**Notes and Actions from Meeting between Bidwells and the Parish Councils of Great Denham and Biddenham. Meeting held Friday 2nd October 2020, via Zoom**

In attendance

Bidwells: Jack Hawkesworth, Senior Rural Surveyor; Giles Dobson, Managing Partner Rural Team.

Blackstocks: Billy Moran, Account Manager

Great Denham Parish Council: Donna Parsons (Chair), Vince Arthur, Louise Evans

Biddenham Parish Council: Peter Chase (Chair), Graham Bates, Harry Fowler

The Borough Councillors Jim Weir (Kempston Rural), Roger Rigby and Jon Gambold (Bromham and Biddenham) were invited to attend the meeting, but unfortunately were not available this morning.

The meeting was chaired by Peter Chase who opened the meeting.

1. Intros and Purpose of the meeting

Peter outlined the purpose of the meeting for the Parish Councils:

* To understand the actions and proposed plans for the Golf Course land in Great Denham.
* To get an update on the long-term strategy/direction and intentions regarding the course,
* To get assurances on the short-term details on the immediate management of the land and club facilities, and the security of these.
* To talk about any other activities affecting both/either parishes that Bidwells/their clients may impact.

Jack Hawkesworth outlined Bidwells’ purpose for the meeting as:

* To provide an update on previous communications
* To inform the Councils about the plans moving forward for next 3 months, what will happen with the asset, the management and security of the asset.

He also advised that since the meeting on 4th September he had had a further 15 min conversation with Richard Fuller, who confirmed that communications should go via the Parish Councils but keeping him in the loop. He also informed the meeting of a further call with Jim Weir (Borough Councillor) and Brian Cox of the Save the Golf Course residents group on Monday 5th October.

1. Peter Chase set the scene for the discussion that the Parish Councils are the elected tier of government which represents the residents of Great Denham and Biddenham; they are aware that there is a lot of value associated with this land and residents naturally care deeply about the future of the land and club and what it will be used for. They are very much affected, and are concerned in the short term about security and anti-social behaviour etc, and in the long term the environmental impact on them of any change to the land.

The overall concern of residents is that the land remains an urban green space. The Parish Councils, whilst understanding the landowner has alternative plans to the current golf course, are surprised and somewhat sceptical that the landowner believes their plans are more profitable, and would hope that if these are not successful then a return to a golf course would be considered. Both Parish Councils (and residents) are clear that the land must not now, or ever, be sold for housing.

1. Update on plans for next 3-6 months

Jack Hawkesworth outlined the details of how the land and buildings will be repurposed in the next 3 months:

* The Clubhouse: He confirmed that they have a prospective tenant who wishes to operate a children’s’ nursery. They are 95% there with agreeing Heads of Terms, which will include retention of some of the outside area, e.g. car park. These will then be submitted to the Trustees. A Planning application will be made in due course regarding the change of use, following which any necessary conversion work will be done.
* The Compound: The plans for this are not as advanced as the Clubhouse. A planning application for a change of use will be submitted to enable it to come to market to be let. The intention is to let to one individual company, although subletting may be permitted.
* The Land: they have a retained contract farmer who will be engaged in the upkeep and management of the land (keeping it under control, tidy etc); there will be sheep grazing. A tree-safety survey is in the process of being done, including the maintenance of the footpaths. The fenced areas will be created as a strip/graze method, using electric fencing as the fencing method; the fencing will be moved with the sheep as they move around the site. Hay crops will be taken from the flatter areas of the land next year. They remain fully aware of the public access and footpaths.

Planning applications will be made separately for both properties.

Peter Chase asked about the features of the golf course, e.g. bunkers, and whether these would be filled in. Jack confirmed that this is not in the immediate plan.

Donna Parsons asked about timings for these plans; Jack confirmed that the plan for the Clubhouse is to have the planning application for change of use submitted before Christmas.

1. Security of the site once vacated

It is recognised that there will be a period of time between the current operator vacating and the new operator. Jack confirmed that they will be engaging a local security firm who will hold the keys to both Clubhouse and Compound; the new clubhouse operator will have access to those premises under licence. There will therefore be people who can attend regarding any issues of security.

**Action: further meeting to be held next Friday 9th October with the Parish Councils to update on security arrangements.**

Peter Chase highlighted the issues of drug dealing and traveller invasion that affect both parishes; this will create a very difficult situation as this is not public land. He stressed that this is an extremely important aspect that the Councils and residents need reassurances over, particularly as incidents can happen very quickly. Donna Parsons proposed that Bidwells inform the Police of the vacant properties so that they are aware of potential issues.

