

BISHOP'S HULL PARISH COUNCIL

RESPONSE TO TDBC's SITE ALLOCATIONS & DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN PREFERRED OPTION CONSULTATION

Note: The main submission is followed by an addendum on page 5 giving further comment arising at the Parish Council meeting on 5th December 2013.

HIGHWAYS

There is general concern from a highways point of view to the substantial amounts of development proposed on the western side of Taunton (Comeytrove and Bishops Hull), compounded to an extent by the proposed developments at Staplegrove.

When the planning application for the Persimmon development along Bishops Hull Road was considered, highway engineers were of the view that because the Silk Mills Road / A38 roundabout was over capacity, it was not possible for it to perform any worse. In practice, the occupation of almost 150 of the new dwellings to date, together with other developments where traffic feeds into this junction (eg Norton Fitzwarren, Staplegrove and Wellington) has resulted in a worsening situation – at peak times the roundabout is virtually gridlocked.

The provision of the additional development would result in a substantial worsening of the situation at this roundabout. This is recognised in the Strategic Urban Extensions report, where it is stated that “development will further increase traffic flows at this junction and could have an adverse effect on the operation of this junction”. Whilst it is recognised that the principle of the Comeytrove development was established in the Core Strategy, the issue of increased traffic volumes should be addressed at an early stage in the planning process.

There is suggestion in the consultant's report of junction improvements and bus priority corridor improvements on the A38, but no detail is given of this. Previous reports have indicated the need for a high frequency rapid transit route to the town centre. There is no mention of this in the report or the route that it would take.

The Parish Council would welcome a meeting with County Highways officers to discuss the above concerns alongside the consortium's highways consultants and representatives from both Comeytrove and Trull Parish Councils.

SITE 23 - SILK MILLS PARK AND RIDE

Although the site itself is outside the parish boundary, it is likely that access would be from within Bishop's Hull Parish. It is immediately adjacent to the parish boundary and visually it very much relates to this part of the parish.

The loss of this site within the Green Wedge to development would be regrettable, as employment buildings will have a significantly greater impact on the open nature of this area than the facilities at the park and ride. If development is to be considered, adequate screening should be provided.

Before this site is released for development, full consideration should be given to whether there will be a future need to extend the park and ride facility.

SITE 24 - LAND TO NORTH OF HERON DRIVE

The Parish Council supports the reservation of this site for education purposes. In particular it should be used to provide additional capacity for secondary school stage pupils for Castle School. This is essential in view of the development of over 2000 new dwellings in Comeytrove and Bishops Hull.

The site is close to the Longrun Meadow flood attenuation ponds and the Parish Council would therefore call on the Planning Authority and the Environment Agency to be absolutely sure that adequate surface water attenuation is provided.

Funding for the additional education accommodation should be secured through Section 106 / Community Infrastructure Levy contributions for the developments within the natural catchment area (in particular the Comeytrove development).

The Parish Council would welcome a meeting with the County Education officers to discuss the issue of where school children, both from existing residential areas and from the proposed new developments, will be accommodated.

SITE 27 - LAND AT BISHOPS HULL / STONEGALLOWS

The Parish Council strongly objects to allocation of this site for development.

The site is very sensitive in landscape terms, being elevated, highly visible and prominent from many vantage points to the north and west. It is this contribution to the landscape of the area which resulted in the site becoming part of the Stonegallows Ridge Special Landscape Feature, which has been a protected landscape feature for many years.

Such designation on landscape grounds was used sparingly and only a small number of areas were given such designation. Policy EN11 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan (which is proposed to be retained as part of the Preferred Strategy) states that "Development which would harm the appearance, character and contribution to landscape quality of Special Landscape Features will not be permitted unless planning conditions would prevent such harm". By retaining the policy, the Planning Authority is giving the site extra protection from development over and above normal open countryside policies. Against this background it is totally anomalous for the area now to be proposed for housing development.

It would be helpful if the Special Landscape Feature was included on the maps.

When the current Persimmon development to the north was allowed, the Planning Authority must have considered that it would not conflict with policy EN11. The importance and significance of this site to the landscape character of the area must therefore still prevail. Indeed this site is totally different in character to that being developed to the north. It rises to a much higher level, such that any development would stand out much more and be visually detrimental to the area, both nearby and from a distance.

Despite the site being retained as part of the Special Landscape Feature, the Sustainability Assessment states that development of the site would not affect a local landscape designation. Surely this cannot be the case.

It furthermore states that the site has only medium landscape impact and has the lowest landscape impact of those considered in the South Taunton area. The Parish Council would dispute that for the above reasons. A number of less sensitive sites have been excluded from development for reasons of significant landscape impact.

The general comments above re highways apply and there are also other highways issues specifically relevant to this site.

Since the closure of Bishops Hull Road to traffic from the A38, the only access into the village is from Silk Mills Road. There have been a couple of occasions when Silk Mills Road has been closed to traffic due to serious accidents. This resulted in traffic having to take a long detour, either via the narrow rural lanes to the west or via the town centre. To add more housing and vehicles to this potential scenario is inappropriate.

Existing residents have enough difficulty exiting the village from Waterfield Drive onto Silk Mills Road or from Bishops Hull Road onto the A38 at peak times. Again to put more pressure on these junctions is inappropriate.

