

* MDA 14/11/08

Estate sale details still not known

IT looks as though the people of Newton Abbot will have to wait another month at least before learning details about the sale of the Seale-Hayne estate.

Scottish company Buccleuch Property was named in May as the preferred bidder for the 385-acre former agricultural college.

Gordon Isgrove, director of GVA Grimley, handling the sale for Plymouth University, said that legal discussions are on-going.

'We said it would take a little while. An announcement is likely to be made in December. If we still can, we will do so,' he said.

Buccleuch Property is the commercial property arm of the Buccleuch Group originally set up to manage the Duke of Buccleugh's vast Scottish estates. It has significant property interests in Australia, the US, Europe and the UK.

The downturn in the property market is likely to have put a damper on negotiations as building sites are mothballed awaiting better times.

Meanwhile there are unconfirmed rumours that the former agricultural site has been sold at the knockdown price of £2.2m.

The University of Plymouth is referring enquiries to its agent, GVA Grimley, which declined to comment on the commercial aspects of any deal.

It is understood that the duke was planning to sell the upper part of the

by LINDSEY SILL

site, including the listed buildings, to Raven Audley Court to be developed into upmarket retirement homes.

This may now be in doubt as Raven Audley Court has sold off its subsidiary Audley after it made a loss of £2.3m after tax in 2008. A 75 per cent stake in Audley was sold for £15m to a newly-formed subsidiary of the Moorfield Group called AC Holdings SARL.

Ian Goodwin co-founder of the Seale-Hayne Futures Group which wants to see the site retained for education, said that the property downturn could work in their favour.

He said that part of the site is held in a covenant restricting its use to education. Although the group cannot afford to enforce it, it may cause difficulties when councillors consider any application.

'I don't see how the covenant can be ignored. The planning authorities might be quite interested in the fact that it was an educational site and that there was a covenant. We have written to Buccleuch and Audley Court explaining our position.'

However, Teignbridge Council is under pressure to find development sites for the 15,900 new homes the Secretary of State says must be built by 2026. In its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment the Seale-Hayne site is marked for potential development.

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THE CRITICS SPEAK OUT...

'Next time, we'll demand transparency'

Ken Tuckett, parish councillor and spokesman for the Kingsteignton Residents Environmental Awareness Group, which has campaigned against the Northern Option, said: 'The Independent Examination found the proposed Kingsteignton Northern Urban Extension development 'unsound'.

'It cannot deliver the required affordable housing and there is no cogent evidence that it can deliver the essential infrastructure and community requirements.

'The risk of flooding and highway matters are genuine concerns which are not adequately addressed.

'There was a lack of community involvement.

'The policy has fundamental flaws which cannot be rectified by a change of wording or by an early review.

'How do our councils respond? Cllr Connett, leader of Teignbridge Council, declares the Kingsteignton development will not be scrapped.

'TDC development control committee discussed the inspector's report at a meeting from which the public were banned.

'The sound on a webcast of a Devon County Council development control committee debate on the

Kingsteignton development, chaired by Teignbridge Council executive member Cllr David Cox, was turned off.

'The two councils have a dilemma: they have been committed to the Kingsteignton development as part of the Bovey Basin Strategy for the past eight years.

'The decision-making in respect of the Northern Urban Extension on land primarily in the ownership of WBB Minerals and Clifford Estates is to rest with TDC.

'However, Cllr Connett and his fellow district councillors should be mindful that how the fundamental flaws of the current policy are addressed to pass the tests of soundness and the extent of community involvement and consultation will be closely scrutinised when the new LDF Core Strategy is submitted to another independent examination.

'Public consultation has hitherto been a thoroughly disingenuous process – the community of Kingsteignton will rightly expect and require full open and transparent public consultation during TDC's preparation of a new LDF policy to provide sustainable and deliverable development for Newton Abbot.

'A stinging indictment of our council'

Jeremy Newcombe, chairman of the Newton Abbot & District Chamber of Trade said: 'Thank goodness that, within this long, drawn out LDF process, some sense has at last prevailed, with the inspector's conclusion that the district council's development plan is unsound.

