

SECOND REPORT OF LANGLEY STEERING GROUP AUGUST 2014

to the
LANGLEY COMMUNITY CENTRE COMMITTEE (LCCC)

INTRODUCTION

Our starting point is that Langley needs a new Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion. In our first report, we concluded that fundraising would not raise sufficient money to pay for this, and recommended that an 'enabling development' [the building of houses on an appropriated site in the village] should be used to produce necessary funds.

We, and the Langley Community Centre Committee ('LCCC'), have been in agreement that such a site should be a brown field one, and that a green field site should be avoided. It is therefore not particularly surprising to us that there has been a campaign (and petition) against the use of a green field site, as this follows our own initial view.

The problem is that there are only two possible brown field sites in Langley, and neither of them is available to us. We have therefore been asked by the LCCC to consider and to recommend a possible green field site. However we recommend that, before the village is asked to vote on whether it would accept a green field site to pay for a new Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion, there should be further investigation of fundraising to see whether the need for an enabling development can be avoided.

Once this investigation has been completed, our proposal is that there should be a public exhibition. At this, the LCCC should 1) recommend the location of a new Village Hall, 2) display plans for a new Hall and Pavilion and 3) recommend that the building costs should be paid out of fundraising, or that an enabling development will be necessary, and 4) if an enabling development will be necessary, display plans of what they propose.

Villagers can then be asked to vote on whether they would be willing to accept an enabling development in order to achieve new facilities. In our view, the project should only then be allowed to proceed to the next stage if at least 70% of villagers vote in favour.

We set out our detailed recommendations below.

HISTORY

We previously recommended in our report dated 28th of November 2012 (which is on the Parish Council website www.essexinfo.net/langleygreens/ under "Organisations") that an enabling development should be proposed for the Greenall Barns brownfield site near Duddenhoe Grange to raise £425,000 to pay for a new Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion on the present site.

The LCCC accepted our recommendation, but in September 2013 the owner of the Greenall Barns site backed out. At about the same time, it became apparent that the

Church of St. John may be closed and sold for housing if not taken over by the Village for community use.

Given these two developments, the LCCC asked us to investigate and recommend an alternative enabling development which would need to be on a green field site, and to reconsider our previous rejection of the Church as Village Hall.

We believe that it is relevant in considering the idea of a green field site that there have been many houses built on green field sites on Upper Green in the last 38 years (see Plan "A" attached) and also that a large number of us have extended our gardens over green field sites.

We remain of the view that fundraising would not raise sufficient funds to replace the Village Hall on the present site. It may however do so if the Village Hall moves to the Church because of available grants.

QUESTION ONE: Should the Church be converted for use as our Village Hall or should there be a new building on the present site?

The Diocesan Advisory Committee ("DAC") have made it clear that they are keen for the Church to be converted for use as a village hall. They have explained that the Chancel would be retained for church services, and the Nave would be used for larger religious events, including weddings and funerals. The DAC will pay for a feasibility study and will apparently agree to removal of the pews and will authorize adequate parking to the west and east of the churchyard. The Nave is a similar size to the one at the converted church at Wicken Bonhunt, and would be sufficient for the needs of Langley. In our view there would need to be an extension for a kitchen, storage and toilets.

Having said this, as the Church has not yet been formally declared redundant, it will continue to be managed by the Parochial Church Council ("PCC") who will have control of the process. They have invited the LCCC for representation and input, but can choose to go it alone if they wish.

We believe that there are 2 main advantages in the PCC and LCCC cooperating and forming a joint Committee to take the matter forward. Firstly the PCC will have to accommodate many views if they are to gain the overwhelming majority of Village support needed to achieve DAC backing and access to grant funding. Secondly, if the LCCC is fully involved, there would remain the possibility of using an enabling development in the event that it is concluded that obtaining grants and fundraising will not prove to be adequate.

Langley Cricket Club are anxious to maintain a cricket team in Langley and believe that a new pavilion, whether combined with a new village hall on the present site, or as a separate building if the church option is chosen, will reinvigorate membership. There has been an increase in the number of children living in the village who would benefit from the sporting activities which the new pavilion would encourage. It would also provide a kitchen and bar area, of particular importance for the village fete. The continued existence of a cricket club would ensure the ongoing maintenance of the village green.

We therefore hope that the PCC will recognise that the replacement of the Cricket Pavilion should be an essential part of their plans, if they are to achieve the level of Village support which they will need. They will also, in our view, need to address the issue of security of tenure if a large majority is to support a move of the Village Hall away from its present location.

Our recommendation

1. The LCCC should accept the invitation of the PCC to participate in their proposal to convert the Church to Village Hall.
2. A decision on whether to pursue the Church option further, as a possible alternative to a new building on the present site, be delayed until completion of a feasibility study, drawing up of plans and preparation of costings. In the meantime grants and fundraising can be investigated. We suggest that a time limit expiring on 30th April 2015 be set for LCCC purposes for completion of these investigations.

QUESTION TWO: Where should a possible enabling development be sited?

We have again considered the two possible brown field sites in Langley, but neither is available. We therefore remain with the problem of recommending a green field site.

We attached plans and ecology reports for each of the three sites marked “B” “C” and “D”.

