Knightley Road Public Meeting Summary

Meeting Overview

The meeting was convened by Gnosall Parish Council to provide information on the outline planning application and to explain why the Parish Council had decided to support the proposed Knightley Road housing development and to answer questions from residents.

Cllr Gregory, Chair of both the planning Committee and the Council, gave a slide presentation outlining the wider planning framework and the current challenges recent changes in legislation have presented, how this impacts national and regional planning, and how the change in building targets, moving from 300 homes per year to 831 per year, has impacted the Borough. This increase has reduced Stafford Borough Council's housing land supply from an 8-year supply, to a 2-year supply. One of the consequences of this decrease in housing land supply is that being outside the settlement boundary no longer carries the same weight. Instead, applications must now be judged on a much broader range of considerations with settlement boundaries no longer providing sufficient grounds for refusal. Changes in Government policy have shifted significant housing growth from urban areas towards rural settlements, and because Gnosall is designated as a Key Service Village, with existing services and good road connections via the A518, it is expected to receive further housing growth regardless of local opinion.

Cllr Gregory reiterated several times that Gnosall Parish Council are a statutory consultee and do not determine planning applications. As a statutory consultee, the Council may comment in support or to object to a planning application, but the final decision rests entirely with the Planning Authority, Stafford Borough Council, and is ultimately them, through planning officers or the Planning Committee that grant or refuse planning permission.

Consultation Period

Q. Why are there multiple deadlines being circulated.
A. The initial deadline for comments was the 24th of July. The Parish Council felt this did not give sufficient time to call and hold a Public Meeting and give residents time to digest the presented information, so requested an extension. An extension to the 31st of July was granted, but SBC had not updated their website. The Council were advised at the meeting that the deadline has since been extended again to the 12th of August. The Council have since confirmed that this extension was requested by Stafford Borough council as they have yet to complete their determinations within the statutory 12-week period.

The Origins of the Development Proposal

Q. When did the Council engage with the developer.
A. The Council was approached by Central & Country Development Ltd in mid-2023 with the offer to form a Project Board and consult on the proposed 100 % affordable housing development on their newly acquired site at Knightley Road. The Parish Council declined to engage initially because it had only just begun reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan and did not believe it was the appropriate time to enter into discussions.

Stafford Borough Plan Consultation

Q. Why was the Knightley Road site selected.
A. During consultation on the emerging Stafford Borough Local Plan, the Parish Council believed Gnosall might receive only one major housing allocation and two principal sites were under consideration:

- the Staffordshire County Council land behind Lowfield Lane, intended for conventional market housing; and
- the Knightley Road site, proposed primarily for affordable housing.

A Public Meeting was called in 2024 to give residents the opportunity to comment on the two proposals. Despite passionately expressed opinions, no clear consensus was reached.

Pre-Project Board Formation

Q. Why did the Council agree to work with the developer.

A. The Council were initially sceptical and asked whether they could operate a trial Pre-Project Board for six months to see whether the developer genuinely intended to work collaboratively with the community, before making a commitment either way.

The Council contacted other Parishes who had worked with the developer previously and the feedback was consistently positive, with other councils saying the developer had honoured its commitments, that residents had genuinely influenced the designs via the Project Board and that the consultation had been meaningful rather than superficial. These conversations gave the Parish Council confidence that a collaborative approach might work, and they agreed to trial run.

The Pre-Project Board was formed in December 2024, with up to ten residents from neighbouring areas including Tulip & Daffodil, Knightley Road and surrounding estates taking participate alongside representatives from the Parish Council.

Q. How was this information shared as several residents said they had no notification regarding the formation of the pre–Project Board and that representation had been too limited.

A. Notice of the intent to form a pre-Project Board had been circulated via a variety of methods including the Council website and notice boards. Up to 10 residents attended the first meeting, but there is a practical limit to the numbers that can partake in boards like this and the number for the board was capped at around 15 including developers and Councillors. A spread of resident presentation was sought.

Formal Project Board Formation

Q. When did the Council agree to formalise the arrangement.

A. Following the six-month trial period, the Parish Council representatives concluded that the developer had acted in good faith and recommended to Full Council that a permanent Project board be established.

The reasons being evidence that the developer had:

- listened to concerns,
- shown a willingness to alter layouts following discussion
- belief that affordable housing was genuinely needed in the community
- the unique opportunity to influence a development before, during and after planning permission had been granted.

The Council agreed to the establishment of a formal Project Board by a majority vote at the Full Council meeting in May 2025.

Q. Whether the Parish Council had placed too much trust in the developer.

A. The Council believes it carried out due diligence prior to the pre-Project Board and had no reason to not trust the developer. The Council had never been asked to collaborate on an application before and believed this was an invaluable opportunity to help shape a planning application to achieve the best outcome for residents.

Q. Why work with the developer.

A. The developer could have submitted a planning application without engaging with the Council, as is usually the case. The Council believes this is an invaluable opportunity to be able to influence the proposal in a way that achieves the best possible outcome for the community.

Housing Allocation

The initial proposal was for 100% affordable homes, which the council believe are greatly needed in the Parish.

