

# Council meeting was like 'a toxic Vicar of Dibley episode'

## EXCLUSIVE

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**A HEATED parish council meeting was "like something out of an unusually toxic Vicar of Dibley episode", it's been claimed.**

The meeting with about 20 members of the public present was described as a "real humdinger" with feelings high about sites proposed for building and other matters.

But it's not the only humdinger there's been at Hurst Parish Council in recent weeks.

At a previous meeting, in November, the public forum part "became increasingly lively and acrimonious" and had to be closed down, the minutes reveal.

Thirty members of the public attended.

The minutes leading up to the forum closure show disagreement between two villagers Lou Robinson and Hurst Village Society planning member John Osborne.

According to the minutes, Mrs Robinson alleged that the Hurst Village Society (HVS) was "not protecting the village from future development and, if the village is not careful, it is paving the way for landowners and developers to build all over Hurst's greenfield sites."

She made other comments about HVS.

The minutes reported Mr Osborne saying Mrs Robinson's comments were outrageous.

He had hoped she might have commented to his face rather than in a public forum.

Mrs Robinson felt that HVS was not being proactive against development. Mr Osborne replied that the [Protect] Hurst Action Group [another village group] was shrouded in secrecy and no one was truly aware of its operation.

Parish council chair, Councillor Wayne Smith told the [November]



VILLAGE CENTRE: Hurst Village Halls in School Lane where parish council meetings take place  
Picture: Brendan and Ruth McCartney / Wikimedia Commons

meeting that the conversations were for outside the meeting, and the matter was not for the parish council.

This week Mr Osborne said: "We would vehemently deny Hurst Village Society are not protecting the village from any adverse or inappropriate development.

"I would direct people to our website planning page.

"On it our engagement in a whole variety of ongoing planning issues and proactive stance in relation to many planning issues and applications can be seen."

There's been strong debate in Hurst about proposals and planning applications to build homes on fields in the last year.

As a result, many more villagers go to parish council meetings.

People at last week's meeting declined to comment on it to *Wokingham Today*.

On Tuesday Parish Council chair Wayne Smith had not replied to *Wokingham Today's* earlier requests to discuss the meeting.

The parish council is due to comment on what it thinks about the sites put forward in the Local Plan for future housing.

Two sites for a total of 15 homes are in Broadwater Lane. The Green Heart of Hurst campaign is fighting to stop the homes and protect 300 year old oak trees.

Asked for the council's comments on the Local Plan sites the council clerk said: "Councillors are currently considering their response and this will be sent to WBC [Wokingham Borough Council] by the deadline of the 24th January."

She said a copy of the council's response would go on the parish council website. Last week's meeting minutes will be on the website later.