

## Thorpe St Andrew Town Council Meeting

### Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010

**1. Present:** Mr R. S. James (Town Mayor) Mrs E. C. Laming  
Mr J. M. Ward (Deputy Town Mayor) Miss S. P. Lawn  
Mr J. Emsell Mr I. J. Mackie  
Mr J. F. Fisher Mr E. A. Newberry  
Mr R. Robson Mr N. Shaw

**Apologies:** Mr G. Allison, Mr A. J. Barber, Mr D. E. Eley,  
Mr D. R. C. Spooner, Mr S. Freeman-Pannett  
Mr G. Rowe,

**In attendance:** Mr S. J. Ford, Mr P. Rope, Town Tree Warden

**2. Declarations of interest:** Mr J. M. Ward declared a prejudicial interest as a member of Broadland District Council planning committee and said he was attending to observe the meeting. Mr N. Shaw and Mr I. J. Mackie declared a personal interest in any matters relating to Norfolk County Council and Broadland District Council as members of those councils.

#### **3. Announcements:**

The Town Mayor, Mr R. S. James welcomed the large number of residents and visitors to the meeting. Mr James said that he had met representatives of the Thorpe and Felthorpe Trust earlier in the week prior to the opening of the Charrette. In the light of developments Mr James said he would amend the motion he had previously put forward for discussion.

#### **4. Public Participation:**

The Town Mayor then put forward a motion, seconded by Mr J. Ward to suspend the meeting to enable members of the public to speak. Following a vote the meeting was suspended to enable members of the public, Town and District Councillors to speak. Notes on the public session are attached as an addendum to the minutes of the Town Council meeting.

#### **5. Development of Belmore and Racecourse Woods**

Following the public session the Town Council reconvened and it was **RESOLVED** with eight votes cast in favour to adopt an amended motion put forward by Mr R. S. James seconded by Mr J. F. Fisher that omitted some wording from the original motion that was summarised by "The Town Council supports and fully understands the anger of local residents at the plan to deprive them of one of the few open spaces in the Town; it will oppose this scheme by all means available to it."

**6. Date of next meeting:** 2 August 2010

## **Addendum to Town Council minutes of meeting held on 7 July 2010**

### **5 (i) Public Session**

#### **County and District Councils**

Mr Andrew Proctor opened the public session by introducing himself as Deputy Leader of Broadland District Council and Cabinet Portfolio holder for Planning Policy and Conservation. Mr Proctor started his address by advising the meeting that the District Council had received the same information as the public shortly before commencement of the charrette and were not promoting it but were observing it. He was attending the meeting to listen and consider comments in context to the new government situation.

#### **Public**

Mr B. Mayhew and Mr J. Mayhew, trustees and their sister in law Mrs G. Mayhew then introduced themselves and the background to the organisation of the charrette. Mr B. Mayhew said the trusts were set up 20 years ago by his grandfather Mr J. Gurney for five of his grandchildren and involved the three plantations in Thorpe St Andrew – Racecourse and Belmore Woods and Browns Plantation and Felthorpe Trust also owned some of the land that it was proposed to develop.

Broadland Land Group had been formed in the hope that other landowners would join in the development proposals however at short notice it was found that this was not to be. Mr Mayhew apologised for the late notice of the development proposals and the charrette. 5000 flyers had been printed but the distribution company employed to deliver them locally had failed to deliver as required. The first public meeting of the charrette would not be held in Thorpe St Andrew for which Mr Mayhew apologised; he considered now that it should have been as he wanted the public to be involved from the outset in the design sessions. Thorpe St Andrew School had been contacted but was not available on dates needed. Mr B. Mayhew concluded his address by saying he was sorry that people had been upset and he hoped that residents could forgive and move on.

Mr J. Mayhew then took the floor and reiterated apologies. He said firstly there was no proposal to consider at this stage. The consultation wanted to see what local residents did and did not want. The site under consideration sits in the growth triangle identified by planners; there were already proposals to develop locally - Brook Farm to one side, Blue Boar Lane, an area north of the airport and the Rackheath eco town.

Broadland Land Group differed from other developers in that it was a private group that had owned the land for many years. The land was a commercial forest where trees were felled and replanted over the years. Conifers had been planted and grown for use as pit props; however the market for pit props no longer existed and the trees were due for felling.