'The chamber of trade has repeatedly expressed its concern that the direction of growth should not extend so significantly into the land to the west and north of Kingsteignton, with a new local hub, but should be concentrated more around Newton Abbot and spread on to land which is easier to develop and not wholly controlled by one landowner/developer.

'We have been concerned that the nature of the planned growth was dependent

upon an investment that was unlikely to be economically viable and would only be achievable through substantial public subsidy, which was unlikely to be forthcoming, and that the great dream of a high-quality urban extension would not be achieved because of simple development economics.

'The inspector's report is a stinging indictment of our district council's failure both to manage the process of consultation and to achieve comprehensive and reliable outcomes.

'We only hope that they are now big enough to acknowledge their mistakes and to work closer with the chamber of trade and others to produce a new plan to suit the needs of Newton Abbot and the district for the future.'

Do not pass go: 'Unreliable' homes plan condemned

'Half of the core strategies nationwide have been found to be unsound or flawed,' said Steve Robinson.

'That shows there's something wrong with the process.'

'The problem is we've not really been allowed to speak with the inspector and instead have had to go through the Government Office South West.

'We've consulted them all along and they said we had adopted a sensible position and naturally we expected them to have a good idea of what the government wanted.

'So when a single government inspector disagrees, it's very difficult to know how to proceed. Just look at other authorities across the country where the core strategy has been declared unsound – some are incensed.'

It was in June that Neil Pope conducted the formal two-day examination of the core strategy, but in February he had warned the council not to proceed with it. He said it was not ready in the light of evolving government policies and would waste time and money.

Steve Robinson said that was unfair as the strategy had been submitted three months beforehand and it was too late to pull out.

'We had already submitted it in November,' he said. 'What's more, each time the government brought out new legislation which could effect the strategy – such as that published the day before we went to submission – they said it shouldn't delay the process.'

'If we had stopped, it would simply have had the same effect as where we are today, back at square one – only we wouldn't be as clear about what the inspector thought.'

'We needed to know that. It was essential to have his report.'

An attempt to answer some of the inspector's early criticisms – such as the strategy being 'verbose and almost impenetrable' – was to



by **NIGEL CANHAM**

mda.news@internet-today.co.uk

produce what amounted to a slimmed-down version, the Statement of Common Ground drawn up with GOSW.

It had shed 50 pages from the original's 170 but was presented in June only after public consultation had ended.

'The submission of a detailed SCG at this stage... only served to complicate matters,' Mr Pope noted.

He was also 'very far from certain' that the document, although simpler than its predecessor, was any easier to understand.

Mike Haines said: 'The changes were in response to the inspector's own criticisms, which is what I find wrong because he wasn't prepared then to accept them.'

'And if the inspector had wanted people to have the chance to comment on the changes he could have allowed that, although he doesn't agree. This is another example of how inflexible the whole process is. It doesn't enable an authority to get a document through. It more or less fails something and says "go back to the start".'

The element of the inspector's findings likely to rouse greatest interest is his suggestion that the council almost blindly favoured the Northern Option, or Northern Urban Extension, over all others.

He effectively accused the authority of placing all its eggs in one basket and said it was 'somewhat surprising' that most of the earmarked land around Kingsteignton was either greenfield or in a flood plain, dotted with unstable clay workings.

High restoration costs and a lack

of evidence to show how the scheme could deliver affordable housing prompted him to write: 'I have serious doubts the NUE... represents the appropriate direction for strategic growth.'

Why had Seale-Hayne been dismissed? he asked.

And why abandon the Southern Option when the proposed Kingskerswell bypass (South Devon Link Road) had planning permission and contracts were likely to be issued in 2009?

'What the inspector was trying to say was that he felt we still hadn't demonstrated that the Northern Option was the most preferable and that he hadn't ruled out the other options,' said Steve Robinson.

'He felt the Southern Option was possible as there was quite a commitment to the South Devon Link Road. Well, we all know the finances have not yet been committed, but he said he expected contracts to be issued in 2009. What does he know that we don't?'

'Can you imagine if we'd gone in with the bulk of our homes, say 1,500, going into the Southern Option and reliant on the South Devon Link Road? We'd have been told that's not realistic.'

