

Garden Communities Parish Liaison Group.. PC Report 19.08.24.12.1

1. This is an interim report as the last meeting held on 1st May 2024
2. The next meeting of the Parish Council Liaison Group will be 2nd September 2024. This will be a briefing session to discuss important updates.
3. Chris Ashman Executive Director for Place, a leading driving force of the Garden Communities has now left. Council CEO Alistair Cunningham will be absorbing the role.
4. Garden Communities Charter has received endorsement from
 - a. Bellway, Bromford and Mansfield Partners which together are the North Ashchurch Consortium.
 - b. Northway Parish Council
 - c. Gloucestershire Rural Communities Council (GRCC)
 - d. St. Nicholas Church Parish Council.
 - e. Full article can be seen on TBC website <https://tewkesbury.gov.uk/developers-and-community-groups-come-together-to-sign-garden-communities-charter/>

5. Garden Communities Infrastructure taken

- a. Ashchurch Bridge over Rail (ABoR) is being resurrected to unlock first phase of the Garden Communities.
- b. TBC have entered into a conditional sale agreement to purchase land at Northway Court Farm if planning permission is granted.
- c. Planning permission for the bridge will be the responsibility of the developers to secure. Unlike the previous application, this application will NOT be for a standalone bridge (Bridge to nowhere) but will also need to address the relevant planning policies for the surrounding development, and the bridge.
- d. TBC will build the bridge and is in discussions with Homes England to secure grant funding to include improved bridge design costs.
- e. Costs for the bridge, road and closing Grange Road level crossing will total up to £20M. The intention is to ensure as much money as possible is available to deliver community infrastructure, reflecting what the local community has asked for.
- f. North Ashchurch Consortium (NAC) have showed plans for a local road connecting new communities east of Aston Cross with Northway and **avoiding the congested A46 and junction 9.**
- g. Also including significant community infrastructure
 - i. Primary Schools
 - ii. Local Centres
 - iii.
 - iv. Health Facilities
 - v. And space for a Secondary School and Supermarket.
- h. Alistair Cunningham OBE said: (abridged)
 - i. The bridge is needed for the Garden Communities development to proceed, considering the way forward, particularly after the judicial review in 2023.
 - ii. TBC are stepping in to ensure the bridge remains a viable option and to secure grant funding to deliver the scheme.

- iii. The cost of securing land and funding for the bridge, will over time be recovered from the developers, which will then be reinvested in not only the GC initiative, but also the town centre and Tewkesbury as a whole, for more community infrastructure.
- iv. It should be made clear that TBC's involvement does not conflict with the role of the Local Planning Authority.
- v. The council are in the best position to bring the bridge forward due to their relationship with Network Rail.
- i. See Appendix 2 below for more details or from TBC website
<https://tewkesbury.gov.uk/helping-to-optimize-infrastructure-delivery-within-garden-communities/>

6. ARPC Chairman, made a statement in response which can be seen in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1 - Tewkesbury Borough Council's Garden Communities Charter has received endorsement from developers and community groups alike as the first group of signatories are announced.



Back row (l-r) Mark Thorne, Bromford; Martha Mundy, Garden Communities Programme Co-ordinator, Robert James, Bellway Front row (l-r): Gary Belcher, Bromford; Jonathan Dibble, Garden Communities; George Bossom, Mansfield Partners

Bellway, Bromford and Mansfield Partners (which together form the North Ashchurch Consortium), along with Northway Parish Council, Gloucestershire Rural Communities Council and St. Nicholas' Parochial Church Council have each signed up to the charter's nine development principles.

Some organisations have signed up at meetings with the Garden Communities team while others have been signing up to the charter digitally, through the Garden Communities pages on the council's website.

Council Leader, Cllr Richard Stanley, said: "We're delighted to finally be able to announce these signatories to the charter. During the pre-election period, there are rules about what we can and can't do, and several things had to be put on hold. It's a very encouraging step to announce the first community leaders and committed developers supporting the principles of the charter."

The charter states that "By supporting this charter, we set our expectations of the delivery of the Garden Communities to ensure these are the priority and developers can ensure the principles are met."

A new approach to the delivery of the Garden Communities programme was approved by Tewkesbury Borough Council in July 2023. The programme includes a commitment to increased community engagement and better collaboration with partners and developers. The charter was developed to set out the council's expectations and aspirations for the Garden Communities. It will serve as an agreement between all parties, on the principles by which development will be guided.

Robert James, on behalf of the North Ashchurch consortium, said: "We're pleased to support the principles set out in the Garden Communities Charter. Our vision for North Ashchurch is in harmony with the aims of the charter as it seeks to deliver a vibrant, healthy and happy place for people to live and work in this beautiful area on the edge of the Cotswolds."

Mike Barnes, Chairman of Northway Parish Council, which neighbours the northern area of the proposed development, added: "The Northway Parish Council supports the aims and intentions of the Garden Communities Charter. It is our fervent hope that the proposed development will also give serious consideration to the wider issues (that of flooding and traffic management) both within this development and beyond."