Although the woods were privately owned and there was no right of public access people have walked through the woods and there was increasing risk of fires, some of which were started deliberately. Vandalism was another

problem and newly planted trees were often uprooted. These factors made managing the area as commercial woodland more difficult.

The woods had been designated as County Wildlife Sites; part of the site was heath land regeneration that dated back some 200 years. A number of the plantations had been used as farmland during the Second World War and subsequently planted with trees after the war by his grandfather Mr John Gurney. There was large area of beautiful woodland and rows and rows of mature Christmas trees that were a fire and hurricane risk.

If the woods were developed all sorts of requirements would be needed to build a community – schools, cycleways and jobs were just some the infrastructure that would be needed.

Mr Mayhew explained that the charrette had dropped a profile of medieval Norwich into the middle of a plan of the woods. It fitted in easily and left plenty of room to develop the necessary infrastructure such cycle tracks etc and from it you could see how it could sit in the growth triangle that envisaged 10,000 new homes being built in area to the north east of Norwich. The growth triangle raised further questions such as the need for a link road from Salhouse Road to Plumstead Road and all sorts of issues that affected the lives of us all.

Mr Mayhew emphasised that nothing would happen behind closed doors. “The charrette would not work without your help” he said “A series of public meetings would be held in Norwich; if you participate it will help to guide the whole process. We are starting from the bottom up; working with the people who live here. 4,500 people work on the Broadland Business Park and factors such as that brings issues bigger than all of us.”

Mr Mayhew described the woods as something wonderful and precious, within them there was some good woodland but not much heathland – wildlife included adders, snakes and ground nesting birds. Ordnance Survey maps of the area were the only maps available so a topographical survey of the whole area had been carried out to enable pinpointing exact locations of trees and landscape features. He said that wished to explore whether some of the development that Norwich needs could be in the woods.

At this point in the meeting a member of the public called for a show of hands to see who objected to the housing proposals. There was a clear majority of hands raised but not all.

The Town Mayor, Mr R. S. James said “We need to know what you; what is the next stage?” Mr B. Mayhew said “We have come to you to ask if you are open to the idea of development and if there is any scope for developing in any part of the 200 acres of woods. The first step is to talk and hold long discussions with interested parties.”

Mr E. Munday said “As trustees you have a duty to look at all the options I am interested to see that no other land owners were present. Where would the development end? Would we left with half built houses?”

Mr B. Mayhew replied saying "Thank you, we want you to say what you said, we want to hear from you."

A member of the public asked if there were any restrictive covenants on the woods. Mr Mayhew said that there was not. Being the land owners the trusts could put up a ten foot fence around the woods but were looking to resolve possible development in a way that everyone's best interests were served.

He went on to explain that the trust had been formed as a means of for Mr Gurney to give the land to his five grandchildren in 1988. In the intervening twenty years no forward planning proposals for the woods had been drawn up. The north east growth triangle had provided a window for the trust to consider housing development in the woods and that could provide a window for public access to be given in perpetuity to the remaining woodland.

A member of the public asked what would arise if the housing development was turned down and Mr B. Mayhew said nothing would happen. Other members of the public spoke up who said they were 100% against development. More housing developments would bring about further increases in traffic and there was too much traffic already.

A member of the Stop Norwich Urbanisation Group (SNUB) said that proposed development was just part of a much bigger picture to impose growth by outside bodies; SNUB was campaigning against the proposed north east Norwich growth triangle.

Mr J. Mayhew responded by saying transport is one of the issues there was no connectivity between the various developments that were currently being discussed.

Dr Colin Self quoted a passage from a historic book written by David Gurney who wrote of the desperate problems at the time when the book was written and land that could not be sold even for eleven shillings and sixpence an acre. Dr Self praised Mr Mayhew's grandfather and said he was a great naturalist who had planted the five woods to put something back into the environment; and said it would be a shame if the current generation were to destroy a forest.

In response Mr J. Mayhew said "We agree; the forest's future is not assured. There is no right of public access although for decades the public have had free access. This is an opportunity to discuss development of some of the 200 acres of woodland. Come to the charrette and tell us what percentage of development in the woods might be acceptable to you. In the end it will be Broadland District Council planning committee that will make the decision on any housing development in the woods."

