

Ross-on-Wye NDP

The Chase Hotel Site Consultation June 2019

Results Report

1 Introduction

This report summarises the results of the consultation undertaken by Ross-on-Wye Town Council in June 2019 concerning the future of the Chase site and its potential inclusion in the Ross-on-Wye Neighbourhood Plan.

Important and full background information as to why this consultation was undertaken (and other related work about this site) is found in the 'Chase Process Report' which forms part of the Ross-on-Wye Neighbourhood Plan evidence base.

During Regulation 14 Consultation, the owner of the Chase Hotel informed the Plan Steering Group (SG) that the hotel was no longer viable, that he had unsuccessfully tried to find buyers for the site as a hotel, and that he would therefore be closing the hotel and seeking permission to develop housing on part of the site. Proposals for housing development on the site caused considerable concern locally and pressure was placed on the Town Council to include the retention of the hotel and protection of the surrounding green space within the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Plan consultants were asked for their opinion on the potential retention of the hotel and potential local green space designation of the surrounding open space. Their judgement was that neither option was viable within planning principles, so a decision was taken to undertake a structured survey to formally assess community views mainly on two alternative proposals that the consultants regarded as appropriate in planning terms and that would achieve largely the same result in terms of the open space. This report summarises the results of the survey.

2 Methodology

The survey was undertaken from 8th to 28th 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.

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.

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.

See the Appendix for copies of the letter, background note and survey form.

In the results noted overleaf, no percentages are used given the size of the sample.

3 Summary of Results

The survey received a total of **211** responses. This included **32** responses from immediate or nearby neighbours, and **189** responses from those living elsewhere in or around Ross.

Question 1. Your Postcode

Full list of postcodes of respondents is available on request.

Question 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).

Out of the 32 responses from immediate or nearby neighbours, the average score was **9 out of 10**.

3 of the immediate or nearby neighbour respondents ranked the importance as 2 or below, the remaining 29 ranked the importance as 8 or above.

The average score from those living elsewhere was **2.6 out of 10**.

32 of the respondents from elsewhere ranked the importance as 8 or higher. 142 of the respondents from elsewhere ranked the importance as 5 or below.

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

Typical comments included key words such as: natural, beauty, green, wildlife, habitat, mature trees, pond, open space, manor house.

Question 4. How often do you use the current Chase Hotel and its facilities? Weekly / Monthly / Few times a year / Rarely / Never

A quarter of the respondents who are immediate or nearby neighbours use the hotel and its site rarely. Half of the respondents use the hotel and its site few times a year. 6 of the 32 respondents use the hotel and its site monthly or weekly.

Just under half of the respondents from elsewhere use the hotel and its site rarely. 38 out of the 189 respondents use the hotel and its site few times a year. 13 of the 189 respondents use the hotel and its site monthly or weekly.

Question 5. Next stage options. The Background Note outlines two possible ways to maximise the chances of a positive resolution of the site (one or both options could be used).

Option A: Include in the Plan and Open and Green Space Policy that highlights the importance of the Chase site. Do you support this option? Yes / No

28 out of 32 immediate or nearby neighbour respondents supported Option A. 3 of the remaining immediate or nearby residents did not support Option A, and 1 respondent did not know.

46 out of 189 respondents from elsewhere supported Option A. 123 of the remaining residents from elsewhere did not support Option A, and 10 respondents did not know.

These numbers show that immediate and nearby neighbours strongly supported including an Open and Green Space policy to highlight the importance of the Chase site, whereas the majority of respondents from elsewhere did not support the inclusion of an Open and Green Space policy.

Any comments on Option A:

Typical responses in this section from nearby neighbours commented on:

- The importance of the trees on site and at its boundaries.
- The importance of green spaces within the town, of which the Chase site is one.
- The possible designation of the site as a Local Green Space.

Typical responses in this section from residents from elsewhere commented on:

- The land being privately owned and so the owner should be able to act as he wishes.
- If the hotel is not viable it is not practical to keep it as a hotel.
- The land is not publicly accessible so there would be little benefit designating it a green space.
- The importance of the green space.

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? Yes / No

16 out of 32 immediate or nearby neighbour respondents supported Option B. 11 of the remaining immediate or nearby residents did not support Option B, and 5 respondents did not know.

164 out of 189 respondents from elsewhere supported Option B. 19 of the remaining residents from elsewhere did not support Option B, and 6 respondents did not know.

The answers to this question show that half of the nearby residents, and over 4 out of 5 respondents from elsewhere, support Option B, to include a statement supporting development of the site if it can meet key criteria.

Any comments on Option B:

Typical responses in this section from nearby neighbours commented on:

- Not supporting development of this site.
- Trees, pond and wildlife should be fully protected.
- Sensitive, proportionate and limited development would be supported.

Typical responses in this section from residents from elsewhere commented on:

- The need for new good quality housing near the centre of town.
- Protecting the architecture of the main house as part of development.
- Incorporating and protecting the existing trees and open space into any development.

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?

Allocation for Hotel:

Typical responses in this section from nearby neighbours commented on:

- The important role that the hotel plays in Ross as a tourist town.
- Concerns that the hotel has not received enough investment /attention to make it a viable business, and that the owner has not marketed the site as a hotel effectively.
- It is not practical to allocate the site as a hotel if it is not viable.

Typical responses in this section from residents from elsewhere commented on:

- The hotel is not viable so this is not a practical option.
- Concerns that this would lead to a derelict hotel in the middle of town.
- Private landowners should be allowed to redevelop their property.
- The hotel could be improved with investment in leisure facilities on site.

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

Typical responses in this section from nearby neighbours commented on:

- The space should be protected as a green space; it is important to protect environmental sustainability within the Neighbourhood Plan.
- The site is not open to the public so the green space is not open for public enjoyment.
- The space is important on wildlife value and historic significance grounds.

Typical responses in this section from residents from elsewhere commented on:

- There are plenty of other green spaces in Ross.
- Local Green Space designation shouldn't be used to stop development of private land.
- The land is not particularly visible or open to the public.

Some respondents also contributed other comments, some main points from these comments include:

- It would be a great loss to see the hotel close. Is there any evidence that the hotel has been effectively marketed as a hotel?
- The green space and trees on site should be protected. Any redevelopment should be sensitively designed and the site should not be overdeveloped.
- There is a need for housing in the town, especially for young people and families. This is a sustainable location for development.

July 2019

Appendices

Appendix 1 Consultation cover letter

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 28th 2019.

Appendix 2 Background note

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.

Appendix 3 Survey form

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 **28th July** to **Ross-on-Wye Town Council**, The Corn Exchange, High Street, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire, HR9 5HL.