

## THE FUTURE OF THE CHASE HOTEL SITE

1. The agent for the owner of the Chase hotel on Gloucester Road in Ross put forward the whole of the site for possible development during the SHLAA process. The suggested development was to be of a small number of houses towards the north of the site and perhaps also to the south. This was considered by the plan Steering Group and given qualified support; the qualification being about numbers and details rather than the principle.
2. As a result, the draft Neighbourhood Plan that was put out for the Regulation 14 consultation in autumn 2018 included an allocation of the site for two small housing developments. The text outlined some key criteria to be met to address specific details.
3. Later in the autumn, early in the Regulation 14 consultation period, the owner of the hotel notified the plan Steering Group informally that the hotel was no longer viable, that he had tried unsuccessfully to find buyers for it as an hotel and that he would therefore be closing the hotel and seeking permission to develop housing on part of the site. This was then notified formally towards the end of the consultation period.
4. In consultation with the chair of the Steering Group and the plan consultants, it was agreed that there should be a consultation about the new proposals and that, subject to the outcome of this consultation, changes would need to be made to the draft plan before its final submission.
5. To follow this up, the owner set up a consultation about the emerging proposals for housing development. In order to ensure results that could genuinely be taken into account in the next draft of the plan, the chair of the Steering Group and the plan consultants gave advice on various aspects of the consultation – where and when to hold, it, how to promote it etc. – and advised on the content of the exhibition and the appropriate nature of feedback.
6. The consultation took the form of an open drop-in at the hotel over a day in January 2019. Those attending were asked to sign in and could then look at several exhibition boards showing the background to the proposals, some key issues and possible criteria, some very early sketch drawings and information about the appointed architects. Comments forms were made available to all. The event was mainly staffed by the site owner and his architect although, in addition, the chair of the Steering Group attended the event both to observe and to answer questions about how the event and its results might affect the next stage of the plan.
7. A full report of the event, including every comment made, was produced and sent to all who signed in (legibly). A short report was produced and placed on the plan website. A note was added informing people that they could, if wished, access the full report.

*The short report follows overleaf.*

# THE FUTURE OF THE CHASE HOTEL CONSULTATION: SUMMARY FEEDBACK

*This note is a summary only of the many comments made on feedback forms about the consultation on the future of the Chase hotel site in Ross-on-Wye, held on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019. The full report (with all comments) is available on the project website: [www.consultingyou.co.uk/chasehotel](http://www.consultingyou.co.uk/chasehotel)*

## Overall

163 people signed in, between 14.00 and 20.00 on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019. There was a display about what are very early proposals, but no designs as such because the aim was to get guidance from people on how best to proceed. Some of the design team and the landowner were available to answer any questions. Because of the links to the emerging Ross-on-Wye Neighbourhood Plan, someone from that group was also present to help. Comments forms were handed to all who signed in. 70 completed forms were received on the day and up to a few days later. The form asked for general comments and for ideas and suggestions on a series of listed issues. (A few comments were made on the website - see above - and can be seen there.)

***Many thanks to all those who came along and especially to those giving so much time to offer quite detailed comments.***

## General Comments

58 people made general comments on their form, often about several aspects of the proposals. The key points were as follows:

- The biggest concern raised was about the potential loss of the hotel as a locally valued facility.
- The next most common issue of concern was the impact of extra vehicles on local roads.
- Some people commented on the scale of the development, some but not all considering it too much.
- The site is clearly valued by nearby residents for its wildlife and ecology although the comments were not all objections on this aspect, more about ensuring no damage.
- One aspect that attracted a number of comments was about the effect of possibly overloading local services, notably doctors and schools.
- A few people were concerned about what they thought might be the loss of the current large area of open space in the hotel grounds.
- Very few people stated a blunt objection to the proposals, although around a dozen made comments raising serious enough concerns to suggest future objections. (*Reasons given were largely as covered in the other comments.*)
- At the same time, some people were very positive about the proposals (and in some cases the consultation) and a few even expressed an interest in purchasing a property if the development proceeds.
- There were also a few miscellaneous comments.

## **Specific Issues Comments**

This was mainly intended to seek possible ideas and suggestions for the designers on what, in detail, should be addressed in any design. Many of the contributions were more questions than comments or suggestions, e.g. what materials will be used?

Reflecting the general results above, by far the most comments in total were made about traffic, mainly around the site as well as movement within it and parking on it. The next most commented on set of issues was a great variety of points about wildlife and ecology, some being lists of all the animals and birds seen on and around the site. There were a number of comments and thoughts about landscape (e.g. future planting) and (keeping) open space, closely related to the comments about wildlife and ecology. Given the number of attendees from surrounding streets, there were a number of comments on views into the site, far less so on views out.

