

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN CONSULTATION

RESPONSE FROM BISHOPS HULL PARISH COUNCIL

It is unfortunate that very little notice was given to this consultation, which has resulted in great difficulty in getting word out to parishioners of its existence. At the next stage of the consultation, it is requested that longer notice is given of the consultation period, so that a more timely item can be included in the village 'Community News', which is delivered to all houses in the parish.

On a general level, it is noted that the Taunton Town Centre Action Area Plan (TTCAAP) is to be reviewed separately and that this review will need to take into account changes in the market and the viability of sites already proposed for development in that plan area. The Parish Council is firmly of the view that brown field sites, such as those within the area covered by the TTCAAP should be developed for housing in preference to increasing the allocation of green field sites instead. Out of choice, the volume house builders will invariably opt for the development of green field sites over brown field sites. The Planning Authority should rigorously examine, and must not accept at face value, the pronouncements of the house building industry with regard to brown field sites being high risk and less attractive to the market. The brown field sites could be made more attractive to the developers by reducing Section 106 requirements. The Authority should bend over backwards to attract development to these brown field sites.

There are a number of general points that apply to all sites being considered for development.

Whilst none of the sites put forward are actually in the presently defined flood plain, a number of them are extremely close to flood plain areas. One is immediately adjacent to the Longrun Meadows flood attenuation ponds, and another is close to the River Tone in an area very prone to flooding. The Parish Council would therefore call on the Planning Authority and the Environment Agency to be absolutely sure that adequate surface water attenuation was provided to at least the normal requirements, in the event of the sites being developed.

When the planning application for the housing development along Bishops Hull Road was being considered, the 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 over 100 of the new dwellings to date, together with other developments where traffic feeds into this junction (eg Norton Fitzwarren and Wellington) has resulted in a worsening situation – very frequently at peak times the roundabout is virtually gridlocked. All the potential development sites within Bishops Hull parish would feed into this junction (in addition to the northern part of the Comeytrove development) in order to travel towards Taunton. This would result in a worsening of the situation at this roundabout. Whilst it is recognised that the principle of the Comeytrove development was established

in the Core Strategy, this issue should be addressed before any further commitments are made for development in the Bishops Hull area.

The provision of adequate co-ordinated schooling is essential, both at primary and secondary level. At primary level, all new housing should have either an existing school with adequate spare capacity or a new primary school within 800 metres. At secondary level, adequate provision should be available or made near to any proposed housing development. Such provision ought not to reduce the accessibility of secondary level schools from existing housing areas in Bishops Hull. The document states that the consortium of developers promoting the development at Comeytrowe has produced a draft development brief providing for (amongst other things) a primary and secondary school. The Plan doesn't indicate whether these will be a requirement of the development or not. If a new secondary school is not to be provided, it is essential that secondary school provision is enhanced at the nearest existing school, i.e. Castle. As this is currently at capacity, developer contributions would need to be secured to expand facilities there. If a new school were to be provided, it needs to be made clear whether this would just take pupils from the new development or whether it is intended to also take pupils from the existing housing areas on the south west and west sides of Taunton that currently feed into Castle School. These issues ought to be clarified because they have implications for any potential development at site 24 (Longrun Farm / SCAT) – if expansion of Castle School is required. The provision of the requisite improved facilities should be a requirement of any development at Comeytrowe – and this should be included in the Plan.

All the sites are greenfield areas which have an abundance of wildlife and the loss of their habitat would be unfortunate.

Site 23 – Silk Mills Park and Ride

Although this site is not within Bishops Hull Parish, it is likely that the access would be taken from the park and ride access, which is within the 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 also be given to whether in the future there will be a need to extend the park and ride facility.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, wildlife and traffic.

Site 24 – Longrun Farm / SCAT

It is unclear which part of the site is proposed for residential development. In the SHLAA, the written text states that residential development would be restricted to the southwestern part of the site, but the notation on the plan in the current document indicates it across the northern part of the site. Given

that this site is currently part of the Green Wedge, the Parish Council consider that it would be incongruous to provide housing in the northern part of the site and then have open playing field provision between that and Heron Drive / SCAT. Any residential development should be well related to the existing built up area. Any loss of Green Wedge in this area would be regrettable anyway.