Jack advised that he has already dealt with a number of similar issues on the Ouse Valley development; Bidwells has a strong relationship with private enforcement officers who will be instructed at the drop of a hat. If necessary preventative measures, e.g. ditches, will be put in place. In terms of the car park they will look to block it in some way to prevent vehicular access.

**Action: Jack to inform the local police team of the changes and potential issues due to vacancy arising from these changes.**

**Action: Clerk to provide contact details for Rural Policing team**

1. Other questions arising at this point

* Peter Chase asked about the potential for future use of the Clubhouse building for community activities once the Golf Club has vacated and it is used as a Nursery.

Jack could not confirm, but this was a possibility and the new operator would engage with the community on this.

* A number of footpaths cross the golf course land and are well-used. They will require attention and maintenance as often overgrown and must be allowed to be kept open.

Jack confirmed that there are no plans to change the status of any paths (including the permissive path noted by Vince Arthur) and he would add a survey of the footpaths to be done at the same time as the tree survey mentioned above. Bidwells will do what it is required on any areas that are their responsibility, and would welcome any requests they receive.

* The access to the land must be proactively managed, but it is important that any electric fences are not close to the footpaths as the area is heavily used by young families and dog walkers.

Jack confirmed that any fencing will adhere to any regulations regarding footpaths and their proximity.

* How will the grazing plans work?

It will depend on the weather; the sheep are likely to come on at the beginning of the year; they will go off when the hay is cut and return later.

* Peter Chase asked whether these plans will earn more money than as a golf course.

Jack advised that they believe these plans will earn more money, and there will be less risk with three sources of income from the assets.

**Action: Jack to include footpaths in the proposed tree survey.**

1. Longer term plans and use of the land

Giles Dobson stated that Bidwells would welcome any feedback from the Councils and residents about what they would like on the land. This is an open and honest invitation. The changing subsidy regime invites greater public access, e.g. birds, bees, bats, wildlife corridors, etc. At the moment we don’t have the detail on what subsidies may be available. This is likely to be 2-3 years’ time, but it would be very helpful to learn what residents might want to see in terms of public access of the land, a field, park area etc.

The Councils are open to anything that creates a permanent stamp on the land, makes it available as an amenity to the public and keeps it open and accessible: a future partnership with the Trust to operate the land as an amenity is likely to be well-received by residents. It will be important to maintain the separation/distance between the villages of Great Denham and Biddenham.

1. Other areas of land managed by Bidwells in the parishes

Donna Parsons enquired about the 2 areas of land within the Country Park – the “retained loop” – that have recently been submitted in the recent Call for Sites for the Local Plan.

Jack Hawkesworth advised that Bidwells do not have much to do with this site; it is not managed by Bidwells planners. The day to day management of the site is Bidwells responsibility but no other involvement.

**Action: Jack to investigate and report back to Donna.**

Peter Chase enquired about the land west of Gold Lane as Bidwells had acted on behalf of the Manners family.

Jack advised that Bidwells had acted on behalf of Lioncourt, but the individual who dealt with this has left and may have taken this project with him.

**Action: Jack to confirm situation to Peter.**

PC also asked about the status regarding the Coffin Path field, as this was close to the end of the 3-year moratorium period during which it would not be cultivated. It would be helpful if another 3-year period could be agreed, as this is not causing any issues at the moment; the fear is that any plans to cultivate will result in the path being ploughed up and this is a very sensitive issue.

Jack confirmed that there are no plans for cultivation at the moment.

**Action: Jack to advise whether another 3-year period can be agreed.**

1. Future communication and meetings

A meeting to update on security arrangements was agreed for next Friday afternoon (9th October).

**Action: Clerk to set up meeting on 9/10/2020 for update on security meeting.**

It was agreed by all to hold a regular monthly meeting between the Parish Councils and Bidwells; it is particularly important to have regular meetings at this time so that residents can be kept up to date. Timing of future meetings will be co-ordinated to take place before Council meetings.

Bidwells have engaged Blackstocks to assist them with preparing and issuing statements to provide these updates. They will communicate via the Parish Councils, and hope that the information can be published by the Councils.

Future attendance – to be Parish and Borough Councillors. Inclusion of residents will be kept under review.

**Action: Clerk to set up schedule of meetings and arrange next meeting on 2nd November at 12.30pm.**

**Notes made by Clerk, Great Denham Parish Council**

**2nd October 2020**