A member of the public said that he had contacted estate agents to gauge the current housing market and found that about 48,000 houses were currently for sale in the area and 37,000 available to rent. In view of those numbers he questioned the need for more houses to be built.

The trustees had set out their responsibilities to the trust but did they not also have a responsibility to the wildlife he asked. There were bats, squirrels, deer and foxes in the woods.

Mr B. Mayhew said "We respect that view. Come to the charrette and tell us what you think.

A member of the public commented that the trustees had said the woods were difficult to manage because of the public access however Lion Wood in the city was managed very well despite being well used by the public.

Mr J. Mayhew said that Belmore Wood contained some very good trees and lots of long rows of fully mature conifers. There was also a very nice Corsican Red Needle pine in the middle of the woods. Parts of Belmore Wood were very attractive and they would be kept. Where there were good areas for wildlife they could be made better with careful management. Again the public were urged to come to the charrette to put forward their views.

Peter Lanyon of Little Plumstead said "Our trees are threatened by this sort of process. Join the [snubcampaign.org](http://snubcampaign.org)' we believe development does not mean material growth. Your woodland is the quality that needs preserving."

Greg Towers of Dussindale said "Government housing targets are on hold, the growth triangle has not been adopted, the LDF and NDR won't get funding, and Broadland District Council stopped their consultation on the growth triangle. Everyone has to understand that the growth triangle is only an idea and could easily change in the next few months."

Mr B. Mayhew commented "If so we will have to have another management plan for the woods."

A member of the public thought the area should not be compared with Norwich city centre; it should be compared with many of the parks in the county that were of similar size.

Mr B. Mayhew then went on to explain the various meetings that were being held by the charrette. Some daytime meetings were with specialists with particular interests. A number of evening meetings were for the public to attend and put forward their views on development. Also anyone with comments could email them to [broadlandlandgroup@gmail.com](mailto:broadlandlandgroup@gmail.com).

Mr M. Martins asked if the trustees would be prepared to put some woodland into public ownership and if so if 20% of the woods were developed would the remaining 80% be passed into public ownership.

Mr B. Mayhew said that they would consider any feasible proposal and that it was possible that a large part of the woodland could pass into public ownership in perpetuity.

Members of the public expressed concerns that there was confusion over the charrette process and they considered there was a need for a meeting to be

held on one clear day that could be well publicised. The public wanted to be involved and to have one crucial vote on the development proposals.

Mr J. Mayhew said the results of the charrette would need to be digested and were just the beginning point for coming back with further proposals. The development was not just about houses; schools, doctors and other important issues needed consideration.

Members of the public questioned why development was being considered; it was for the benefit of the trust and the beneficiaries were the five grandchildren so it was being considered for profit. From the floor it was pointed out that the public could give their opinion but the trust could still do what it liked and it was not their wish to give legitimacy if it wouldn't have happened in the first place.

The current commercial viability of the plantations was discussed and the trustees said that the woods produced very low income. Mr P. Rope introduced himself as the Town Tree Warden and gave his thanks to the Trustees for all the work they had done in the woods.

The public debate continued with views being expressed that because of the development that was already proposed by other developers in the area that the woods needed to be preserved. It was suggested that the trustees could sell the woods into public ownership and protected as a green lung. It was suggested that the Norwich Fringe Project could manage the woods but Mr J. M. Ward pointed out that the Fringe Project had only one full time and one part time member of staff who were already working to capacity. An alternative would be to form a Friends Group to manage the woods.

Mrs W. Howes said "We have to be realistic, I would rather it wasn't built on but would like to reserve judgement and wait and see what was proposed. Mr B. Mayhew said he appreciated the comment; development was a means of securing the future of a large part of the woodland with public access and paying for the long term management.

Concerns were expressed about the many shops that had closed down in Norwich, where jobs were going to come from, schools that were already at capacity and loss of value to properties adjacent to any development. Mr B. Mayhew commented that these were all valid issues that needed to be put to charrette to shape the proposals that would arise.