This area may be required in the event of any expansion needs at Castle School. Whether this is necessary will be dependent on what provision for secondary education is made at Comeytrowe.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, traffic, wildlife and schooling.

Site 25 – Silk Mills Road / Netherclay

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

The site is within the existing Green Wedge and should not be released for development. It is very steep sloping and elevated. The landscape impact of any development would be considerable, and be detrimental to the character and amenity of the area, both near to and from a distance. The site is located alongside one of the approaches to Taunton and provides an open and green approach to the built up area, contributing to its setting, character and appearance. Saved policy T34 of the Taunton Deane Local Plan states that development which would harm the landscape setting of approach routes into Taunton will not be permitted. The essence of this should be retained in any future policy area and specifically applied to the current site. Furthermore, the site has designation as a Special Landscape Feature on plans in the Taunton Deane Local Plan. If the site is within an area designated as a Special Landscape Feature, the issues and concerns raised in relation to Sites 27 and 28 also apply. If the site is put forward for development, high quality landscaping to a sufficient depth should be provided.

There is concern that it would not be possible to provide adequate flood alleviation. The lowest point of the site is at the foot of a fairly steep slope, almost adjacent to the River Tone. This issue would have to be considered very carefully, along with potential land stability issues.

The site adjoins the village conservation area along its western boundary, together with part of the southern boundary. It is unlikely that development in this area would meet the normal requirement to preserve or enhance the conservation area.

The site comprises good quality agricultural land.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, traffic, wildlife and schooling. In particular vehicular access appears likely to have to be either directly from Silk Mills Road or via Haydon Close and Bishop's Hull Hill. Either would severely exacerbate existing traffic problems.

Site 26 – Parsonage Farm

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

The site is within the existing Green Wedge and should not be released for development. The site is elevated and the landscape setting of the village would be compromised by development.

It is difficult to imagine how 5 or more dwellings could be accommodated on the site without adversely affecting the light and outlook of the apartments at Parsonage Court to the south of the site.

Access would be difficult to achieve, being through the curtilages of existing dwellings and onto Netherclay, where visibility is extremely sub-standard.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, traffic, wildlife and schooling.

Site 27 - 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 remains extant) 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". Whilst it is recognised that Central Government has pronounced that local landscape designations are inappropriate, that should not negate the reasoning behind the Planning Authority giving the site extra protection from development over and above normal open countryside policies.

Paragraph 4.91 of the document states that the area covered by the Special Landscape Feature designation is protected from harm through other policy coverage, in particular, it lies outside of settlement limits so there is a general presumption against development. In the face of this, it would be wholly inconsistent and inappropriate for development to take place on the site.

When the current 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 the site to the landscape character of the area must therefore still prevail. Indeed this site is totally different in character. 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.

The general comment with regard to traffic applies. 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 again in the future 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 development to the north of the current site, has resulted in a far more dangerous cross roads junction to previously, due to the realignment of 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 potentially extremely dangerous situations. To put more traffic into this situation is wrong.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, wildlife and schooling.

Site 28 – Comeytrowe

It is recognised that the principle has been accepted for development at Comeytrowe.

However, the site extends further towards the A38 than was envisaged in the Urban Extensions Baseline Report, and 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 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 which would harm the landscape setting of approach routes into Taunton will not be permitted. The essence of this should be retained in any future policy area and specifically applied to the current site where it is adjacent to the A38. If the site is put forward for development, high quality landscaping to a sufficient depth should be provided.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, traffic, wildlife and schooling.

Site 29 – Rumwell Manor

This site should not be considered as a stand-alone development. Rather it should only be considered as an adjunct to the adjacent Comeytrowe development and furthermore only be accessed through that site.

The green approach to Taunton also applies to this site, as does the potential impact of any development on the setting of Rumwell Manor, which is a listed building.

See also general comments with regard to flood alleviation, traffic, wildlife and schooling.