Phil Shears added: 'We've been waiting 20 years or more for that road so you're probably looking at development not starting until 2011 or even later.'

'Development has got to go where it's deliverable now.'

So does the Northern Option remain the council's favoured solution? Not necessarily, apparently.

'No, we're not saying that,' said Steve Robinson.

'That was the option that was deliverable during this time period. There were fundamental reasons why the others could not have been delivered or not been as good.'



PHIL SHEARS, Teignbridge Council's deputy chief executive.

'We're desperate to do the right thing for the community. We're here to serve our community – our officers and elected members are passionate about that, down to every man and woman'

The planning policy which was to regulate massive development across the district has been thrown out by a government inspector.

The Core Strategy, central to the Teignbridge Local Development Framework, has been declared 'unsound'.

Inspector Neil Pope cited unreliable evidence and almost an eagerness to overlook what he said were shortcomings in the council's preferred Northern Option for at least 1,500 homes in Kingsteignton.

He also suggested that the council had failed to communicate with the public.

His decision means years of

policy limbo for the district and the fear that speculative developers could take advantage.

But those who pieced the failed strategy together have defended their roles and criticised the system's inflexibility and the power it gives one man to reject three years' work by host of agencies.

There is no appeal process – it is back to square one.

Teignbridge's deputy chief executive Phil Shears, head of planning Steve Robinson and Cllr Mike Haines, the member responsible for strategic planning, told *Nigel Canham* why they believe the district has been the loser in an administrative lottery...



STEVE ROBINSON, head of planning at Teignbridge Council.

'A report will now go to the Teignbridge executive on October 1 to allow our position to be clarified. Over the next couple of months we're going to find out what the view of members is and exactly where we stand.'

And just as the inspector's report changes everything, so does the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, the government's plan for the wider south west until 2026 and expected to be published in November.

'The likelihood is that the number of new houses in Teignbridge is going to go up,' said Steve Robinson.

'That means our next plan might just not be looking at one option around Newton Abbot, there could be two or three, it just depends what comes from the RSS.'

He suggested it would take until 'at least' 2010 before a new Teignbridge development policy could be adopted, leaving the district with no black and white rules to fall back on when contentious planning applications arose.

'Without an LDF you cannot have the management of the situation we would like,' said Steve Robinson.

'This is an example of how inflexible the whole process is. It doesn't enable an authority to get a document through, it more or less fails something and says go back to the start'

'We can only hope to gain as much control as possible.'

Mike Haines also warned that the secretary of state would be minded to approve applications in a bid to meet higher government housing targets, even if there was strong local opposition.

However, all three men refused to acknowledge that the whole LDF exercise had been a waste of time or money and said that much of what been learned could be carried over.

They also denied there would be any additional costs generated by the inspector's rejection of the strategy – the estimated bill to date is as much as £500,000 according to council chairman Cllr Anna Klinkenberg – because even if it had been adopted, it was always the intention to update it next year.

'That's meant to be the whole benefit of this system,' said Mike Haines.

'The fact you can do something then just update parts of it.'

'It remains our belief that it was the sensible thing to continue with the strategy and then update it afterwards in the light of changing legislation.'

'They said we had adopted a sensible position – so when a single government inspector disagrees, it's very difficult to know how to proceed'

The council is now predicting 'rapid changes' to the national planning system, something it said had been signalled by the government in its demand for more homes.

Planning locally could also end up being handled jointly with other authorities such as South Hams and West Devon.

It is also unclear what the long term implications could be of Exeter's successful unitary bid and the possible creation of a single authority to oversee the rest of Devon, in which Newton Abbot would be the second largest town – for now at least.

'Let's just say there's considerable development pressure on Newton Abbot,' said Steve Robinson.