Q. Where is the evidence of this need, the Housing Needs Survey does not support this.

A. It was conceded that the Housing Needs Survey had been deeply flawed, and that despite well over 3000 surveys being distributed, only 73 had been returned. There is however anecdotal evidence of a need for affordable homes with interest in applying to the waiting list when the Project Board formation

was announced, request from both for young people in the parish leaving home and older people wishing to down-size, and it is evidenced in the Neighbourhood Plan Survey the data for which is still being analyzed.

Q. Why was the allocation changed from 100%.
A. During pre-application with Stafford Borough Council, the developer was informed that a 100% affordable housing application would not be supported as the Borough Council could not see the evidence to justify such a scheme. The council indicated that it would support a more conventional development comprising 60% open market housing with 40% affordable housing.

Q. Could the scheme become 100% affordable.
A. The developer intends to start construction with the affordable homes, and should the demand indicate there is a greater need than provisioned, the developer may apply to Stafford Borough Council to seek permission to convert later phases into additional affordable homes. This could not happen automatically, and a further planning application would be required.

Q. Who would be allocated the affordable housing.
A. The Project Board would determine the eligibility criteria once planning permission had been granted, but priority would be given to residents of Gnosall Parish, people with connections to the village, people working locally, residents from neighboring rural villages, before extending it to edge of Stafford.

Q. What is the mix of housing.
A. This will be determined by the Project Board once the application is approved. These are affordable homes, not council homes, with a mix of shared ownership, rent-to-buy, affordable rent and social rent linked to local incomes.

Local Facilities
Q. Why is there more development when the school, doctors etc. are already oversubscribed.
A. Two residents responded that the school is currently undersubscribed and has just reduced its class sizes by 30%.

Flood Risk
Flooding in the Parish is a key topic and one the Council has highlighted on many occasions.
Q. It is acknowledged by Stafford Borough Council that the existing attenuation ponds serving the Tulip Drive and Daffodil Drive development were not constructed to the approved planning specification, why is this development being supported.
A. The developer has committed to over engineering the attenuation ponds on the Knightley Road site by more than 65%, reducing the surface flood water run-off from the existing 17L/second to less that 5l/second. This is significantly less than the current surface water run-off and should improve conditions downstream in the Gnosall floodplain.

Q. Why is the proposed connection into the T&D surface water drain.
A. Severn Trent Water determine where the developer will connect into the surface water drainage system. The T&D system is an adopted system including main pipes, manholes, hydrobrake chamber, head wall to each pond and head wall to hollies common, the attenuation ponds are not adopted. The Knightley Road system will be adopted by Severn Trent Water.
The developer has committed in writing, that they will not connect into the T&D system until such time as the T&D attenuation ponds have been corrected, and have offered to do this at their own expense. providing the landowners give permission.

Q. How can the developer connect into the T&D system if they don't own the land.
A. The developer has committed to rectifying the situation, though there are obviously challenges to be overcome. The Council's support was agreed subject to the flooding issues and drainage issues being resolved. These can only be resolved by Stafford Borough Council, Severn rent Water, the developer and landowner of T&D. The Parish Council ultimately have no influence over this.

Q. Should SBC impose a Grampian Condition on the application.
A. The Council acknowledge that flooding represented one of the major issues raised throughout the consultation, but that the information supplied by the developer indicated that the completed development would discharge at a significantly lower rate the existing agricultural land and on that basis, would actually release water than the current field.
The developer has committed that the Knightley Road development would not connect into the existing attenuation system until deficiencies had been rectified.

Farmland vs alternative Sites
Q. Why is valuable farmland being used for development rather than brownfield sites.
A. The current Government planning policy and housing targets meant that many rural greenfield sites were now under increasing pressure, particularly around Key Service Villages such as Gnosall. The Chair noted that several surrounding landowners had submitted farmland for potential future development through the Local Plan process.

Why the Parish Council Supported the Knightley Road Proposal
Having explained the wider planning context, the Chair explained that the Council's decision to support this planning application was based on a mixture of pragmatism and principle. In an ideal world, no new development would be permitted in Gnosall, however that is not realistic in today's planning environment.
The Council's view is that:

- The landowner could have submitted a planning application without involving the Council at all.
- By engaging with the developer from the outset, the community had gained an unusual opportunity to influence the design and layout of the scheme.
- The Project Board has already secured several amendments to the proposal in response to residents' concerns, including greater attenuation and larger spacing between new builds and existing properties.
- Affordable housing remains an identified priority for many residents, despite disagreement over the scale of need.
- As Gnosall is a Key Service Village, it will see development.
- It is better for the Parish Council to help shape development rather than simply react once plans have already been submitted.

Overall Conclusion
The meeting highlighted the complexity of balancing national planning policy, local housing need and community concerns.
The Parish Council sought to explain why it believed constructive engagement with the developer represented the best opportunity to influence development in Gnosall. Residents, meanwhile, challenged both the evidence underpinning that approach and the practical implications of the proposal, particularly in relation to flooding, consultation, trust and affordable housing.
Although few minds appeared to be changed during the evening, the meeting provided a comprehensive public forum in which both the Parish Council and residents were able to explain their positions in considerable detail before the planning application progressed through Stafford Borough Council's decision-making process.