

Badsey & Aldington Parish Council major Land Project:

“For Today, for Tomorrow, for Always”

Agendas and Minutes of the Parish Council record the entire process of this project. An earlier version of this document charting the history of the project has been provided to residents who have asked, and it has been available on the website for some considerable time. This is an updated version following planning consent for the development in August 2020. Other updates will follow as the project progresses.

The purpose of this document is to explain the Parish Council's efforts to purchase land in recent times. Provision of a burial ground has been an issue that has occupied the Parish Council for four years.

Wychavon District Council, which controls so-called “New Homes Bonus” funds, changed the circumstances under which Parish Councils could apply for this funding. The process became a competitive application for what is called a “Legacy Grant” and Wychavon stipulated that any project funded had to provide something new (so renovations and replacements were excluded) and must provide a lasting benefit for the community, as the name “Legacy Grant” makes clear. With so much new development having taken place within the Parish, the Council was determined to make a strong case for funding here.

Badsey and Aldington Parish Council decided to involve residents from the beginning of the process and various ideas were floated. In September 2016 a number of residents attended a meeting before the normal council meeting to make their views known. The suggestions to provide a Community Heritage Orchard and allotment gardens for residents were discussed, and on the same evening members of the Parochial Church Council attended to request the provision of a Parish Council-run burial ground because the churchyard at St. James, Badsey was almost full. This was minuted following September's meeting: “Representatives from Badsey Church attended to formally request that the PC consider the provision of a burial ground as only 21 spaces remain at church and there are, on average, 11-15 burials per year.” These ideas all demanded something the Council just did not have: land.

At the October 2016 meeting the Council debated the issue and the minutes record: “**Burial Ground** - A request from Badsey Church for PC providing a burial ground was considered. It was agreed that in order to consider this proposal, the PC needs to establish if there is possible land available for this purpose. Letter to be sent to Rev Morton requesting information about possible land and current fees to consider viability of purchasing land. Clerk advised that PC does not have to provide a Burial Ground. It can consider a donation, sharing responsibility or asking a neighbouring parish to consider using their facility if available. PC should also consider the work involved in set-up and maintenance of a facility. Cllrs agreed that this could not be considered unless land was available at which time they would discuss again.”

There is absolutely no obligation that the Council provide a burial ground, but it was felt to be right that those residents who wished to be buried or have ashes interred should, if possible, have a facility within the Parish. The only other burial facility available once the churchyard at St James was full would be at Waterside in Evesham, where the Town Council makes much higher charges for non-residents. The Council therefore set about looking for land, but without a successful result initially.

In February 2017 the minutes record a discussion of a piece of land in the Aldington area which had been suggested as a possibility, and this was pursued over the following months. Following a valuation of the site an offer was made, but rejected by the landowner. It should

be noted that the Council has a responsibility to exercise due diligence in spending public money and was not able to justify a price above the value that had been advised by our valuation. Discussion and negotiation followed during 2017, but ultimately the possibility was found unsuitable.

In July the minutes record that we approached Christchurch, Oxford – a large landowner in our area – but their eventual response was not helpful. This institution at a later date made an offer of land to lease for allotment gardens, but it was conditional on the Council's support for a planning application embracing a larger development, and it was considered not appropriate to pursue this. In any case, it did nothing to resolve the issue of the burial ground. Another piece close to Bretforton was contemplated but rejected because the asking price was well in excess of the value which was placed on it by our professional advisor.

In July 2018, following our approach to the vicar with regard to the possibility of purchasing Glebe land near Allsebrook Gardens, we had contact with solicitors of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), advising that their land agent would contact us, which he did in August 2018. It emerged that the Glebe land near Allsebrook Gardens was earmarked by the Diocese for possible housing development in the future, but they suggested a further three pieces of agricultural land which they would be prepared to sell. We were asked by the DBF's agent not to make public the locations of these pieces of land because they were currently tenanted and we respected this request. In October 2018 we expressed an interest in a piece just outside Badsey, close to the old Lisbon Nurseries, but the DBF subsequently withdrew their offer of half of that piece, making it inaccessible and smaller and therefore unsuitable for our purposes. At this point they offered us the piece opposite Pear Tree Corner. We made an offer, which was accepted, and negotiations began.

Meanwhile we applied for a Wychavon Community Legacy Grant for our project. This money would supplement New Homes Bonus funds which we already had available and a Public Works Loan Board loan. A requirement of all this was that we demonstrated extensive community consultation, especially as the loan would involve a small one-off increase in the Parish Precept to cover the initial years of the loan repayment. This was detailed in the June 2019 minutes and a Survey Monkey survey showed overwhelming support for a £4.03p increase in the Precept on Band D properties (detailed in the July 2019 minutes). Councillors also consulted residents face to face outside the Spar shop, at the Flower Show and the Carnival, as well as delivering a dedicated Newsletter to every household in October inviting comment on the project. No negative feedback was received, but many offers of involvement in the project. We may not be able to knock on every door in the community, but we do put information through every door three times a year in our Newsletter and we publish this Newsletter, agendas, minutes and much else on our website. We also make ourselves available at Public Forum and speak to residents at village events (the latter, sadly, not possible during the present pandemic). We do our best to keep people in the loop, and in this we do far more than many other public bodies. We cannot, however, be responsible if residents do not read or look at this information.

In September 2019 minutes record that: "26 residents attended to receive an update on land purchase, PWLB application, NHB application and the progress of Community Legacy Grant. MiT gave a short presentation on progress of all the applications and the intended uses for the land. Residents asked a number of questions including where the land is situated. *PC advised that they cannot disclose this information at this time but will as soon as they can via Facebook, Newsletter, Community News and website as well as noticeboards.* Also asked was when it is likely to be up and running, it is hoped that it will be by the end of 2020."

The location of the land was advised, once the agreement of the DBF had been secured, in our December Newsletter delivered to all households. Our Legacy Grant application was approved in March 2020. Detailed work on the purchase of the land, planning application and aspects of design continued, with the location of the burial ground moved to higher ground before submission of the plans. A contract to purchase was exchanged in August 2020, conditional upon our receiving planning consent, so that the community did not buy a piece of land which was unusable. Since the project is classed as a major development, Wychavon Planning Committee considered the proposal on 20th August and it was approved with a vote of 14 in favour with one abstention. The drawdown of PWLB funds was approved on 21st August and the available Wychavon funds have been requested. At each and every stage, appropriate expert professional advice has been taken. It should be noted that planning approval for change of use is needed only for the burial ground – a small area of the development – since the Heritage Orchard and Allotment gardens are deemed appropriate development.

Residents should be aware of the fact that there is no other land available for this project, and certainly nothing closer to the heart of the village of Badsey itself. If the burial ground were not provided by this project, then the most likely outcome would have been no burial ground available in the Parish at all and burials and interments of ashes would only then be possible at Waterside in Evesham at a much higher cost than will now be provided here.

Now that the biggest hurdles are behind us, we shall enter into discussion with interested parties about the finer details of how the development is driven forward, especially those individuals who offered help and expertise.

MiT

22.08.2020