On more specific design issues, people commented on:

- the possible height of the new buildings - generally hoping that they could be kept as no higher than the old house;
- aspects of lighting - to be kept low key and downward facing;
- materials - with mixed views between brick to relate to the surroundings and render to relate to the old house;
- (from just a few) the need for sustainable construction, renewable energy etc., and
- the setting of the old house - to be carefully respected.

Finally, in terms of who might live there, various views were expressed, but several people mentioned the value of such a site near the town centre for elderly or retired people, others suggested a mix of sizes of houses/apartments etc. and most people supported the standard percentage of 'affordable' homes.

## **Where Now?**

All this information will be carefully considered by the site owners and the design team and the next stage will be to work on detailed design proposals – crucial as the site is in the Conservation Area. In relation to concerns above, any planning application will be required by Herefordshire Council to include at least a Heritage Assessment, a Landscape Assessment and an Ecology Assessment. The last of these will have an important impact on timescales because it must include a study of bats that can only take place during June this year.

It is not currently possible to say when a planning application will be submitted but the current intention is to share the designs back with the community before the application.

***Camanoe Estates  
January 2019***

8. As can be seen from the summary report on the previous page, the proposals for housing development caused considerable concern locally. A petition was raised\* to keep the hotel open and the Town Council received a number of letters seeking to have the green space on the site protected/designated in some way. Pressure was also placed more generally on the Town Council and the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to retain the hotel and protect the green space. (\* By another local hotel owner, though this was not declared.)

9. The plan consultants were asked for their opinion on the hotel retention and designation of green space options. Their judgement was that neither option was viable within planning principles, so a decision was taken to undertake a structured survey to assess community views more formally than was possible via the petitions etc. This intent was announced at the parish meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

10. The consultants suggested that the best way forward for the now almost finalised plan was to (a) add a new section to the plan about open and green space in general but also highlighting the importance of the site to local people, and (b) add a new section in the plan under 'Other Sites', the section in which sites that could not at this stage be allocated were described and then 'supported for development'.

11. The survey was undertaken from 8<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019. It was widely promoted through local social media and in the Ross Gazette. It was also sent directly to around 93 residents living immediately around the site, those who had objected most strongly in earlier stages.

12. The survey had three elements:

- A letter from the Town Council outlining the purpose, timing and format of the survey.
- A background note from the plan consultants elaborating why the resident-promoted options were not possible and outlining their two alternative approaches as above.
- A survey form for people to complete.

*These three elements follow overleaf.*

13. In addition to the hard copy versions sent directly to adjacent residents, and available to others via the Town Council, the survey could be completed on line using Survey Monkey. Hard copy responses were typed in to the Survey Monkey survey.

## **CHASE SITE CONSULTATION LETTER (FROM THE TOWN COUNCIL AND FOR USE ON WEBSITE ETC.)**

Dear Ross-on-Wye Resident,

As you are probably aware, the landowner has announced that the Chase Hotel will be closing later this year. As a result of this, the previous section on the Chase Hotel in the draft Neighbourhood Plan is now no longer fit for purpose and has been removed. However, we are aware that local concerns have been raised about the future of the Chase Hotel site and buildings.

In response to these concerns, we are now seeking information and opinions that can shape what could and should be added back into the Ross Neighbourhood Plan to ensure an appropriate future for the Chase Hotel site.

The timing of the Hotel closure announcement and the legal limitations on what can be put into a Neighbourhood Plan (and, crucially, pass examination) have created a challenging situation. We have therefore asked our Neighbourhood Planning consultants to put in place, manage and report on an additional consultation process, focusing on the future of the Chase site. They will then use this as evidence to recommend a way forward. A final decision on what to include in the Neighbourhood Plan will be considered by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and a decision will ultimately be made by the Town Council.

Attached to this letter are two documents, both from our consultants:

- The first is a background note which introduces and explains the current situation - what can and cannot be done from here on.
- The second covers the form of the additional consultation and explains how to respond.

Various local communications and media links are being used to encourage contributions from anybody in the town as a whole. In addition, to ensure that residents living in close proximity to the site are made aware of the additional consultation, material is being delivered directly to all those living immediately around the site.

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Please respond to this consultation by post to this address or online at the web address below. This additional consultation will close at midnight on June 28<sup>th</sup> 2019.

