

An e-petition containing 1392 signatories was submitted to the Council on 8 October 2015. In accordance with the provisions of the Council's Constitution, it was requested by the lead petitioner that the petition be reported to, and debated at, a full Council meeting. The petition read as follows:

*'We the undersigned petition The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to retain all the land at Ray Mill Road East, Maidenhead, currently designated as public open space, under council ownership and ensure that the majority of the land remains so designated and incorporates nature as an integral feature for the benefit of future generations'*

The petition was introduced by Mark Shephard, Development & Property Manager. He explained that the 6 acre site (former playing fields to St Luke's School) was acquired from Berkshire County Council in February 1997 for future residential development.

The majority of the site was bounded by residential property. The site could be accessed via an open pedestrian pathway leading from Blackamoor Lane. It could also be accessed to the side of the council owned Mill House Family Centre on Ray Mill Road East (RMRE). The site was split west to east with two different zones of flood risk. The western part of the site was the lower Flood Risk Zone 2 (3.7 acres) while the eastern part of the site was the higher Flood Risk Zone 3 (2.3 acres).

Options for the future use of the site were considered at Cabinet in October 2013. Options included the provision of adult social care, a new school and residential development. Residential development was the preferred option. Cabinet updates were provided in February 2014 and July 2014. Commercial property consultants, GVA, were appointed to undertake an initial feasibility assessment of the site. The feasibility study confirmed the suitability of the site for residential development. The report discussed delivery options available to the Council including self development or a direct land sale of the site (subject to Council conditions as to the form of development). The indicative scheme layout from the feasibility study included 64 dwellings comprising 26 four bed houses, 22 three bed houses, 12 two bed flats and 4 one bed flats. It is proposed that approximately 50% of the site (32 units) would be developed for private sale housing, 20% as shared ownership (12 units) and 30% retained by the Council as private rented units (20 units).

In March 2015 Cabinet recommended a Development Manager be appointed to market the lower flood risk site and identify a suitable development partner to the Council. The remaining 2.3 acres of the site (contained in the higher risk flood zone 3) would be professionally landscaped to provide high quality public open space. A development partner was expected to be confirmed in the first quarter of 2016. The site would be subject to a full planning application.

Jan Stannard spoke on behalf of the Lead Petitioner. She stated that the land at RMRE should be taken out of the Borough Local Plan for two reasons. Firstly, the land was to be sold off as surplus yet Maidenhead had a big deficit and did not meet Section 74 requirements. Secondly, the document stated that there were no known conservation issues, but there was a toad colony of regional importance. Professional landscaping would decimate the colony. Misleading statements meant

the consultation had been undemocratic. The council had a manifesto pledge to maintain and improve open spaces; residents expected it to act with integrity and honour. Residents were asking the council to remove Deerswood in totality from the plan and designate it a local green space.

Councillor Jones and McWilliams arrived at 7.55pm.

Members viewed a short video in relation to the petition.

Councillor Smith commented that in the two years since the plan was put into place he as a Ward Councillor had not heard from petitioners. He had received one call from a resident who objected to the development on the grounds of overdevelopment and building on the flood plain. The absence of comment did not surprise him because the open space policy showed that the large majority of residents were happy with the provision of open space as it existed. He highlighted that he used Town Moor and North Town Moor both of which were decent sized pieces of open space. The 2008 review, pre-Crossrail and crystallisation of regeneration plans generally agreed that demand for new private and social housing exceeded supply. RBWM policy was brownfield first, but if it did not give serious consideration to developing all land, it would lose planning appeals and therefore lose control.

If we build up or out, the ratio of people to open space would shrink. The open space policy needed to be coherent with emerging Local Plan and with rising housing pressure. The policy needed an injection of imagination as it was about quality as well as quantity. If ratio fell below an unacceptable level then it would need to be addressed.

Notwithstanding the desirability of reviewing the Open Space Policy, standing policy guidance was clear that 'existing open space should not be built on unless clearly shown to be surplus to requirements'.

Councillor Dudley commented that the site was adjacent to Boulters Meadow. He had attended a number of meetings with local residents over the last few months; their concerns had been in relation to bulk and scale. The council was going through a procurement route so it retained a degree of control about the bulk and height of the design on the site. As elected politicians, councillors had to make difficult decisions. He was a great lover of the natural habitat and 83% of the land in the borough was Green Belt, but there was also a great number of people who wanted to live in the area. Younger people wanted the opportunity to buy their own home. The council had a responsibility to balance the interests of the natural environment with the ability to get people on the housing ladder. Therefore the council was looking to bring forward proposals for a mixed supply of housing on the site.