The nine principles in the charter are:

- Maintain existing communities alongside the development of new areas, reflecting local character.
- A strong identity and character of place.
- Interconnected water infrastructure (ponds, brooks, streams, and rivers).
- Carbon-neutral communities and building sustainably for climate resilience.
- Great green spaces for people and wildlife.
- Sustainable wider connectivity.
- Integrated live, work, play communities.
- Owned and rented homes, housing types and densities supporting diverse communities.
- Promoting community ownership and longer-term stewardship.

Appendix 2 - Tewkesbury Borough Council has committed to ensuring that critical infrastructure is delivered ahead of, and as part of, housing growth within its Garden Communities programme.

Reflecting the necessity of a bridge to unlock access to the first phase of the Garden Communities, the borough council has entered into a conditional sale agreement to purchase land at Northway Court Farm, Tewkesbury, if planning permission is granted.

Importantly, unlike the previous bridge project – colloquially known as the ‘bridge to nowhere’ – on this occasion the Council is securing the ability to acquire the land needed to enable the bridge to come forward as part of planning applications that will deliver housing to meet the local need.

Having listened to concerns raised about the previous bridge project, the council will not be submitting a planning application to deliver a ‘standalone’ bridge. The responsibility of securing planning permission now lies with developers as part of their broader planning applications, and they will be required to demonstrate the validity of the overall scheme within the environmental, and other relevant, planning policies not addressed previously.

If planning permission is secured by the developers, the council will build the bridge and is in discussions with Homes England to secure the necessary grant funding for this, including the cost of an improved design.

Without this proactive approach, the cost of this essential infrastructure – including the bridge, road, and the works required to close the Grange Road level crossing, which could total up to £20 million—would negatively affect the viability of the project. The intention is therefore to ensure as much money as possible is available to deliver community infrastructure. This plays a particularly important role in making a Garden Community and reflects what the local community has asked for.

This move by the council aligns with the emerging masterplans that are coming forward for the Garden Communities, with recent illustrations by the North Ashchurch Consortium showcasing a local road that would connect new communities east of Aston Cross with Northway, linking with existing routes into Tewkesbury town centre and avoiding the congested A46 and Junction 9, along with significant community infrastructure including primary schools, local centres, health facilities and space for a secondary school and supermarket.

Tewkesbury Borough Council Chief Executive, Alistair Cunningham OBE, said: “We know from our previous work that a bridge is required to enable the Garden Communities development to proceed, and we have carefully considered the way forward, particularly after the judicial review in 2023.

“We are stepping in to ensure the bridge remains a viable option and to secure grant funding to deliver the scheme. In securing the land and funding for the bridge, we will, over time, be able to recover the costs from the developers and reinvest this additional funding into not only the Garden Communities initiative but also the town centre and Tewkesbury as a whole. This approach should ensure the developers can deliver more community infrastructure.

“It is important to be very clear that our involvement in this scheme in no way conflicts with the role of the local planning authority in assessing any applications that should be received. Development, particularly involving rail infrastructure, is extremely complex with long lead-in times, and the relationships developed by the council with Network Rail over the past few years means the council is in the best position to bring the bridge forward in a timely manner.”

Appendix 3 – ARPC Chairman statement to BBC Radio Gloucestershire

Ashchurch Rural Parish Council (ARPC) are already aware of the application for central government funding of c£20m to finance the construction of a bridge over the main rail line to replace the existing level crossing. The intention is for the bridge to facilitate construction of around 4000 homes and additional infrastructure north of the MOD site in Ashchurch as part of the Garden Communities concept plan.

Supported by neighbouring Parish Councils ARPC successfully led the fight through the courts against the previous application for the bridge to nowhere mainly due to the failure of the previous administration to comply with planning and environmental regulations when granting themselves planning permission.

We welcome the initiatives by the new administration and developers to engage with ARPC however we remain concerned about the whole project and in particular the flooding and transport effects on the existing communities as well as the ecological and heritage implications. As such we will be carefully observing and analysing any future planning applications.

The proposed new road over the bridge will effectively run parallel with the A46 and connect to the B4080 via Hardwick Bank and the B4079 with both of these roads connecting in Bredon. However there are no solutions as to what happens to the c6000 to 8000 vehicles generated by the development once they access these two B roads. There are currently limited options as to where it can go all of which will have significant implications for communities in Ashchurch Parish and other surrounding communities including Tewkesbury, Northway, Bredon and Kemerton. There is also the prospect of rat running through the development due to the congestion on the A46 compounding these effects - again with limited solutions.

We understand that analysis of the potential transport effects combined with the already committed development in Ashchurch including c1500 homes, Dobbies Garden Centre and the Retail Outlet Centre most of which have yet to become available and/or operational is currently underway. Naturally we will be very interested to fully understand the results of this analysis and how these were generated I.e. output is dependent upon the input.

We also note that whilst there are plans for building homes there are as yet no substantive plans for perhaps the less profitable employment development including industrial use within the site which is fundamental to any Garden Communities programme. This can only compound future traffic congestion and thus simply exacerbates our concerns.

Ends