

RAF DAWS HILL

INTERIM REPORT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Jeff Bishop: BDOR Limited: 25th July 2012

Over the last 9 months or so there has been a programme of community involvement around the proposed RAF Daws Hill development. That work is continuing and will do so until mid autumn this year. This is an interim report only. It can describe the approach taken, the activities delivered and some of the outcomes but most of the conclusions about the content of the final project and its relationship to consultation results will not be available until later.

Requirements and Standards

When the work started there were no actual requirements on the applicant/developer, Taylor/Wimpey (TW), to undertake involvement; the Wycombe Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) could only encourage this. Nevertheless TW chose to do so. Involvement in the parallel Development Brief work, a Council responsibility, is also not mandatory but the SCI states that it should be done. The planning team have therefore also chosen to do this.

Since April 2012 when the Localism Act came into force there has been a formal requirement for managed involvement by applicants on projects of the size of RAF Daws Hill. It is uncertain whether or how this requirement might apply to the RAF Daws Hill project because the majority of work was started before the Act came into force.

The SCI provides some very basic standards for good involvement, as does some national guidance. The commitment by both parties to put in place a programme of involvement, and the approach being taken, accordingly with the SCI and the requirements in the Localism Act.

The Agreed Programme

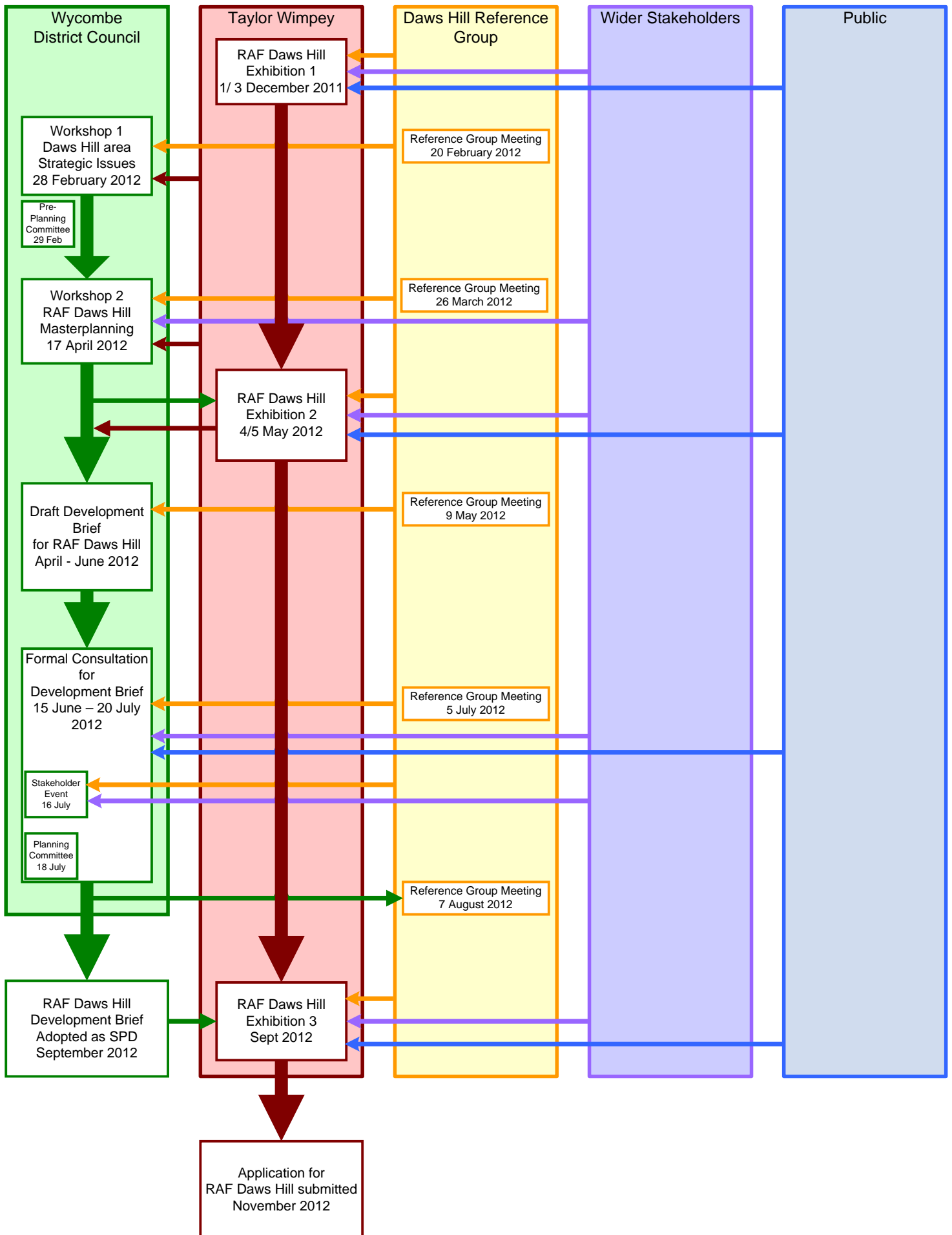
Although a first major involvement event was run by the TW team in December 2011, early in 2012 it was agreed that there should, from there on, be a single, coherent, overall programme aimed at both the application and the Development Brief and therefore shared by TW and the Council. At this point I was brought in to advise on the programme and, where necessary, support and deliver it. (The use of an independent external facilitator is recommended in the latest government guidance.)