Councillor Ms Stretton, spoke as Principal Member with responsibility for public open spaces. She was aware of the toads as she knew a resident who lived in a property backing onto the site. It would give her great pleasure to give unequivocal support to the petition however life was not so simple. The council was continually required to balance the needs of different groups. The petition described the site as being designated as a public open space. This was not the case. The site had been

described in 2003 as an important urban open space. There were 200 hectares of designated open space and parks in the borough and the council had a good track record of managing these areas. She was currently on working on two areas in Eton Wick and Shurlock Row to bring them into public access. A motion later in the meeting would clarify the overall picture and reassess the site in question. The national housing shortage meant the council was required by the government to provide minimum housing levels despite constraints. Every potential piece of land needed to be assessed on its own merits. She assured residents that the information presented at the meeting would be taken into account in the Borough Local Plan and any planning application for the site.

Councillor Ms Stretton proposed the following motion:

- i) The Council notes the petition and acknowledges the concerns raised
- ii) The Council notes the extant Royal Borough Cabinet decision from 26 March 2015 to develop part of the land
- iii) The Council notes the opportunity for representations to be made to any subsequent planning application
- iv) The Council notes the motion relating to Public Open Space on tonight's agenda

Councillor D. Wilson stated that the administration wanted to protect the Green Belt. The piece of land in question was purchased by the council in 1997 for future residential development. The site had constraints. He fully supported the motion by Councillor Stretton.

Councillor Werner stated that he was disappointed with the motion and would not be able to support it. There was a need for housing to give people the opportunity to get on the housing ladder but he could not see how this would happen with the housing as proposed. The affordable housing split was 80%/20% but he did not know of any teachers that could afford 80%. Unless controls and covenants were put n the properties would be bought as buy to lets. Other similar sites such as Braywick Park were being divided up by competing interests. The golf club was also being put up for sale. There was a deficit of public open space in the area. The toad colony could be of regional importance and needed to be researched before any decision to sell the land for development. He suggested that at least the decision should be deferred until a proper open space audit was undertaken.

Councillor Brimacombe commented that the public speaker had said the toad population would be decimated by landscaping. It would be important to register the needs and be sympathetic to biodiversity.

Councillor Dudley commented that the council had levers to positively affect the distribution of housing stock in the borough. Twelve of the units would be shared ownership, a successful national scheme. The council was also able to offer Two5Nine properties for private rent. The council was also looking to develop another scheme of direct discounted affordable rental properties.

Councillor Ms Stretton commented that no developer would buy until planning permission was in place therefore the land would not be sold until that happened, which would require ecology surveys.

Councillor Burbage highlighted that no member of the opposition commented on the proposals when they went through Cabinet in March 2015. The pressure to provide housing was putting incredible pressure on land in the south east. The Green Belt protected the borough to some extent but sites such as RMRE were rare.

Councillor Beer commented that before he was a councillor 20 years ago, the council had been a housing association. The stock was then sold off to the tune of £6m which funded council projects including the borough share of TVAC. The council had lost sight of the fact that it was a housing association responsible for funding housing for people. Large house sin particular in the western end f the borough were totally out of the reach of ordinary people. Even shared ownership was a bridge too far. There was a need to focus on rentals. He appreciated the 712 figure but asked where they would go? The Davies Commission had highlighted that few local authorities had addressed housing need of 70,000 extra houses for Heathrow expansion. This would spill into neighbouring boroughs in the countryside. The council should not be releasing areas of green field or green space because when more people were living in the area more open space would be required. Crossrail would bring people into work in Maidenhead, but not necessarily to live there.

Councillor Werner commented that in March 2015 he did not know much about the site in question, thanks to the campaign he now understood the implications.

It was proposed by Councillor Stretton, seconded by Councillor D. Wilson and:

**RESOLVED: That:**

- i) The Council notes the petition and acknowledges the concerns raised**
- ii) The Council notes the extant Royal Borough Cabinet decision from 26 March 2015 to develop part of the land**
- iii) The Council notes the opportunity for representations to be made to any subsequent planning application**
- iv) The Council notes the motion relating to Public Open Space on tonight's agenda**

**45 Councillors voted in favour of the motion – Councillors Michael Airey, Natasha Airey, Malcolm Alexander, Christine Bateson, George Bathurst, Hashim Bhatti, Phillip Bicknell, John Bowden, Paul Brimacombe, Clive Bullock, David Burbage, Stuart Carroll, Gerald Clark, John Collins, David Coppinger, Simon Dudley, Marius Gilmore, Jesse Grey, Geoffrey Hill, David Hilton, Maureen Hunt, Mohammed Ilyas, Richard Kellaway, John Lenton, Sayonara Luxton, Ross McWilliams, Marion Mills, Gary Muir, Nicola Pryer, Eileen Quick, Jack Rankin, Colin Rayner, Samantha Rayner, Wesley Richards, MJ Saunders, Hari Sharma, Shamsul Shelim, Adam Smith, John Story, Claire Stretton, Lisa Targowska, Leo Walters, Derek Wilson, Ed Wilson and Lynda Yong.**

**Three councillor voted against the motion – Councillors Beer, Mrs Jones and Werner.**