

‘500 houses for Hassocks’

Gleeson Development Consultation on the Land North of Clayton Mills

Planning and Design Workshop – 5th December 2017

Organisation

The workshop was run by Feria Urbanism, an independent Consultant being retained by Gleesons. The nature of the event was scaled down by Feria in the light of the very small number of acceptances received prior to the event, and it was run using a ‘focus group’ approach.

49 local organisations had been invited to attend, but apart from the Feria Team of four staff and a Gleeson representative (who listened but contributed no comments) there were only 7 attendees including Fred Maillardet (Hassocks Amenity Association), Gordon Marples and Michelle Binks.

Introduction

Richard Eastham (Feria) gave a substantial introduction acknowledging that this was a very contentious development proposal and acknowledging that many local residents did not wish to take part because of the risk of attendance being interpreted as support. He assured the audience that this would not be claimed (and had confirmed this in writing to FJM before the meeting). The introduction focused on today's challenge of designing and constructing houses to meet local requirements and included recognition of the need to ensure that the design was not only best for the development itself, but did not exacerbate any problems in adjacent areas.

The need to take into account traffic flow issues, local bus routes, local train services, and the availability of footpaths and cycle tracks were covered in general terms as was the need for adequate school places locally together with health care facilities including GPs. Feria had visited Hassocks and acknowledged some obvious challenges – e.g. narrow country lanes with no footpaths and resulting parking problems both within and around the village. Recent examples of both good and bad estate design were shown and the introduction finished with pictures of 8 examples of Hassocks vernacular architecture as observed by Feria staff.

I consider that the introduction appeared to recognise all the many issues local residents are concerned about except for there being no mention of flooding or any appreciation of the traffic constraint imposed by the *single* rail bridge restricting easy east/west travel by road.

Focus Groups

The attendees were asked to choose one of two tables and I chose to work with Michelle Binks and two Feria staff on one table. Michelle and I were then asked to work through a series of worksheets covering issues like existing facilities (i.e. where the shops, car parks

schools, health centre, railway station, parks and open spaces, pubs, etc, were located), access and movement (i.e. how do you move from residential areas to the shops, from the schools to the parks, from the railway station to the pubs, etc), and the design of housing communities (i.e. what we considered good as opposed to bad design both locally and elsewhere). I introduced the existing flooding concerns (Feria had not heard of Operation Watershed!) and indicated in detail where flooding occurs in the village. Michelle focussed on the need for more and better footpaths and off-road cycle tracks to facilitate safe movement around the village and between local villages particularly for children. We then jointly elaborated on the other current issues like the shortage of school places, the lack of facilities for the young (e.g. no dedicated Youth Club building) and the extreme traffic congestion throughout the village at school opening and closing times and during the 'rush hour'. We pointed out the quite absurd suggestions in the transport study (which had obviously been written as a desk exercise by a person who had never visited Hassocks) where additional traffic was suggested for two of the most congested roads in the village!

Above all we emphasised that it was the *large scale* of the current proposal, following as it does on a number of substantial developments that have been approved in and around Hassocks in recent years, that so shocked the village. The scale is simply disproportionate to the existing and currently proposed facilities and infrastructure.

Summary

I consider that Feria had responded to what they clearly recognised as very strong local opposition to the proposal by preparing thoroughly for this event. They had anticipated virtually all the issues that were raised (with the exception of flooding and the lack of multi rail crossings) and can be left in no doubt as to the multitude of major issues needing to be addressed if *any* further development (irrespective of the scale) is to be successfully implemented.

Feria confirmed that the workshop participants would be able to input to the draft report. The final report submitted to Gleasons would be in the public domain.