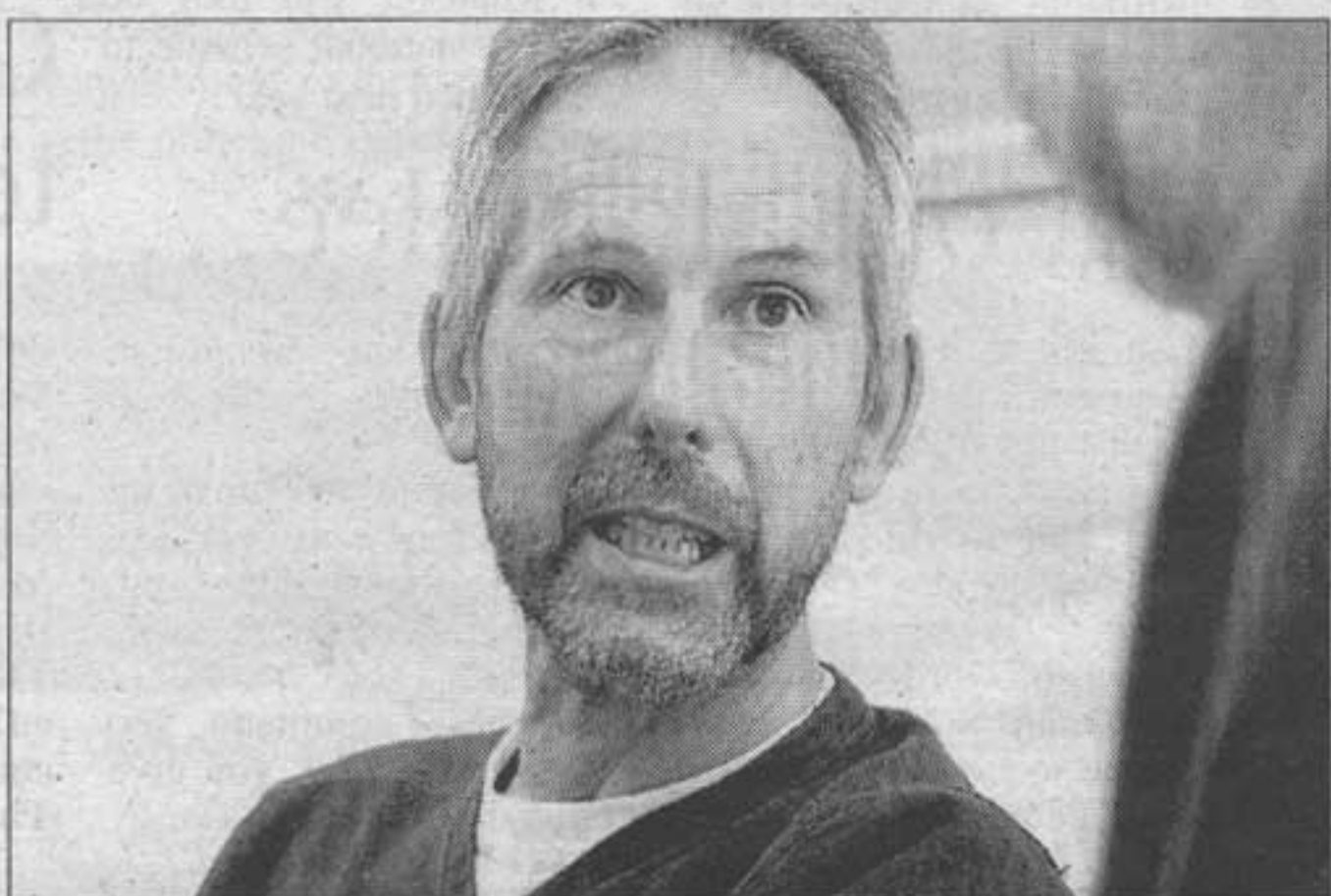
Phil Shears claimed whatever the future might hold, he was clear about his and his colleagues' aims.

'We're desperate to do the right thing for the community,' he said.

'We're not here to not serve our community; our officers and elected members are passionate about that down to every man and woman.'

'I think that particularly applies to our councillors, who of course might not be re-elected if they fail.'

He said it.



MIKE HAINES, member responsible for strategic planning.

COMMENT

LDF process must change

THE news that a single government inspector has consigned Teignbridge's development blueprint to the bin should be of concern to us all.

His decision means that after three years and anything up to £500,000, we are left without a robust planning policy.

Although the council will hobble along with a confused concoction of the old Local Plan and the now aborted Local Development Framework Core Strategy, developers potentially will have a much easier time of it.

