

MINUTES OF THE WOOLPIT PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2018 AT 7.30 P.M. IN St MARY'S CHURCH

Present: Mr Guyler (Chairman), Mr Hardiman, Mr Howard, Mrs Jenkins, Dr Geake and 54 members of the public.

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Mr Wheatley, Mrs Drury and Mrs Cook.

**2. To receive declarations of interest.** There were none.

**3. Planning – to consider the following applications**

**18/04342** Notification of works to trees protected by a Tree preservation order MS196/W1. Fell 1 Scots Pine. 5 Horsefair – support.

**18/04454** Erection of three dwellings with parking and new vehicular access. Southlands, old Stowmarket Road – support.

**18/04247** Outline planning application (access to be considered). Erection of up to 300 dwellings, construction of new spine road, land for new primary school, burial ground extension, village car park and associated infrastructure. Land of Bury Road

The meeting adjourned to allow members of the public to comment on the application. 17 residents made comment on various concerns regarding the application including the scale and density of the development, the effect on the village infrastructure, social and community pressure unacceptable, too large a growth for the village in a short period of time, highway and pedestrian safety. 13 letters of objection had been received prior to this meeting.

The meeting reconvened.

After discussion Councillors unanimously agreed to object to the proposals for the following reasons:

1. Woolpit currently has approximately 900 houses and planning approval has recently been granted for a further 169. With the 300 from this application, the number of homes in the village will rise by some 50%. This is a disproportionate increase which will overwhelm the village and its facilities and destroy the unique character of Woolpit. A village would become a town.
2. The traffic through the village is already an issue for the many listed buildings in the conservation area and the additional traffic from 300 more houses, much of which will use the village centre, would have a serious detrimental effect on the mediaeval core. The narrow pavements and pinch points of the centre will create additional congestion and make pedestrian safety a serious issue.
3. Sustainability. The development is not sustainable within the definition of the NPPF, in that it does not meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Firstly, the economic objective is not met. Economic sustainability builds a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure.

We have seen no evidence that this development is of the right type, in the right place or at the right time to support growth. We have seen no evidence that it will support innovation or improve productivity locally.

We also have concerns about infrastructure. Although the railway station at Elmswell is close by, it is very difficult to get to without using a car. Cycling is dangerous and walking the short distance is terrifying. There is no mention of increased bus services, which are limited during the day and non-existent in the evening. The lack of access to public transport coupled with the easy access to the A14 in both directions means that those living here will be encouraged to drive rather than use public transport. This also has implications for a transition to a low carbon economy (see below under environmental sustainability).

Secondly, the social objective is not met. Social sustainability supports strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; it fosters a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being.

The huge scale of the proposed development, in conjunction with other developments already granted planning consent locally, means it cannot be socially sustainable. Over 170 new dwellings already have planning consent in the parish, and the 300 proposed here will take the total to over 470 – a more than 50% increase in the number of dwellings in the parish. This will overwhelm the village in terms of infrastructure and social cohesion, and the estate risks being seen as separate to the village. The easy access to the A14 in both directions means that the estate will be more dormitory than community.

Thirdly, the environmental objective is not met. Environmental sustainability contributes to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Services in the village centre are between 345 and 435m distant; this is roughly twice the desirable distance quoted in the transport assessment of 200m. The health centre is 790m away, nearly twice the desirable distance of 400m. It seems likely that vehicular transport will be used to access the centre of the village and certainly the health centre. This is unsustainable in terms of transition to a low carbon economy.

4. Wildlife. The site is locally important for wildlife. The ecological survey acknowledges the high number of skylarks, a red-list species in severe decline, nesting in the fields; skylarks are in decline due to loss of habitat, and this development cannot be mitigated in a way that will not contribute to their decline. It also found evidence that eight of the 17 UK bat species roost or forage here, that there is good evidence for common lizards and that there are great crested newts that will be affected by the development. Local mitigation may be possible for these, but the continued piecemeal loss of habitat is not sustainable. The ecological survey mentioned two owl species, little owl and barn owl, but did not apparently find the tawny owl well known to

those living on this side of the village, nor the hedgehogs which are found on both sides of Bury Road.

Increased street lighting will be to the detriment of Woolpit's dark skies (it is a relatively dark village for its size, with few street lights) and to the detriment of bats, owls and night-time pollinators such as moth species.

Increased traffic on Bury Road will be detrimental to those species which are vulnerable to road traffic, such as hedgehogs and barn owls.

5. Proposals do not provide for a footpath and cycle links to Elmswell to give access to the railway station. Proposals should incorporate a cycle track link to the village through Rectory Lane and a cycle track to Elmswell. A safe crossing for the pedestrian/cycle track at the existing roundabout at J47 interchange of the A14 is required.
6. No improvements are proposed to the narrow footway between Wrights Way and Windmill Avenue (Woolpit Business Park entrance). There will be a considerable increase in traffic along this section of road with vehicles accessing the business park through the new link road from the A14 which will significantly increase the danger to the many pedestrians who use the path. The width of the existing path requires many pedestrians, and particularly wheel chair users and those with pushchairs, to walk in the road.
7. Heavy vehicles should not be allowed to use the spine road to access Woolpit Business Park from the A14 but should be required to take their existing route via the A1088. The spine road would be a residential street which should have a weight restriction imposed together with traffic calming and a 20 mph speed restriction.
8. Historic England is concerned for the setting of the Grade 1 listed St Mary's parish church. They say that 'they are concerned that development of the application site would result in harm to the significance of the listed building' and 'it would not achieve the NPPF overarching aim of promoting sustainable development.'
9. This site has open and extensive views across to Norton Wood and to the church tower of Elmswell which will be damaged by the development. The views inward are from the A14 and White Elm road of the village with the Woolpit church spire. These views are of significant importance to the village - in the words of the Landscape Appraisal undertaken for Woolpit Neighbourhood Plan they are "distinctive and valuable". The appraisal also says, "Development in this area also has the potential to alter the settlement form and character, undermine the rural setting to the church and alter perceptions of arrival." There will also be some loss of public amenity in the form of views over Street Farm from White Elm Road, Bury Road, and Hay Barn Meadow.
10. Provision should be made for housing for older people. The village questionnaire which is part of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan shows there is a high demand for accommodation which would allow older people to relocate within the village without leaving the community in which they have lived for many years.

11. Land on the application site at the junction of Bury Road and White Elm Road is higher than that of the existing adjacent homes in White Elm Rd which will be overlooked and dominated by new properties.
12. Provision for a new primary school should not be included whilst discussions are currently taking place with Suffolk County Council for an extension of the existing school.
13. Hopkins Homes originally proposed 600 houses on their 90 acre site. They are now proposing 300 units on about half this area. If this development proceeds, it is probable that there will be an application for a further 300 units in due course.
14. The site is high quality grade 2 agricultural land.
15. A site inspection should be carried out by members of the Planning Committee before the application is determined.

**4. Date of the next full Parish Council Meeting – Monday 5 November 2018 at 7.30 pm. Noted.**

The meeting closed at 9.04 p.m.

Signed.....

Dated.....