# THE CHASE HOTEL SITE CONSULTATION

## PART 1: BACKGROUND NOTE

### INTRODUCTION

Local press coverage and petitions make clear the scope and scale of local concern about the closure of the Chase Hotel. There appear to be two main concerns:

- The closure of the hotel itself, an important facility not just for locals but also for visitors, all contributing to the local economy and community vitality.
- Worries about the future of the overall site, especially future development pressure on the areas of grass, trees and shrubs, all private but highly valued as green space near the centre of the town.

We have given considerable thought to how best the Neighbourhood Plan might help on these issues, as below. However, it is possible that a planning application for the Chase site may be lodged before the Neighbourhood Plan is fully 'made' or reaches an advanced stage (examination/referendum).

Furthermore, there is already an existing planning permission for development on part of this site, which establishes development potential. We understand that this planning permission is still extant.

### Potential Approaches

There are a number of approaches being discussed locally, some of which have limited chances of success.

### *Preventing the Hotel Closure*

The Neighbourhood Plan cannot prevent the hotel closure. While including an allocation for the site for hotel use (planning use class C1) may be technically possible, it would require robust evidence to be gathered to demonstrate that such a (continued) use is viable. The landowner will be very well placed to show evidence to the contrary. As above, it is also likely that a planning application would come in ahead of such an allocation being made, in which case the Neighbourhood Plan at its current stage of progress would have moderate rather than significant influence over the future of the site.

Furthermore, even if successful, while the allocation of hotel sites in plans has happened before it that has often resulted in sites being left derelict for years because hotel operators did not consider the sites suitable. It would therefore only delay the inevitable redevelopment of the site.

*Our conclusion is that this approach is very unlikely to be successful in facilitating a continued hotel use on the site.*

### **Using 'Local Green Space' Designation to protect green parts of the site from future development**

The suggestion has been made that, for future protection, a part of the site (other than the buildings and parking areas) could be designated in the plan as a 'Local Green Space'. However:

- National planning policy is clear that the designation of land as local green space should be consistent with planning for sustainable development and should complement the provision of new development. It is not appropriate to use this designation as a means of preventing or limiting development.
- Any area proposed for designation should have a clear and positively defined boundary. If there were to be a proposed area less than the whole of the site, there does not appear to be any obvious definition of a clearly bounded area.
- Selection of a space to designate could have negative implications for the future of the remaining areas.
- There is also a very basic limit to designation of at least part of the site because there is still an extant planning permission for development to the south west area of the site. As such, that part of the site area could not be designated as a Local Green Space.

This approach would also delay the progress of the Neighbourhood Plan which is, otherwise, ready for its next formal stage.

*Our conclusion is that this approach is unlikely to be successful in protecting the green spaces on the site from development.*

### **Proposed Approach**

The proposed approach responds better to the uncertainty about the future of the Chase site. It is suggested that a new section is included in the Neighbourhood Plan where the redevelopment of the site is supported subject to specific criteria being met. (This is what was done in the current plan, for similar reasons, about the whole Broadmeadows area.)

The plan could therefore include some explanation about the site and the current situation, some general development principles and some criteria for many aspects of any future development proposals – heights, materials, design, parking, views, wildlife protection, tree protection and replacements and, of course, open space protection. Once again, the examiner would have to consider whether these criteria would suggest any unreasonable constraints on the future of the site.

In addition, a new policy relating to the green and open spaces within Ross, with specific reference to the Chase site could be added to the plan.

In our view both of the above are achievable and would provide for the examiner the appropriate balance between concerns about a locally if not formally valued open space and a viable development future for the site. This work could also be undertaken quite quickly.

*We consider this approach has the highest chance of success in terms of positively*

*influencing the future of the site. It is therefore recommended that the following be added to the Neighbourhood Plan:*

- An additional policy about green and open spaces in the town as a whole but with specific reference to the recognised value to the local community of the green character of the overall Chase Hotel site.*
- A new section on the Chase site where the redevelopment of the site is supported subject to specific caveats/criteria (e.g. location of any development, heights, site coverage, open space, wildlife protection, even public access).*

## **ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION**

The success at examination of any addition to the plan is fundamentally determined by the quality of the related evidence. That evidence can and should include community opinions and aspirations but it is also key to base Neighbourhood Plans on robust factual evidence.

The attached form provides an opportunity for local people to make comments both on aspirations and in terms of factual information, and it will be important to be able to consider these two types of comment separately. It will also be important to be able to assess responses in terms of the views and information from people in the town as a whole and those living adjacent to or very close to the site – hence the important request for postcodes. Please note: No personal information is sought.