Controversial planning applications which historically could be measured against set criteria will now be harder to assess or refuse.

Coupled with the government's demand for increased housing, watch out - there might soon be a new housing estate down the road, like it or not. And in the absence of the Core Strategy, it is unlikely developers will be demanded to improve infrastructure such as roads and schooling.

The inspector has blamed Teignbridge for failing to produce a

Core Strategy that stood up to critical analysis or demonstrate it could deliver the district's needs. He said evidence was unreliable and criticised the preferred Northern Option, saying the case in favour was far from proved.

Many will agree with him, as our special report on pages six and seven illustrates.

They will accuse the council of stupidity, of creating a plan to build more than 1,500 homes on green fields prone to flooding and unstable worked-out clay pits.

The truth is the blame game could go on forever. Whether the council had it right or wrong, it cannot be fair that one man has the power to say 'go back to the drawing board'.

The government has continually moved the goal posts throughout the LDF process and made it almost impossible for authorities across the country to follow the rules.

It's a lottery, with the odds stacked against democracy.

We hope that mooted changes to national planning policy deliver something much better. Soon.

12 Sept 2007

Western Morning News

The Voice of the Westcountry

Act of betrayal

BETRAYAL is a strong word to use, especially when it is directed at such a venerable institution as a university. But we can understand why campaigners who battled to save Seale-Hayne agricultural college from closure would use just that word to describe the behaviour of Plymouth University over the announcement yesterday that the 650-acre campus will be sold off to a developer.

Seale-Hayne was a place of learning for thousands of farmers over many generations. Plymouth University's decision to close it down two years ago met with outrage, both in the local community and the wider agricultural world. Old boys and girls who learned their craft at the college were angry and upset. Many local people were worried about what would happen to the beautiful and unspoilt site, close to Newton Abbot.

Now they know that there is a strong chance it will become a housing estate, against the spirit of what the original trustees who set up the college intended. Times change, priorities change and universities now have to act as businesses if they are to survive. But still betrayal will not be too strong a word to use if, as now seems likely, this site becomes a vast new housing development.

COMMENT

David and Goliath struggle

WHEN Plymouth University announced it was to sell off Seale-Hayne, promises were apparently given that economics would not be the only criterion upon which a buyer would be accepted. The history and nature of the site and its importance to Newton Abbot would also be taken into account.

Agents GVA Grimley are to unveil the marketing programme next Tuesday. So far they are reluctant to say whether they will be aiming it at the big house-builders or towards an educational or institutional use.

At the moment it is not designated as possible development land but that isn't to say that things may

not change in the future.

No prizes for guessing which will be the most profitable. No prizes for guessing what many people in Newton Abbot would prefer.

With altruistic Lifeworks in the wings, hoping to use the site for educating and training learning disabled adults, there is the potential for a David and Goliath struggle developing.

Some former staff have criticised the way university has handled the sale, claiming their methods have fallen little short of skulduggery.

Now the university has the chance to show that it is as good as its word by honouring the history and character of Seale-Hayne.

Letters to the Editor

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Letters should be about 300 words, and may be shortened. Preference is given to those no
Please include a daytime phone number. Email letters must be accompanied by a p

Challenge UoP about scheme

RAYMOND BARTLETT, former Seale-Hayne student, writes:

The Comment (MDA, Sept 7, David and Goliath struggle) appealed to University of Plymouth (UoP) to 'stand by its word by honouring the history and character of Seale-Hayne'.

However, their agent has declared they will consider applications from a property developer, which implies that the UoP intends to do no such thing.

The comment points out that many think the UoP 'methods have fallen little short of skulduggery' – a pretty mild way of putting it.

Much has been said about the wrongs of the closure of Seale-Hayne, but there is one action by UoP which led to all this.

The Charity Commission revised scheme (April 1989) made the UoP the trustee of the Seale-Hayne College Trust charity. In the scheme, a faculty council was established, mostly of former governors of the college, and constituted them to safeguard the substantial assets of the charity.

Specifically, clause 10 stated that any disposal of land was subject to the agreement (or otherwise) of the faculty council.

