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Baldock Town Talk June 20th 2022

Present:

- Cllr Alistair Willoughby (NHC) alistair.willoughby@north-herts.gov.uk
- Cllr Michael Muir (NHC & County Councillor) Michael.muir@north-herts.gov.uk
- Cllr Steve Jarvis (NHC & County Councillor) steve.jarvis@north-herts.gov.uk
- Cllr Michael Weeks (NHC) Michael.weeks@north-herts.gov.uk
- Cllr Tom Tyson (NHC) tom.tyson@north-herts.gov.uk
- Cllr Juan Cowell (NHC) juan.cowell@north-herts.gov.uk
- Ashley Hawkins (NHC Community Engagement Officer) Ashley.hawkins@north-herts.gov.uk
- Becca Edwards (NHC Community Engagement Admin Apprentice)
- **MOA = Member of Audience**

Ashley Hawkins opened the Town Talk meeting at 6.30pm and welcomed the MOAs. Ashley commented that this was the highest attended Town Talk to date and informed MOAs that if they are unable to make a Town Talk that they can email councillors or himself with any queries.

Councillors and officers in attendance made introductions before Ashley invited questions from the floor. Issues were raised as follows:

- Planning application for Templars
- Drug issue suspected to be linked to Templars' residents
- BA4 and Local Plan

MOA raised concerns about the planning application for 24 High Street, Baldock, SG7 6AX (Templars).

Proposal: *Retention of change of use of first and second floors to residential sheltered housing accommodation to provide 19 en-suite rooms and one office for a temporary period of three years.*

MOA's opinion is that the 10 rooms that are currently in use are acceptable, but more are not. Informed cllrs that they felt vulnerable leaving their name and address on the online comment form.

Seconded by MOA2 who lives very close to Templars. She has contacted Cllrs Muir and Weeks regarding the subject. She objected to the previous planning application and objects to the current application. Has numerous issues with the tenants. Loves Baldock, but the current situation is very distressing. Objected and listed numerous issues, including Templars' occupants using their address for fraudulent reasons. Stated that both applications have noted there will be no impact on neighbours, but this is not true.

MOA3 put in an objection to the planning application. Has received a notice from a third party that his comments were invalid and that they need to resubmit - no word from the Council about this. MOA3 thinks the location of the property is unsuitable for what it is being used for, however he is not personally affected.

MOA4 attends dance classes at the church hall. Regularly there is a group in the church yard, who MOA4 believes to be associated with Templars and appear to be dealing drugs. This has been going on for 4-5months. There was an incident recently where a man collapsed – he had been kicked out of Templars for being disruptive. MOA4 concerned that there aren't community officers walking around like there used to be, and if the application goes through the situation is likely to get worse.

Cllr Weeks noted he put an article in the In Your Doorstep magazine. The planning application is going to Committee, Cllr Weeks stated he will speak as Baldock people want him to (For or Against).

He understands that some people seem to be afraid to register a complaint due to thinking their details will be made

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public and noted this is *not true. ***Update: Misunderstanding. If a comment is made on the NHC website the commentor's name and address will be published.**

Cllr Weeks has received one comment for and 29 against the application and shared some of the comments he has received from residents, which echo those of the MOAs present. Cllr Weeks stated he will speak against the application and if anyone would care to join him to add their voice please let him know.

Cllr Muir informed the audience that he is a reserve on the Planning Committee. If a Conservative councillor can't make the meeting, he will step in. He is going to ask someone to step down so he can take part.

Has spoken to several residents as well as the Planning officer dealing with the application, so he has the full facts. Members of the public who objected to the first application want to know if the objections stand for the second. Cllr Muir explained that the first planning application will be heard, followed by the second - members of the Committee will take on board everything that has been said.

Noted that anyone who wishes to speak at the Committee meeting can do, for up to 5mins – however there is only a five-minute timeslot. If more than one person wants to speak they will share the five minutes. MM noted to Karen that he has suggested she should speak. The Planning officer will go through the report, then will note if statements are correct etc.

