

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN TEAM

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

9th August 2016

Dear Cllr. Robinson,

Re: Outline Planning Application – 2797/16 – (with all matters other than means of access reserved) for residential development of up to 175 dwellings with associated car parking, landscaping, public open space areas, allotments and vehicular access from Sandpit Lane and Norton Road @ land to the South of Norton Road, Thurston.

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

- In the letter submitted by Armstrong Rigg Planning to Mr J Pateman-Gee of Mid Suffolk District Council, it is stated that 'the applicant has also engaged with Thurston Parish Council through the preparation of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan and with the local community at a Public Exhibition.'

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 Hopkins Homes or their agents at Neighbourhood Plan Meetings and that whilst the applicant has been informed that it could state that they have met with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group they could not in any forthcoming developer public meetings state that their proposals have in any way, shape or form, been endorsed by the Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group.

- The letter further states that 'Thurston Parish Council is at an early stage in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan' and ...that the plan has not reached the stage of allocating sites or proposing policies and can be afforded very limited weight'.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team disputes this as it has continually consulted with the residents and businesses of Thurston over the past two years and feels that it has followed a clear programme of consultative events which places it in a strong position to be able to reflect the local community and to respond to planning applications that are premature and fail to follow the Neighbourhood Plan Process.

- The Neighbourhood Plan Team is disappointed at the speed at which this and potentially other applications 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 Concept Masterplan is an unimaginative off the shelf design and that it fails to show any respect for the fact that it abuts countryside on one side and an existing housing development on the other. It was felt that the masterplan was more in-keeping with an urban edge of town design than that which would reflect the rural state of Thurston as a village. The Neighbourhood Team is also concerned at the proposal of 2.5 – 3 storey dwellings which are considered not 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 roads in order to ensure that the new development enhanced and protected the existing natural environment, wildlife networks and biodiversity.
- In particular the Planning and Design and Access Statement makes reference to the Statement of Community Engagement – page 8 which refers to the percentage of responses as to what type of housing is most needed in Thurston.

The response from the community engagement carried out by Engage Planning reflects the Neighbourhood Plan's findings that the majority of those who have responded to the public consultations wished to see starter homes for local first time buyers; bungalows and 1 - 2 bedroom houses. This is not reflected in the indicative housing size within the Concept Masterplan in the outline planning application submitted. The implication is that size is still to be determined but the Neighbourhood Team would have expected the outline application to have followed the applicant's consultative results.

The Neighbourhood Team is disappointed that within the Concept Masterplan 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.

- Within the Combined Planning, Design and Access Statement the overall response received from Housing Growth was considered to be positive and that local people generally appreciated that Thurston will require sustainable growth.

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 Concept Masterplan draw on this preference and to have divided the site into three separate areas using hard and soft landscaping technics 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.

- Within the Interim Residential Travel Plan mention is made of the access to local facilities either via pedestrian access, cycle access, bus services or rail services.

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 junction of Norton Road and Ixworth Road and Fishwick and Pokeriage Corners for those accessing the A14. It was noted that the crash map produced did not include Fishwick Corner which had a higher proportion of incidences than other areas quoted. Nor was mention made of the pinch point at the bridge on Sandpit Lane / Thedwastre Road.

It was further agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan Team was disappointed that there were no plans to install safe pedestrian footpaths 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. The Neighbourhood Plan Team feels that the applicant should consider linking the development with the Sustrans National Route to ensure that there are linked routes for cyclist safety.

The Neighbourhood Team felt that a comprehensive travel plan which assesses the impact of such a development on the whole road network in Thurston including pedestrian and cycles routes was lacking.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team was also concerned that whilst it is stated (within the planning overview submission document) that additional residents would also support the sustainability of established bus and rail services, there still needs to be an overall assessment of the impact on the station that this and other developments will have on the station/rail network and the fact that car parking 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 too will have a further 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 Norton Road and Ixworth Road; Fishwick and Pokeriage Corner for those accessing the A14,
- pedestrian safety along Sandpit Lane and Norton Road where there are no pavements,
- the impact on the pinch point at the bridge along Sandpit Lane – Thedwastre Road,
- 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
- 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