Well, the long and short is that UoP managed to reconstitute the faculty council from about 16 former governors to five members of its own choice. Eventually, after many assurances that the UoP wished to invest in the college, they acquired ownership

for only £750,000, disbanded the faculty council and, less than three years later, announced the closure of college.

Skulduggery? Legal counsel confirmed that reconstituting the faculty council without reference to the Charity Commission contravenes the terms of the 1989 scheme.

Well, that's illegal isn't it? It would cost a fortune to pursue this through the courts, but if all supporters of Seale-Hayne – and maybe an enterprising journalist – challenged the UoP authorities about this key action, then maybe it will embarrass the UoP into selling to someone with educational intent, like the splendid Lifeworks.

Mayor's Seale-Hayne warning to planners

By LAURA DALE

ldale@heraldexpress.co.uk

NEWTON Abbot Mayor Keith Smith today sent a stark warning to agents putting a landmark college on the open market: "We shall object in all quarters, planning included, to any bids for Seale-Hayne which don't provide educational benefit for the community."

Mr Smith was reacting to the news that Plymouth University has instructed agents to sell the vast 385-acre estate, which could fetch between £5million and a staggering £45million depending on its future use.

Details of the sale are to be made public at a launch on September 11.

Mr Smith said: "If we can remove all the uncertainty people would be much happier. I understand that Plymouth University need to make an economy, but they need to be aware of the community they serve."

The university closed the campus in 2005 when it no longer became economically viable to keep it there and they relocated the teaching and accommodation to Plymouth.

The latest controversial move means the former agricultural college could potentially be sold on to housing developers.

Agents, GVA Grimley will oversee the sale of the site and are holding a series of open days for interested bidders.

Richard Clarke, a partner at Grimley, said: "We cannot put a figure on the site. It has to be put out to tender. What it is going to be used for, whether it's housing or education is down to the local authority.

"It has been a well-known landmark for

100 years and its sale represents an exceptionally rare opportunity to invest in the future of this area."

Mr Clarke said he will outline details of the marketing programme, the package being put up for sale and the opportunities the site offers at the meeting next Tuesday.

The mostly redundant site is currently used for police training, but they will have moved off the premises by Christmas.

Campaigners against a change of educational use for the building say they are surprised by the 'knee-jerk' reaction from the university, which has so far rebuffed any interested parties.

Eirene Williams, who was a senior lecturer at the college and secretary of the Seale-Hayne Futures Group, fears the site could be labelled as brownfield

paving the way for industrial or housing development.

She said: "Things have changed subtly over the past few months. Everything has picked up again. It would be good to see something done with the site.

"There has been little maintenance done on the buildings since the college moved out and there are leaks in the roof and buckets underneath. The quad is a listed building and it should not have been allowed to fall into disrepair.

"We are very concerned and don't want to see the farm split up. It's like selling the family silver once the money has gone you can't get it back."

In recent years, the site has been earmarked for possible development by a number of interested groups including Devon County Council and

Lifeworks, which is part of The Bidwell Brook Foundation, which runs projects for learning-disabled children and young adults.

And last year farming equipment used at the site was sold off at auction fetching £100,000.

Richard Hanlon, chief executive of Lifeworks, said: "We will be putting in a bid which we think will secure the site. We are not being naive and we have done our homework on it. We will put in a realistic price but we cannot compete with the big boys and developers."

They have promised to 'regenerate' the college if their bid is accepted and retain its educational and agricultural roots.

Formal declarations of bids will be in before Christmas with final decisions being made as early as March next year.

College site ripe for housing?

PROPERTY developers may be eyeing up the news that the former Seale-Hayne campus is going on the market, but Teignbridge Council is firm that it wants to see an educational or institutional use continue there.

Plymouth University has instructed agents GVA Grimley to market the 385-acre former agricultural college.

Details of the sale are being kept under wraps until next Tuesday, when a formal press briefing is being held.

An advance notice, however, describes the campus as having 'stunning views across adjoining countryside' and having 'a core of impressive listed academic buildings built around a quadrangle.'

Open days will be arranged for potential buyers, who will be required to put in sealed bids.