The results from the consultation will be used to suggest specific text and material to include in the two parts of the final Neighbourhood Plan as outlined above. As stated in the accompanying letter from the Town Council, it is then for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and the Town Council to finally agree the plan content.

## THE CHASE HOTEL SITE CONSULTATION PART 2: CONSULTATION FORM

This feedback form is being issued by Place Studio on behalf of the Town Council.

Please note that, if you prefer, an on-line version of this form can be completed at the website noted in the letter.

For any comments you make in responding to this form to be as effective as you probably wish, it is extremely important that you do so after reading the accompanying letter from the Town Council and the Part 1: Background Note.

**1. Your Postcode** .....

**2. How important for you are the open and green qualities of the Chase site generally?** Please rank from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely important). Ring one

0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**3. What particular qualities, parts of the site, features and so forth are important to you and why?**

**4. How often do you use the current Chase Hotel and its facilities?** Ring one

Weekly    Monthly    Few times a year    Rarely    Never

**5. Next Stage Options.**

The Background Note outlines two possible ways forward to maximise the chances of a positive resolution to the future of the site. (One or both options could be used.)

**Option A:** Include in the Plan an Open and Green Space policy that highlights the importance of the Chase site.

Do you support this option? *Ring as appropriate:*

Yes

No

Any comments on Option A:

**Option B:** Include in the Plan a statement supporting development if it can meet key criteria, e.g about open space, wildlife, heights etc..

Do you support this option? *Ring as appropriate:*

Yes

No

Any comments on Option B:

## 6. Other Choices

The Background Note states quite strongly that neither keeping the hotel via an allocation in the plan nor designating part of the site as a Local Green Space are likely to be viable options. Do you have any comments on these statements?  
(See over)

**Allocation for Hotel:**

**Designation of part of the site as a Local Green Space:**

**Thank you!**

Please return completed forms by **28<sup>th</sup> July** to **Ross-on-Wye Town Council**, The Corn Exchange, High Street, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 5HL.

14. The summary results from the survey were as follows:

- 211 responses were received, of which 32 were from the 93 immediate or nearby neighbours contacted personally.
- The open and green qualities of the site were ranked by those not living near or adjacent to the site as 2.6 out of 10.
- Immediate or nearby neighbours ranked those qualities as 9 out of 10.
- Most people used the hotel and its facilities only a few times a year or rarely, a few never.
- 47% of respondents not living near or adjacent to the site supported option A (including an open and green space policy in the plan) 64% did not.
- 27 out of 32 nearby or immediate neighbours supported option A, 4 did not.
- 73% of respondents not living near or adjacent to the site supported option B (including a policy in the plan supporting development of the site in principle), 8% did not.
- 16 out of 32 nearby or immediate neighbours supported option B, 11 did not.
- Though an option was included for people to comment on the hotel retention and/or Local Green Space approach, few commented on either of these.

The full report and analysis is available from Ross-on-Wye Town Council.

15. Given the wish to move speedily to submission of the final version Neighbourhood Plan to Herefordshire before the summer break, the consultants had drafted the two possible new plan sections. Following the closure of the survey on 28<sup>th</sup> June, a Steering Group meeting was held on 4<sup>th</sup> July to consider the results and to agree, if appropriate, the two new sections.

16. Given the increasingly high profile of the proposals for the site, at least amongst nearby residents, a number of members of the public attended the 4<sup>th</sup> July meeting. Although this was a Town Council Sub-Committee meeting, the meeting chair agreed to provide an opportunity for members of the public to have their say.

17. At the start of this open session, Mr. Bishop of Place Studio made a presentation elaborating the history of the proposals for the site, the January 2019 consultation, the survey, its interim results and the Place Studio conclusions\*. Members of the public, including a representative of an informal group – Save the Chase 2019 – made comments arguing the importance of the site and expressing again the aspiration to have the majority of the site designated as a Local Green Space. (\* Mr. Bishop also commented on concerns about the independence of Place Studio at various stages of the process.)

18. Along with his presentation, Mr. Bishop shared several items: a letter to the Town Clerk about the role of Place Studio, the interim results of the latest survey and the letter from Save the Chase 2019, annotated with comments from Place Studio. All of these papers are appended to the minutes of the Steering Group meeting.

19. Following the open session, Steering Group members were given a copy of the two proposed new plan sections. They agreed that these should be included in the final plan, to be considered at a Town Council meeting the following Monday (9<sup>th</sup> July). The note of the two new sections is also appended to the minutes of the Steering Group meeting.