

# NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN TEAM

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Councillor P Robinson  
Chair of Thurston Planning Committee  
Thurston Parish Council  
New Green Centre  
Thurston  
IP31 3TG

22<sup>nd</sup> November 2016

Dear Cllr. Robinson,

**Re: Planning Application – 4386/16 – Erection of 138 dwellings. Construction of new vehicular access and provision of cycle/pedestrian link to Barton Road. Provision of road and drainage infrastructure, landscaping and open space @ land on the west side of Barton Road, Thurston.**

Please be advised that the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan Team have considered this application and have the following general comments to make:

- The Neighbourhood Plan Team would like to state that in accordance with the Parish Council Protocol's for Pre Planning Application Developments – no comments on the suitability of the site for development or how the site performs in relation to others ahead of the site assessment work have been made during the attendance of representatives from either Artisan Planning or Bovis Homes at any Neighbourhood Plan Meetings.
- Thurston Parish Council is at a relatively advanced stage in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and whilst the plan has not yet reached the stage of allocating sites or proposing policies, following consultation with the public and land owners and agents on the site assessments carried out during Summer 2016, should be afforded some weight in responding to this application. This site was not submitted as part of the Neighbourhood Plan Process but is known to have been submitted as part of MSDC's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. A request was made in June 2016 for the site to be formally assessed by the Neighbourhood Plan Team and is referred to as Site 19. The results of the assessment on the land submitted by the agent on behalf of Bovis Homes by the Neighbourhood Plan Team has raised a number of issues which the Neighbourhood Plan Team feel are so major and fundamental as to override any acknowledgment of the site's "neutral" assessment. Comments raised by the public following the public consultation on the site assessments have also been incorporated into the process and the revised site assessment overall summary has not changed from that of 'neutral'. A copy of this site assessment is attached to this letter.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Team is disappointed at the speed at which this and another application have been submitted for new housing in the village. There seems to be a general haste to ensure that each development is the first to submit with little regard for the impact that each development will have as a whole on the general infrastructure of Thurston which requires time to evolve and time to absorb new residents and associated growth. There is a general concern that the size of new developments being proposed will result in Thurston losing its 'village feel' and for it to become 'a small town'.

With particular reference to the planning application submitted:

- Generally the Neighbourhood Plan Team feels that the Application shows an unimaginative off the shelf design and fails to show any respect for the fact that it abuts countryside on one side and an existing housing development on the other. It is felt that the allocated formal 'open spaces' are not in keeping with the surrounding area and that the current layout was more in keeping with a high density housing

estate and not that of a rural village beyond the limits of the Built Up Area Boundary. The Team also felt that the inclusion of 2.5 – 3 storey dwellings at this point of the village was not considered to be in-keeping with the general characteristic of a rural village. The Neighbourhood Plan Team felt that there was also a need for better screening around the edge of the site, along the existing road in order to ensure that the new development enhanced and protected the existing natural environment, wildlife networks and biodiversity.

- The Neighbourhood Plan Team is disappointed that within the application submitted there is little evidence to show that the scheme is set to encourage the development of appropriate housing stock that reflects the needs of current and future residents. The Team is concerned that the density is higher than that of surrounding areas and is not in-keeping with that of a rural village. The market housing proposed in this application comprises 90 dwellings of which 61 are for 4+ bedrooms. The majority of those who have responded to the public consultations held by the Neighbourhood Plan Team have indicated that there is a desire to ensure future growth reflects the community wish for starter homes for local first time buyers; bungalows and 1 - 2 bedroom houses.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Team would like to reiterate that, whilst it is generally appreciated within the village that as a Key Service Centre and a village on the A14 corridor with a good rail link there will be growth within the village, there is a preference for this growth to be handled sympathetically and on sites of no more than 50 houses. The Neighbourhood Team would have liked to see the Planning Application draw on this preference and to have divided the site into separate areas using hard and soft landscaping techniques to ensure that the design preserves and enhances the built, natural and historic environment of the local area as well as maintaining and enhancing its distinctive characteristics.
- It is acknowledged in the documents submitted by the applicant that the proposed residential development would result in an increase in the vehicular movements from the site and that given the number of dwellings proposed that this has not been assessed to be at a level that would result in a significant impact upon the local road network that could not be adequately assessed by an appropriate transport assessment.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team feels that given the location of the site little reference has been made to the current road infrastructure and the impact that the development will have on the junctions of Fishwick and Pokeriage Corners for those accessing the A14 via the narrow bridge on Barton Road. It is recognised that both areas have a high proportion of incidences involving more than one vehicle and yet there is only mention of a financial contribution towards the physical improvement works proposed to the Fishwick Corner junction (signing and road marking). As it is expected that direct access to this route will be under the very narrow Railway Bridge, the Neighbourhood Plan would expect further consideration to be given to traffic improvements at this point.