Richard Clarke, partner at GVA Grimley, said: 'Seale-Hayne, on the edge of Newton Abbot, has been a well-known landmark for more than 100 years and its sale represents an exceptionally rare opportunity to invest in the future of this most picturesque environment.'

Property developers Per-simmon Homes (SW) Ltd and Cavanna Homes said they were unable to say whether they were interested until more details were announced.

Mayor of Newton Abbot, Cllr Keith Smith, has warned: 'If they [Plymouth University] want to maximise profit for residential development, we will oppose it all the way down the line. I can speak for the town on that.'

Cllr Smith is a member of



by LINDSEY SILL

the Seale-Hayne Futures Group, which wants the site reserved for educational use, as cited in the original trust. But he is nervous that the current uncertainty over Teignbridge Council's planning strategy could make the site vulnerable to a determined bid by a developer.

'I am worried that it may be regarded as a brownfield site and that it could be open to anybody coming forward with a development plan.'

'Developers seem to be using the appeals process rather than the planning process to get their schemes through.'

Teignbridge Council is currently awaiting the Planning Inspector's verdict on its core strategy, which earmarks land at Kingsteignton for large-scale housing development.

Teignbridge Council's deputy chief executive and strategic manager Phil Shears confirmed it would be looking for a continued education or institutional use at Seale-Hayne.

The council has already held discussions with interested parties and said it will continue to listen to fresh ideas.

'While there is no specific designation for its future use, it is important to note that any change of use will

require planning permission, which will be decided through all of our usual procedures, including public consultation,' a council spokesman said.

Two names mentioned in connection with the site have been Totnes-based Lifeworks, formerly the Bidwell Brook Foundation, and Devon County Council.

Lifeworks recently put forward an ambitious vision to turn the site into a specialist training and employment centre for young adults with learning disabilities.

The scheme apparently has the backing of Devon Enterprise Facility, a company with an £8m turnover.

Programme manager Nick Haywood said: 'We are still developing our partnership with Devon Enterprise Facility Ltd. We're not in a position to say definitely, but we are still working towards putting in a bid.'

Devon County Council is a longer shot and is dependent on whether it needs to find a new home if Exeter City Council's bid for unitary status goes through.

A county spokesman said: 'Should restructuring go ahead we would need carefully to consider our accommodation strategy, but we are not yet at that point.'

The University of Ply-

mouth left the site in 2005.

The herd of 155 pedigree Holsteins and milking equipment were auctioned off last May, since when it has been largely redundant. It is currently used for police training, while Middlemoor police headquarters are refurbished, but they are due to leave by Christmas.

Former lecturer and secretary of the Seale-Hayne Futures Group, Dr Eirene Williams, said:

'Remaining domestic and estate staff have been told that they will be laid off next July, but are worried that after the police leave in December they may not have much to do.'

'The tenants in the houses also seem to have July 2008 as an end date.'

'The state of repair of the buildings is going rapidly downhill, with buckets under leaks in Lambert and North Block and probably elsewhere.'

'Apparently, no major maintenance has been carried out since merger with Plymouth and this is beginning to matter.'

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Seale-Hayne goes on the market

by BEN MIDDLETON

THE marketing of the former Seale-Hayne campus began on Tuesday.

Plymouth University instructed agents GVA Grimley to market the 385-acre former agricultural college.

The site, on the outskirts of Newton Abbot, includes a six-bedroom former principal's house, 25 traditional cottages and a working farm alongside a quadrangle of academic buildings.

There is also a sports hall, lecture theatre and chapel within the surrounding complex.

The future development of Seale-Hayne is still a mystery, with possible bidders coming from sporting, residential and employment backgrounds. However, Martin Berkien, director of facilities and estates at Plymouth University, did say he would prefer to sell to another educational provider.

Mr Berkien said: 'The planning authorities will have the final say on the development, but we would prefer to sell to another educational provider.'

'We can't speculate the price as the value will be determined by the planning process.'

The possibility that Seale-Hayne could become a village in its own right was also raised at Tuesday's press conference.

Richard Clarke, partner at GVA Grimley, said: 'This is a unique opportunity to invest in the Devon countryside and purchase what could eventually become a village in its own right.'

