

23rd November 2020.

As chairman of Calvert Green parish Council (CGPC), I feel it necessary to respond to a letter that was circulated over the weekend purporting to be on behalf of Calvert Green Parish Residents Action Group (CGP-RAG).

I must firstly explain that this letter was deliberately omitted from parish councillor's letterboxes and I am deeply concerned by the content and by the fact that survey data was used to personally identify individuals, in contradiction of GDPR policy. I have previously had to complain about the harassment of parish councillors on their own doorsteps by a member of CGP-RAG which is another misuse of personal identifiable information. The content of this letter that was circulated was brought to our attention by concerned residents on Sunday 22nd November.

All but one parish councillor signed the CGP-RAG petition and while some did feel pressured to do so, it also puts us in a difficult position because, after taking legal advice, this affects our ability to make a majority balanced decision based on declarations of interest. Therefore, criticism of parish councillors who, on reflection (and on the record) actually felt pressured to sign the petition undermines their ability to represent the community's views.

I'll start by setting the scene. Calvert Green, whether we like it or not, is surrounded by land already owned by developers - none of which is green belt. The Vale of Aylesbury local Plan (VALP) which is soon to be approved (at County Level) will protect us from major development for 5 years. CGPG is in the process of formulating its own Neighbourhood plan which will include engagement with the community. This plan, when complete will afford us some protection by influencing future planning applications. The Dunsty Hill developers are working outside of these current planning restrictions by using a rural exception scheme - to demonstrate a need for affordable housing. At this stage, no planning application has been submitted.

While Parish Councils are consulted on all parish planning applications., any views expressed by the Parish Council will be taken into account by the Planning Authority before a decision is made, providing the points made are relevant to the determination of a planning application. However, the final decision is made by the Planning Authority (Buckinghamshire Council), not the Parish Council.

For years, CGPC has supported the best interest of our community and has successfully objected to several planning applications from developers surrounding us. As with all developer interaction, CGPC identifies the lack of amenities, public transport and existing percentage of affordable housing. We then encourage developers to engage with the community on their plans prior to any planning application - to give parishioners the ability to formulate their own considered response. This was done in respect of the Dunsty Hill proposal.

In January 2019 we objected to a previous planning application opinion for approximately 400 homes, including 4 and 5 storey blocks of flats on Dunsty Hill. In the interest of transparency, I am sharing a map of our community showing all the previous development proposals to date. All of which have currently come to nothing - not that they won't come up again because many of you will be aware of the various planning consultancy schemes such as http://www.5thstudio.co.uk/site/assets/files/1308/5thstudio-cal-project_page.pdf and https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/page_downloads/160905%20FINAL%20DRAFT%20VALP%20Reps%20-%20Verney%20Junction.pdf. CGPC has challenged these grand schemes and was assured by Buckinghamshire County Council that no master plan is at play.



At our last parish council meeting, CGPC agreed to setup a steering committee with CGP-RAG. CGPC is still waiting for dates from CGP-RAG to proceed. Furthermore, CGPC arranged to meet with CGP-RAG and our MP Greg Smith but were told by CGP-RAG not to attend. For the record, CGPC is very much willing to work with CGP-RAG and our parishioners to ensure the best for our community. Our position with the developers is entirely to ensure the community would get the best deal should any development be approved and it is clear that we neither support nor object at this stage because no planning application has been made. It is common for parish councils to discuss with developers on the needs of the community - such as allotments or play areas. This does not set any precedent for support. While a petition of names is useful, it does not carry the same weight as individual letters of objection and we would encourage everyone to respond if a planning application is submitted, whether you support or object to the proposal.

As a parish council, we are here to represent the whole community. The Dunsty Hill farm developers sent their own petition to every household - and of the respondents, 50% were against new affordable homes and 50% were in favour. Now whilst this only represents a small percentage of the community, everyone was given the opportunity to respond and nobody should have been discouraged from responding. There are 402 domestic properties in Calvert Green Parish as well as two businesses. However, we are attached and integrated with the original hamlet of Calvert (Brackley Lane and Werner Terrace) where there are several more properties which were rightly included in the developer's consultation.

Amongst other things, CGPC is also engaged with East West Rail and High Speed Two and has successfully won concessions after petitioning in parliament - not that this will minimise the blight our community will suffer over the coming years during construction, but it has at least provided us with funding to mitigate the impact of these projects.

All your parish councillors are unpaid volunteers who also work full time and give up their time to support the community. I encourage you to join us for our parish council meeting at 7:30pm on Thursday 3rd December. It will be a Zoom meeting and the connection details will be shared via CGPC website at www.calvertgreenparish.co.uk and via Facebook and the village notice board.

Phil Gaskin
Chairman, Calvert Green Parish Council