The programme that emerged was genuinely innovative, not in its details or methods but in the fact that it was a single process and shared in a collaborative way between the two main parties. This is a real strength and, despite some inevitable challenges in agreeing and delivering it, this should be borne in mind in considering the eventual outcomes.

A diagram of the programme is attached. The first two vertical columns refer to the work of WDC officers and TW. The next three columns refer to the three main targets for involvement. One is the Daws Hill Reference Group (DHRG) that has met throughout the process and will now continue to meet. By definition that is a relatively small group but they have been involved throughout. 'Wider Stakeholders' includes the DHRG members and, according to the activity, involves others. They meet at specific times. The final column is the general public, invited to contribute in various ways at drop-in sessions, electronically, via representations etc. The boxes show the main activities, stages or events and, via the arrows, who is involved. Not all DHRG meetings are shown and the later stages have been adapted slightly since the diagram was produced. Such adaptation is normal as projects proceed and lessons are learnt and, in this case, entirely appropriate and mutually agreed.

As suggested, this is a basically sound process in principle that meets appropriate standards.

Daws Hill Area Engagement Process



Delivery to Date

The following specific activities have taken place to date (so the regular DHRG meetings are not included). Full information on all of these, and DHRG meetings, will be in the final report.

- **Exhibition 1, December 2011:** This was run entirely by TW as it was prior to the agreement to a joint process. It was a drop-in session held in the Daws Hill site office. There were display boards and a questionnaire which people could fill in. No proposals plans were show; the questionnaire focusing on community responses to the basic mix and to key issues about the site and its development. Transport emerged as a key issues; slightly less significant was the general lack of support for any employment uses.
- **Workshop 1, February 2012:** *(From here on all events were discussed between both parties.)* This was run by WDC and aimed at addressing 'semi-strategic' issues, especially traffic and transport across a broader area than just the site and its surroundings. It was well attended and was run very much as a workshop. It generated a number of agreed traffic/transport initiatives (mostly more minor ones) but also highlighted and did not resolve, some broader issues about the suitability of the site, because of perceived traffic problems, for the suggested quantum of development.
- **Workshop 2, April 2012:** This was also run by WDC. It aimed to highlight emerging issues and ideas (from earlier events) and to use these to enable people to interrogate and take forward an initial masterplan option produced by TW. Once again it was well attended and run as an active workshop. General agreement emerged on some aspects (eg. character and design) and there were varying views on some issues (eg. access to the site but especially the inclusion of employment uses). The two key issues or concerns were about traffic and transport (again) and tree retention (people wanting more retained than had apparently been shown). With both these key issues in mind there was a general feeling that the site could not accommodate the suggested 550 houses.
- **Exhibition 2, May 2012:** This was run by TW, again in the site office. As before, it comprised an exhibition and questionnaire. The display included an initial masterplan option developed further in part as a result of what emerged from events above. Almost 250 people attended and 68 forms were returned. Given earlier comments, the first three main questions covered traffic related issues and were fairly specific. The clearest results were in support of a bus hub on site and extra capacity for a left turn out of Daws Hill Lane onto Marlow Road. Views were split on walking and cycling improvements and on the final question about where best to locate the local centre.
- **Development Brief Consultation, June/July 2012:** This was a semi-formal consultation run by WDC. The draft Development Brief had been amended as a result of all the activities above. The new version was promoted very widely through conventional methods to encourage primarily individual responses or responses from key groups. A workshop was also held with around 20 key stakeholders. The consultation period has just finished so no final results are available, although a quick study of representations made to date (over 100 of them plus notes from the workshop) suggests an acceptance by some that a certain level and type of development might be appropriate, but not the proposed level, and a continued feeling of discontent about the traffic and transport solutions and the evidence submitted on those issues.

Daws Hill Reference Group meetings were held on 19/9/11, 17/10/11, 21/11/11, 9/1/12, 20/2/12, 26/3/12, 9/5/12, 5/7/12.

Towards the end of this period the Daws Hill Residents Group decided to apply to develop a formal Neighbourhood Plan, the prime aim being to influence the scale and nature of the RAF Daws Hill project. It is understood that those involved have continued to engage with the programme as above so it is doubtful if the Neighbourhood Plan idea has (yet) had any effect on the involvement work.

TW are planning at least one more event prior to submitting their application.

Summary

At this interim stage it is my view that the overall process is working well and has the potential to deliver a robust final set of results. There are clearly some issues that are not yet resolved or agreed, on which significant community/stakeholder concerns remain and on which the very local community in particular feel they have not been listened to properly. These include the volume of development, tree retention (and hence developable area), the inclusion or not of some form of employment uses and (less significantly) the location of the centre and school (both of which link to questions about Abbey Barn South). The overarching concerns, however, which then affects most of the issues above (and others), are about traffic and transport. This is about very local and even on-site issues, immediate area issues and issues affecting the whole of what is termed the Southern Quadrant. Almost all consultees remain unconvinced by what is currently proposed, either in the Development Brief (and its evidence) or the emerging TW plans.

Some of the above are matters of principle – can the site really accommodate the suggested 550 or so houses? Some are more about the mix of development and some about the form of development and its details (if important details) such as design. Some of these belong equally to WDC and TW, some to one party alone. However, although it is not the aim of community involvement to satisfy all community concerns, thorough and defensible explanations will be needed at final report stage to justify certain decisions, for example to still include employment uses (if that proves to be the case) and, most especially, about any traffic and transport proposals and the linked issue of total house numbers. Beyond that and other more strategic aspects, the consultation is already informing, one hopes improving, the emerging proposals. It is hoped that this will now continue.