues having always taken the opportunity to study and understand in detail any proposals put forward, both during any consultation stage and also at the time of any planning application so as to identify any potential impact on the local community."

"In so doing, we take full regard of local and national planning policies, material planning considerations and what as a committee we believe to be the wishes of the majority of our members."

"HVS has published its planning guidelines and adheres to these in all of its involvement in any local planning issues, and all responses made by the Society are readily and clearly available on the Society's website (planning@hvs.org.uk) and individual comments are always encouraged. It would therefore be somewhat premature for the Society to answer some of the issues you have raised at this time."

"For instance, Wokingham Borough Council through its Growth Development Team has yet to publish the findings of its Borough wide Revised Growth Strategy Consultation - to which The Society responded, and the response can be viewed on planning@hvs.org.uk - which included the promotion of sites for future development for inclusion in The Local Plan update."

"In the same vein The Society considers it would be unprofessional and inappropriate to comment on a specific site, such as land north of Orchard Road (Willowmead) at this time because we understand, following information we heard at the recent meeting of Hurst Parish Council, it is to be the subject of a village wide public consultation shortly, and presumably after consideration of any comments made, a detailed application will be submitted to The Planning Authority."

"Certainly in an attempt to make the often complex planning process more transparent the Society supports the concept enshrined in the planning process that each individual planning application should be judged on its own merits; as will be the case in relation to this particular site."

■ **Details about the land promoters' consultation are at www.consult-hurst.co.uk. When planning applications are submitted residents are able to give their views to Wokingham Borough Council.**