Further to the above, whilst the proposal is positioned to enable traffic generated by the proposal to access the main vehicular routes of the A143 and A14 without passing the site at land South of Norton Road, the Neighbourhood Plan Team feels that there will be a cumulative impact of this and other developments upon the local network and that an Environmental Impact Assessment for both Thurston and Great Barton should have been submitted with the Planning Application.

- It was further agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan Team was concerned that there were no plans to install safe pedestrian footpaths from the site to the existing footpath that leads to shops or amenities and that no reference has been made to the fact that all pavements should be made suitable for motorised buggies nor was there any mention of cycle lane provision.

Although the Transport Assessment Report states that there are footpaths running adjacent to Barton Road, from Mill Lane to Marley Close there is a single footpath on its eastern side and at Marley Close, the footpath crosses the road and runs along the western side of Barton Road, there are no direct safe pedestrian footpaths linking that from Marley Close to the entrance of the site further along Barton Road. The Neighbourhood Plan Team is also concerned that there are no safe pedestrian crossing points along the whole of the route of Barton Road. The plans indicate that the single entrance road to the development will come straight out onto Barton Road with no pedestrian footpath. The route into the village along Barton Road could be made reasonably safe by providing a short pedestrian footpath and a pedestrian crossing to the other side of the road which would then link to the existing footpath to educational establishments or amenities that are access by the crossing of the road.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team is also aware that whilst the centre of the site is within the preferred distance for commuting to school, it is apparent that around 50% of the site will be in excess of this maximum distance. Given that the Transport Assessment Report states that it is recommended that short car trips are substituted for walking (where the journey is under 2 km) and cycling (where the journey is under 5 km) the Neighbourhood Plan Team feels that this distance will encourage as

opposed to reduce the use of the car thereby increasing the negative impact that this development will have on the local road network.

- The application states that although the site is within the predominately rural district of Mid-Suffolk, Thurston has links by both bus and rail to Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket and rail to Cambridge and Ipswich that provide onward links to rural and national services via their Bus and Railway Station(s). Whilst the Neighbourhood Plan Team accepts this fact, there is concern that there has been little or no assessment of the impact on the railway station that this and other developments will have and the fact that car parking at the station is already an issue.
- The Neighbourhood Plan Team would also like to draw to the Parish Council's attention the impact that such a development will have on the education provision within Thurston. The Team has been informed by Suffolk County Council that Thurston Church of England Primary Academy is currently at capacity (this takes into account current housing commitments only) and that the consequence that any future growth will have must include detailed discussions about infrastructure mitigation. It is also noted that Thurston Community College is also at capacity and that it is unlikely that the school will be supported to grow much bigger than it is now. Given that 200 additional homes by 2031 will yield 50 Primary Pupil Places; 36 Secondary Pupil Places and 8 Secondary 16+ Places the Neighbourhood Plan Team has concerns that this provision will not be met locally and that there will be a need for pupils to be 'bussed' outside of the village. This unsustainable situation will also have a negative impact on traffic, bus stops and road congestion within the village.

Overall the Neighbourhood Plan Team would ask the Parish Council to take into account its concerns for this application on this site for the following reasons:

- road safety with particular emphasis on the junctions of Thurston Road (Great Barton) and the A143
- road safety with particular emphasis on the junctions of Fishwick and Pokeridge Corner for those accessing the A14 via the narrow bridge on Barton Road
- pedestrian safety as there are no safe crossing points
- loss of character of the village
- development inappropriate to that of land abutting the countryside
- concern for the amount of development on the site
- village infrastructure particularly provision of education and traffic
- type and density of housing mix
- cost of affordable homes for local residents

In summary, whilst the Neighbourhood Plan Team recognises the need for future development within Thurston, it does not support the submission in its present guise for the concerns outlined above.

Yours faithfully,

*Victoria S Waples*

Victoria S Waples, BA (Hons), CiLCA  
Secretary to Thurston Neighbourhood Plan Team

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