Cllr Muir asked MOA4 to expand on the drug incident and asked if it was reported to the police.

MOA4 informed Cllr Muir that the incident was reported to the police and stated his concern about the lack of supervision of the residents of templars.

Cllr Muir informed the audience that originally there was someone who looked in on the residents from time to time, but due to his request someone is now supervising full time.

MOA4 concerned that one man isn't enough, as seemingly evidenced by issues in the town.

Cllr Muir explained how police operate regarding drugs issues. Police will follow a person to see who they contact/meet with, then they will follow that person and so on up the chain as far as possible. Months later there will be a drugs raid. Cllr Muir asked MOA4 for his name and said he would contact the Chief Inspector to find out what is happening regarding the specific incident.

MOA4 worried that the people just move on when they are caught. The churchyard of an evening is a problem area to walk through safety wise.

The discussion came back to the planning application.

Cllr Weeks again stated that he was against the application but noted that some councillors might be in favour.

Cllr Willoughby explained that he is on the Planning Control Committee and Deputy Executive for Housing and Environmental Health. He explained that he can't speak on the issue due to being on the Planning Committee, but shared that Housing oversee Haven First and other similar organisations. Regardless of how the Planning turns out, Cllr Willoughby will discuss the issues with the housing organisations.

Cllr Muir shared that the Planning meeting is likely to be in August or September.

Ashley to email those in attendance with the date.

Anyone who wishes to speak at the Planning meeting about the Templars application should email Ashley, who would send them the process for speaking.

Cllr Tyson explained that he is Vice-Chair of the Planning Control Committee so is unable to speak on the matter. Wanted to make it clear that there is not a way to be anonymous when making an objection. Names and addresses will be made public.

MOA2 noted issue with online form – doesn't submit.

Cllr Tyson asked that any comments be emailed to planning.control@north-herts.gov.uk.

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MOA2 glad that the subject of anonymity when submitting objections has been made, her objection has been submitted with some trepidation, but she felt the need to press on due to how much her family's life is affected.

MOA4 noted they received a letter saying the objection to the first Planning Application will not carry over. Glad that there will be a meeting in the next few months but wants to know if there is anything that can be done in the meantime.

Cllr Willoughby said he would be looking into matters and hopefully something happens before the Planning Committee, regardless of what does or doesn't happen at the Committee.

CEO Ashley enquired if MOA2 was given a reference number every time she contacted the police.

MOA2 noted that she doesn't phone the police for every incident, just the more severe ones.

CEO Ashley stressed that it is important to report as much as possible.

Cllr Weeks summed up by asking as many people as possible to comment for or against the application.

MOA3 enquired if The George is linked to Templars.

Cllr Willoughby explained that the properties have the same owner, but their use is not linked

Councillors' understanding is that the flats at The George are long-term lets.

MOA5 wanted to understand how there are two planning applications, but the activities are already happening.

Cllr Muir explained that permission has been granted for the current use, but the application is to have more rooms.

MOA2 stated that they weren't consulted two years ago, she wasn't aware of its change of use.

Cllr Muir explained that the Government gave councils money during Covid to help get people off the street.

MOA6 asked about BA4 and the Local Plan

Cllr Muir explained that the Inspector hasn't done his plan yet, however it's imminent. If he agrees there will be 14000 houses in the whole of N Herts. At the moment, the idea is that there will be 3591 in Baldock - 3300 on county land. Cllr Muir has been speaking to officers about what councillors want. There will be consultation – one during the week, one on a weekend about ideas they would like to submit. Hopefully officers will take on all those points. Hopefully, the district council will come to an agreement on it.

Cllr Jarvis commented on the railway bridge and Norton bridge.

Cllr Muir explained that BA4 is not in the local plan because it's not on greenbelt land.

CEO Ashley explained the minutes will be emailed out.

MOA6 enquired if the Planning meeting from two years ago would be online.

Several councillors confirmed.

Town Talk closed at: 7.13pm