

ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED – EGM 22nd January 2021

A document that sets out in detail the obligations of the Wellcome Trust (WT) to mitigate the impact of the £1.3bn Genome Campus extension was published by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) on December 18. The document is a legal contract between the council and the developer, which outlines those obligations.

The S106 between SCDC and WT includes plans for road improvements, a cash sum for the extension and refurbishment of the village hall, employee travel plans, landscape mitigations etc as well as the timescale during which this is to happen. Hinxton is bound to be significantly affected during and after the period of development, which runs for 20 years and aims to build 1500 homes – in the first instance to be sold or rented to campus workers – on the east side of the A1307 opposite the current campus based on the west side. It would lead to more than doubling the current staff from 2,500 to 6,800.

HPC has consistently objected to the size and scale of the development since the application was made in December 2018, opposing the more commercial elements of the proposed scheme while supporting the work of the Trust. However, planning permission was granted 15 months ago because the national interest was deemed to outweigh the 'significant' harm caused by the development.

"The Parish Council (HPC) then focused on the S106 on which it was consulted but was not a signatory. It was understood by some councillors that HPC would be given sight of the final draft of the S106 but this did not happen.

It is a long, complex document. Some elements of the agreement are seen as positive and some as negative, both within and without HPC.

WT won't build any community infrastructure on their site until the 500th house is built. To offset the pressure on Hinxton's current facilities it has offered £567,000 towards the cost of enlarging the village hall and associated costs, more than twice what HPC originally sought but which still leaves a potential small shortfall of £25,000. In addition it has offered a 2.2 acre strip of land from the allotments down to the river for 20 years, or whenever their own communal facilities come on stream, at a peppercorn rent and the use of the WT site's community facilities.

However, there are concerns over the covenants, agreed by SCDC and Wellcome within the S106, which aim to prevent housing coming on to the open market too soon. It has been clear from the outset that the houses would eventually come onto the open market but the mechanism by which this is meant to be a slow and gradual process – the 'housing lock' – is seen as too weak, which could have a further impact on the village.

The only way now to get SCDC to reconsider its decisions regarding the WT application is by applying to the courts for a judicial review of the way SCDC has managed the process. There is only a six weeks window to make that application after the publication of the S106. Because it went up on the SCDC site on December 18 HPC has only until 29 January to lodge an application.

Some villagers have indicated that they strongly support such an idea, some Parish councillors are wary. Both of these positions were put at the HPC meeting of 11 January. It should be borne in mind that the outcome of all legal actions is uncertain and the PC may have to bear up to £15-£20k in costs if we lose, which would largely be recovered if we were successful.

In the first instance the HPC has committed £1500 for a legal opinion from counsel to give HPC the best possible advice before taking the decision as to whether to go ahead.