

**Summary of a Meeting between Cala Homes and Representatives of Wivelsfield Parish Council
to Discuss the Forthcoming Detailed Application for 96 homes on the Land East of Ditchling
Road**

Date: 22 November 2023

Present: Neal MacGregor, Planning Manager, Cala Homes
Liz Gander, Clerk, Wivelsfield Parish Council (WPC)
Harriet Martin, Chair, WPC
David Cumberland, Councillor, WPC
Richard Morris, Councillor, WPC
Chris Broad, Councillor, WPC

Summary/Key points

Following the grant of permission under appeal for the erection of 96 homes on the site, Cala Homes have purchased the land concerned and reached out to Wivelsfield Parish Council (WPC) to offer a meeting to discuss their proposals for the site, which they expect to submit to Lewes District Council in February 2024. Despite the Council and residents' strong objections to the original applications and the appeal, we welcome the opportunity to discuss the detailed plans and Cala's confirmation that WPC and residents have an opportunity to influence the detail of the plans. The Council thinks that, however unwelcome the development is, we cannot now undo the approval and should seek to create as positive an impact on the village as possible, or at least to minimise the harms.

Cala confirmed in the meeting that consultation with residents would take place through an exhibition to be held in the village hall on 5 December. WPC expressed disappointment at the short notice Cala was giving for the exhibition. A flyer has apparently been produced by Cala and will be posted to c500 homes in the vicinity. Cala stated that they had not planned for how the outcome of the exhibition and the consultation would be fed back to the community. WPC felt this was poor planning on the part of Cala which gave little confidence that the consultation was more than lip service. WPC stated that Cala needed to do more if the process was to be taken seriously by the village. Cala agreed to look into the provision of a website to facilitate feedback by residents who can't attend the exhibition and to communicate the outcome of the consultation, and to make clear to residents that this process was not one of lip service to planning requirements, and that Cala's proposals could be influenced by the feedback they receive. Cala were asked to make clear at the exhibition what kind of things that residents do (or don't) have the power to influence, so that attention can be focused on those areas that can make a difference to the final layout.

Cala produced an outline of the proposed layout of the development at the meeting. WPC felt this was visually quite different from that which was presented in the original application and the appeal. It appears more dense, and the buildings are considerably more linear, and therefore the scheme seems considerably more "estate-like" and urban than the original

indicative layout. WPC expressed its disappointment and emphasised the need for Cala to respect the rural setting they were building in, and to make a proper attempt to deliver a scheme which is as much in keeping with the village as possible. Cala were referred to the recent consultation on the 45 houses at the South Road site where it was felt a more thoughtful attempt had been made to integrate an unwanted development.

Cala confirmed that once complete, the site would be managed by a separate management company. WPC emphasised that it was critical that Cala took responsibility for ensuring that the service charges passed onto residents to manage the communal areas, including the large number of mature trees within the site and on the boundaries, would not be prohibitive in the foreseeable future. Cala is a financial beneficiary of developing on a greenfield site and, as such, it should not be able to walk away from the future cost associated with placing housing into that context. Cala agreed to look into this point.

WPC made the general point that with its Charters Gate development, and now this development, Cala has/will have built significantly more homes in the village than any other developer, many more homes than WPC believes are needed in the area, and has had a commensurate financial return (it was observed that Cala's pre-tax profits have grown by c50% in the last 5 years, despite Covid). In this context, it was made clear to Cala that they had a special responsibility to the village to respond to consultation feedback and to implement the planning permission which has been granted sensitively and thoughtfully. The Council also brought up that Welbeck Land, when drawing up the original outline plans, had been keen to offer additional facilities that would benefit the community, but no such offers had been made by Cala.

Having been pushed on this point, Cala did make clear that there were mechanisms for their engagement with the community (e.g. "Community Pledge") and that in the process of consultation they could consider requests for community facilities which WPC and residents might consider compensation for damage to the rural nature of the village (in addition to the Community Infrastructure Levy -CIL - monies which Cala would be paying over). This is therefore something for residents to consider and give feedback on.