Councillor N. Shaw said he was amazed when he saw that the area of the woods was larger than the Heartsease estate. The area did fall within the north east growth triangle. The previous government had said that 70,000 houses were needed and had identified the areas where they considered they should be built. However with the change in government the growth area will be changed and he did not think the woods should ever have been included in the growth triangle and he would try and keep it that way.

Councillor E. A. Newberry said he had attended a lot of meetings organised by the Greater Norwich Development Partnership. In his opinion the group had not demonstrated the need for even a quarter of the number of houses

under consideration. The group hailed the Broadland Business Park as a great success. However most of the companies based there had simply moved out from the city and left offices there empty. If the NDR was built there would be a lot of housing infill as a result; how many would be affordable homes he asked. Housing development proposals at Brook Farm and Broadland Gate were on hold as there was no plan B in the Greater Norwich Development Partnership's proposals. In Mr Newberry's view there was no need to develop the woods at all.

Councillor Ian Mackie spoke as County Councillor for Thorpe St Andrew. He commended the trustees on the charrette process they had put in place but could not believe that there was not a business case in place.

An article in the Evening News had referred to a rapid fire plan for a community to be built in the woodland. However this was not a community driven initiative it was driven by the financial considerations of the trustees. Dussindale School and Little Plumstead School were already at capacity and there was no money available for new schools.

Mr B. Mayhew confirmed the development proposals were made with a profit in mind but also to bring a really good development to the local community but if the community did not agree then there would be no development in his honest opinion.

District Councillor Andrew Proctor said that the District Council had consulted widely in drawing up the current Core Strategy and the proposed growth triangle that had been driven by the strategy set out by the previous government. Since 6 May in planning terms everything was in a state of uncertainty since the Regional Spatial Strategy had been abandoned. The new coalition government was looking to encourage growth in future housing by community need. That was exactly what the charrette process was about. Consultation exhibitions that were going to be held in June had been put on hold and community engagement would happen in the future.

Mr Proctor was asked how the numbers in the Regional Spatial Strategy had arisen and he advised some had come from local authorities and some come regionally. The Regional Spatial Strategy had set a target of 77,000 homes. This figure would be revisited as there was now a totally different regime to that of two months ago.

The Minister, Eric Pickles, had said the previous day that local authorities should not stop working on their Core Strategy documents. Policy could not proceed with core infrastructure that would put constraints on developers to provide core infrastructure such as roads and schools. When asked how the Green Infrastructure policy fitted Mr Proctor explained it was a separate document.

A member of the public pointed out that the Core Strategy document was not a "done deal"; sixty points had been raised when at a pre-submission inspection. It was considered by members of the public that growth plans had been based on the construction of the NDR for a decade and without construction going ahead the growth plan needed to allow for that.

Mr B. Mayhew pointed out that the trustees had not been “got at” by developers; it was their idea to come to residents and to be open and honest with development proposals.

Mr J. Mayhew said the trustees had attended Joint Core Strategy meetings and as landowners were affected by the outcome. More opportunistic proposals could arise from other land owners in the growth triangle, the trustees wished to be part of Plan B.

A member of the public responded by saying the trustees needed to make a profit and not to carry out a philanthropic act. The trustees were controlling the charrette and they asked if they would write all the responses down. It was his view that by taking part in the charrette he was not doing himself any favours.

Mr B. Mayhew replied “Wait and see and judge us by what you see when we finish. There is a good way to make a profit and there is a bad way. If you agree then we will develop and if you don’t then we won’t.”

A member of the public asked what the market value of the woods was. Mr B. Mayhew said it was agricultural land value multiplied by two hundred. However as the land was on the fringe of the city there was “planning hope” and a Valuer would therefore have two values to consider. Another member of the public said the current value of agricultural land was £6000 per acre but land with planning permission was worth £200,000 per acre.

The Mayhews were asked what would happen if the public did not work with the charrette what would be the outcome. Mr B. Mayhew said that a document would be produced that set out what had arisen from the charrette. The charrette was a long process that could end up with absolutely nothing happening.

Russell James, Town Mayor, then asked if those present would like a public meeting in Thorpe St Andrew and there was overwhelming support from the audience. Mr James said it would be best left until September when the outcome of the Joint Core Strategy was known.