Our deliberations concluded the following:

“B” site 1 – Old football pitch

The pros are:

- it is not much overlooked by other houses
- it would suffer the least environmental damage
- it would be cheaper and require a smaller scale housing development
- there would be little damage to common land for access.

The cons are:

- unsightly impact on first entering the Village
- it is on a narrow road with danger for pedestrians entering and leaving the Village
- it would extend Village envelope

- there would be an increased risk of infill development
- it would provide no amenity land for community use.

“C” site 2 – Kangels

The pros are:

- there would be modest harm to common land at entrance,
- it may prevent substantial housing development on this site in future
- it would provide amenity land on each side for community use.

The cons are:

- this site is seriously overlooked by houses on both sides
- new housing would be more exposed to view because of the slope of field
- the land area is greater and would be more expensive, needing slightly more and larger houses
- there would be the loss of parking for Langley fete.

“D” site 3 – Long Ley

The pros are:

- it is our view that it is best placed in the village and a natural extension to existing Long Ley houses
- the site is not overlooked by other houses, and would be well shielded from the road by preservation of the hedge (although it may be that some rooftops would be visible)
- it will provide more desirable amenity land for community use, perhaps as meadow or trees at the south end and for recreation for older children at the north end
- the 7 houses proposed would be 3 pairs of semi detached suitable for young families and 1 bungalow
- the land falls away so that new housing will be less visible from the east
- it may prevent substantial housing development on this site in future.

The cons are:

- the ecology reports obtained have identified this site as being the most interesting for flora and fauna, although nothing rare has been reported as requiring conservation, and the project would give opportunity to improve the pond and habitat, and to channel water into it.

Our Recommendation

We recommend that the Long Ley site be chosen for an enabling development to be proposed to the village in the event that it becomes clear that fundraising would be insufficient to pay for a Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion. We also recommend that the access roadway, with a surface of shingle, should be across the southern end of the present children's playground (as shown on the site plan marked "D") to minimize damage to common land. In making this choice of site, we recognise that steps must be taken to ensure minimum damage to wildlife and that the suggestions for enhancement of the pond in particular should be followed.

SUPPLEMENTAL POINTS

1. There is no suggestion of access to the Long Ley site from the current roadway in front of the Long Ley houses and we will not support this.
2. The amenity land at each end of the Long Ley site would belong to the Parish Council and could have a covenant against any future development.
3. £425,000. from an enabling development on the Long Ley site would be made available to the village for building costs wherever the Village Hall is located. Any surplus would belong to the Village, but any shortfall would have to be met by fundraising.
4. The building of the new Village Hall and the Cricket Pavilion would be put out to tender and the tendering process would be carefully managed.
5. Pelham Structures have an option agreement with the owner of the Long Ley site to purchase it and to build the houses on it. However they would agree to assign this to another developer if this is the wish of the Village. They otherwise would make no profit from the project unless they tender successfully to build the Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion.
6. We do not believe that an enabling project would set a precedent for more building in Langley (see letter "E" from a planning expert attached).
7. We do not believe that there is any likelihood of the planners granting planning permission for building on any of the 3 sites save with the strong support of the Village as part of an enabling development. However, if planning policy were to change in future, it may be relevant that the planners have allocated a possible 38 to 63 houses to the Kangels site and 32 to 54 houses to the Long Ley site (see www.uttlesford.gov.uk search SHLAA and click Appendix 8).

8. Although sufficient time should be allowed to establish whether it is realistic to raise sufficient money to pay for a new Village Hall at the church as well as to replace the Cricket Pavilion, there is time urgency in that the Option Agreement on the Long Ley site is only valid for two years to 09 June 2016.
9. Contrary to rumours, no one will make an undisclosed profit from an enabling development and all figures would have to be made public as part of the planning process.

SUMMARY

We recommend that:

1. Before progress can be made, more information needs to be obtained on the merits of moving the Village Hall to the Church. We hope that this can be pursued jointly by the LCCC and PCC.
2. When these matters have been dealt with, it should be possible to make a decision on 1) whether to propose to the Village transfer of the Village Hall to the Church and replacement of the Cricket Pavilion, or the building of a new joint Hall and Pavilion on the present site, and 2) whether to propose that this should be paid for by fundraising or an enabling development.
3. If the decision is to recommend that the Church option be pursued and that this can be paid for by grants and fundraising, it will be possible to give up the idea of an enabling development, and to pursue fundraising jointly with Langley Cricket Club to pay for a new Cricket Pavilion.
4. If however the decision is to recommend a joint Village Hall and Cricket Pavilion on the present site, or to move the Village Hall to the Church but without it being possible to pay for this by fundraising, it will be necessary to recommend an enabling development to pay for the project.
5. In this event, we recommend that the Long Ley site be chosen, with access across the southern end of the present playground, for the potential enabling development.
6. Once the LCCC has concluded these investigations, the LCCC's proposals for the location of the Village Hall, for funding and, if necessary, for an enabling development, should be put forward at a public exhibition, and followed by a vote of all villagers. A vote in favour of at least 70% should be required if the matter is to be pursued further. Even if there is a 70% vote in favour, it is not a forgone conclusion that planning permission will be granted
- 7.

Dated

Signed

Judith Churchward

Ben Dennett
Harold Harvey
Phil Rouse
Richard Vallance
Alison Whitehead