A number of other points were made in the meeting. These are summarised below:

1. WPC asked that existing residents be given a discount on final selling prices of some homes to recognise potential local housing need for younger people and those potentially looking to downsize, and as compensation for loss of landscape and amenity in their village.
2. In addition to the more general point about layout and density, WPC asked Cala to ensure there would be a variety of different architectural features, materials and finishes to help minimise the feel of this being an urban estate in a rural setting.

3. WPC impressed upon Cala the necessity of acknowledging in the design of the development, the fact of its rural setting, and pointed out how imperative it is that all consultants involved in the plans appreciate this.
4. There appear to be 20 flats/apartments (?). Can the local need for this number of this type of home be evidenced by Cala, as there appears to be very little local demand for this type of housing in WG, (given the unsold maisonettes at the junction of South Road and Eastern Road).
5. The 20 flats form part of the 40% affordable housing that will be delivered on the site, which will comprise a mix of shared ownership and 'affordable' rent units, as well as some available under the first homes scheme. (A key on the plans provided show these marked with a star).
6. Specifically on layout, No 16 Blackmores seems to directly and closely face a new gable-end wall, can this please be made into a less intrusive position.
7. Drainage was discussed. WPC said that despite the extensive drainage submissions, experience showed that consultants could get it wrong and the real world considerations were not always catered for – e.g. the residents of the existing Cala built development had suffered from unexpected post build drainage/sewerage issues. There were increasing and current issues with run off to the current site from the north as a result of development work there, and it is imperative that Cala take this seriously. Cala confirmed that drainage consultants would be at the exhibition and WPC stressed that they needed to be fully cognisant of the challenges faced by residents with the previous Cala development and current drainage issues in the village before attending.
8. Parking provision for residents and visitors looked limited – especially given the point which WPC has repeatedly made that Wivelsfield residents overwhelmingly use and need their own vehicles, given location and public transport issues. Cala agreed to demonstrate how planned provision would be sufficient and cited the East Sussex Highways parking calculator. WPC emphasised that this is not just a matter of meeting minimum standards, but of catering for the real world needs of residents. They referred Cala Homes to the 2021 Census data, which shows that levels of car ownership in Wivelsfield are significantly higher than the national average.
9. As almost all homes on the site have gardens, WPC asked if priority for the planned allotments be given to existing residents (as there are no allotments in the village at present).
10. WPC asked that consideration be given to switching the position of the planned allotments and the orchard, given that the latter area is larger. (There are potential pros and cons of either approach, and the views of residents would be welcome).

11. WPC asked that Cala widen the short footpath from the site to Dumbrells lane so that villagers from that side of the village could get wheelbarrows to allotments.
12. WPC asked that running water be provided to the allotments.
13. It was noted by WPC that hedging should be used for boundaries between homes wherever possible, as previous experience showed that otherwise tall fences would be erected by homeowners which are unsightly, and accentuate the urban feel.
14. Footpaths should be well established, maintained and denoted.
15. WPC is concerned that, with the maintenance and potential public liability issues associated with the large trees on and around the perimeter of the site, Cala Homes and/or the subsequent management company might be tempted to cut some down to reduce the risk and costs. We would not want to see this happen, as it would risk removing natural screening of the site/established trees within the site and therefore seek assurances that the retention of trees will be prioritised in the long term. As such, we would wish to see the retention of trees written into the planning conditions for the site.
16. Both the temporary and permanent diversion of the existing footpath through the site should be on the southern perimeter to attempt to maintain at least some sense of a semi-rural setting.
17. Cala tried to make much of the alleged biodiversity net gain from the site, but was shut down on this point by the Parish Council since no mitigation measures are going to make up for, let alone improve upon, an unspoiled greenfield site.
18. Cala were asked to confirm whether the roads would be adopted and to confirm what the street lighting strategy is to be.
19. Cala agreed to provide further details of the play area facility, given the apparent paucity of equipment provided in Charters Gate.
20. Cala confirmed they would expect building to start late 2024/early 2025 and that construction would last approximately 2 ½ years.
21. WPC asked and Cala agreed to meet again in January to review progress on the plans and further consider their responses to our questions and those raised in the consultation.
22. Cala will produce a 'Statement of Community Involvement' which will collate the feedback received, and will form a part of their detailed planning application submission.