Any developers wishing to purchase the site will have to declare their interest by November this year and Mr Clarke has warned that the process will be lengthy because there are rules governing the sale.

'It will not be until late 2008 that the final outcome is known for the Seale-Hayne site.'

'This will be an open and transparent process, but there are rules guiding how the assets are disposed and the funding for the University,' explained Mr Clarke.

Persimmon Homes, who were reportedly interested in the site, have now declared themselves out of the running.

Mike Kerton, strategic land manager for Persimmon Homes South West, said: 'Persimmon Homes is not interested in developing the former Seale-Hayne campus.'

'The Exeter office of the national housebuilder has stated clearly and consistently throughout the consultation on Teignbridge Council's strategic development plans that it does not

support an option for residential development at the campus.'

'Persimmon Homes does have an interest in the Mile End site as a limited urban extension to the west of Newton Abbot and a planning application for up to 450 homes was submitted in May.'

There has been continued criticism throughout over the development of the former college and Ian Goodwin, a former member of the Seale-Hayne faculty council, said: 'Many people now feel that to retain a shred of dignity in this affair, the university must carefully consider what happens next.'

'Many feel that the site should be allowed to retain its original educational purpose, as decreed by Sir Charles Seale-Hayne in his will, and this will obviously be dictated by whatever tender is eventually accepted by the University.'

'Sale price should not be a controlling factor.'

A spokesman for Teignbridge Council said: 'While there is no specific designation for its future use, it is important to note that any change of use will require planning permission, which will be decided through all of our usual procedures, including a public consultation.'

Speculation over college sale

Site 'will change for the better'

NO decision is likely to be taken over the future use of a landmark site on the outskirts of Newton Abbot until late 2008.

But landowner Plymouth University says it is 'unlikely' the Seale Hayne former agricultural college will continue to be used as an educational facility.

Plymouth University has instructed agents to sell the vast 385-acre estate, which could fetch between £5million and £45million depending on its future use.

Details of the sale were made public at a launch of the site on the open market yesterday.

Some interested parties have already come forward with ideas ranging from residential care, a village development, housing, sports and other leisure facilities, a hotel or a golf course.

Martin Berkien, director of learning facilities at Plymouth University, said: "The university will not sell to the highest bidder, it is not just a financial thing. It could be affordable housing or an exclusive golf course or something closer to the use it had in the past.

"Ideally it would be something the residents are happy with and some-

By LAURA DALE

ldale@heraldexpress.co.uk

thing for which we can get a reasonable return on our investment.

"The university left the site because of the difficult topography, so it is unlikely another education provider would go there.

"They would not be able to provide the facilities on the site in an economic fashion. There is an inevitability of development, but whatever goes there will provide jobs and it will be changed for the better."

The university closed the campus in 2005 when it no longer became economically viable to keep it there and they relocated to Plymouth.

Agents GVA Grimley will oversee the sale of the site. They say the final decision on the future use of the site will be down to local authority planners.

Campaigners Seale-Hayne Futures Group, backed by Newton Abbot mayor Keith Smith, want to see the site remain as an educational facility and they say they will oppose any plans to turn the site into a property development.

Mr Smith said: "I am in no doubt I am representing the people of Newton Abbot on this issue.

"The university has a commitment and a responsibility to the town and the region.

"I want to know how much they will put back into the community and when are they going to enter into public consultation.

"We are already backing the Northern option for future housing development and I would be appalled if it blew that out of the water and housing should take place on this site."

In recent years, the site has been earmarked for possible development by a number of interested groups including Devon County Council and Lifeworks, which is part of The Bidwell Brook Foundation, which runs projects for learning-disabled children and young adults.

GVA Grimley are holding a series of open days for interested bidders over the next month and have invited parties to submit formal expressions of interest to them by noon on November 2.

Richard Clarke, a partner at Grimley, said: "There has been a lot of speculation over what the site might be used for.

"We have no idea who is going to come forward. There are a number of parties who have expressed interest but decisions will lie with the local planning authority."



■ LAY OF THE LAND: Richard Clarke at Seale Hayne and, above, the college site