The alterations to the A38 / Bishops Hull Road junction, a consequence of the Persimmon development to the north of the site, has resulted in a more dangerous cross roads junction to that existing previously, due to the realignment of the approach from the side roads. There is also frustration at having to take a longer way round because of the no entry restriction from the A38, and some drivers 'chance their arm' and ignore the no entry sign, creating dangerous situations. To put more traffic into this situation is wrong.

With regard to public transport, although the site has been scored in the Sustainability Appraisal as having a twice-hourly bus service, this exists only following a short term subsidy by Persimmon through the S106 Agreement re the development to the north. There is a real possibility that the service will revert back to hourly when the subsidy funds come to an end.

In the event that development takes place on this site, the Parish Council would wish to see the following:-

1. Provision of adequate and convenient primary and secondary education facilities, secured through either a Section 106 agreement or Community Infrastructure Levy.
2. Provision of adequate flood mitigation measures.
3. Securing of development that scores highly against the 'Building for Life' (or similar) criteria. This should be maintained throughout the process of development and not 'watered down' as happened with the current Persimmon development to the north.

4. A robust enforcement regime established from the commencement of development, unlike the situation that occurred with the current Persimmon development to the north.
5. No building on the highest ground adjacent to the dwellings on Bishops Hull Road. Dwellings on land adjacent to this higher ground should be set down in order to reduce their visual impact.

SITE 28 - COMEYTROWE

It is recognised that the principle has been accepted for development at Comeytrowe. The commissioning of independent consultants to inform the development is welcomed and the report in the supporting documents is noted.

Option 1 is preferred and the Parish Council would welcome discussion on the intended master planning to ensure that the development in the parish is provided in an appropriate way.

However, the site is partly within the Stonegallows Ridge Special Landscape Feature. Therefore similar points to those raised in relation to site 27 also apply here.

This area is particularly sensitive in landscape terms and development should avoid this specific area. The Parish Council therefore supports the comment in the consultant's report that landscape impact will be minimised by avoiding the prominent ridgeline to the west of the site.

The A38 towards Stonegallows provides an open and green approach to Taunton, contributing to its setting, character and appearance. Saved policy T34 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan stated that development that would harm the landscape setting of approach routes into Taunton will not be permitted (with the A38 being specifically referred to). The essence of this should be specifically applied to the current site where it is adjacent to the A38. Building design and landscaping should be of sufficient quality to enhance the approach route and contribute towards the attractive setting of the town.

CHANGES TO BOUNDARY OF THE FRENCH WEIR GREEN WEDGE

There is concern at the amendment to the boundary to exclude an area of land to the north of Shutewater (Deletion B3).

Protection from development will be diluted by taking this area out of the Green Wedge. There is also no physical boundary to the new boundary, which makes the remainder of these land parcels vulnerable to pressure for development.

The above relates to the Parish Council's initial response to TDBC. However, further points arose at the Parish Council meeting on 5th December and these are detailed on the following page.

SITE 24 - LAND TO NORTH OF HERON DRIVE

In supporting reservation of this site for education use, it was understood that this would provide additional secondary school places. However, we are now aware of SCAT's separate proposal to develop the site as a hall of residence for 204 students and would query whether residential accommodation is within the criteria for education use. We also have concerns re SCAT's proposal, e.g., parking, and therefore request the right to comment when further details are known.

SITE 25 - SILK MILLS ROAD/ NETHERCLAY & SITE 26 - PARSONAGE FARM

We previously objected to the allocation of these sites for development and therefore support TDBC's decision to omit them from the Preferred Option.

SITE 27 - LAND AT BISHOPS HULL/STONEGALLOWS

With respect to the Special Landscape Feature designation, there seems to be uncertainty within TDBC on whether the Stonegallows Ridge will retain SLF status. However, as the Preferred Option document is silent on this, the presumption is that existing SLF protection remains. A number of less sensitive sites have been excluded from development for reasons of significant landscape impact. At this late stage of consultation, any subsequent change to the status quo is not acceptable, since this is the last stage the public is able to make representations to the Local Planning Authority and any further comments could only be considered by a Government Inspector.

As regards the local landscape, the current Kinglake development must not be seen as creating a precedent for a further build.

With respect to Flood Protection, the Environment Agency has stated that there are existing flooding problems and that new development would require improvements to the existing drainage infrastructure at Shutewater Hill. This will require work to be carried out on 3rd party private land and such work will bring considerable cost. If agreements are not in place for this, the site should not be proposed for development, because it is not deliverable and could not contribute towards the 5-year supply of housing land. We suggest the site be a case study for viability testing.

With respect to the Sustainability Appraisal, we have already raised the issue of the misleading scoring for public transport but, in addition, we note a number of other discrepancies and feel these should be looked at again, i.e., the scoring re secondary education, landscape designation / impact, employment, flooding and cycling networks. We also feel that the scoring system should be weighted rather than remain equal for each consideration shown.

Having heard and seen responses from local residents, it is evident that there is a lot of common ground between us. However our initial response did not include reference to loss of wildlife and habitat nor to the single access road and we would therefore add the Parish Council's support to these local concerns.

Bishop's Hull Parish Council, December 2013