

# 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: Re-consultation on the 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.**

Thank you for allowing the Neighbourhood Plan Team to comment further on the re-consultation of the above planning application as submitted by the agents acting on behalf of Hopkins Homes. The Neighbourhood Plan Team would like to stand by its concerns as mentioned in its letter of 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016 and for ease have repeated the relevant points below:

- 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 were made during the attendance of representatives from either Hopkins Homes or their agents at Neighbourhood Plan Meetings and that whilst the applicant had 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.
- 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 it should be afforded some weight in responding to this application. The results of the assessment on land submitted by the agent on behalf of Hopkins Homes under the Neighbourhood Plan Team's Call for Sites of January 2016, under the Parish Housing Land Availability Assessment, 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 "slightly positive" assessment. Comments raised by the public and the agent 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 slightly positive. A copy of this site assessment is attached to this letter.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team 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 would like to state that it 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 cumulative 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.

Whilst the response from the community engagement process carried out by Engage Planning on behalf of Hopkins Homes 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 Plan Team would have expected the outline application to have followed the applicant's consultative results.

The Neighbourhood Plan 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.

- 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 Plan 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 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.
- 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 Pokeridge Corners for those accessing the A14. The route to the latter is via the single file pinch point at the bridge on Sandpit Lane – Thedwastre Road and then onto the dangerous Pokeridge corner junction. The increase of vehicular movements onto the single exit Sandpit Lane will also impact negatively on this pinch point where there is no pedestrian footpath across the bridge. It is still noted that the crash map produced does not include Fishwick Corner which has a higher proportion of incidences than other areas quoted.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team would respectively draw your attention to its comments above and to the concerns raised by Suffolk Constabulary at the capability of Sandpit Lane / Thedwastre Road Priority System and the inevitable increase in traffic volume from this development onto Sandpit Lane.

It was further agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan Team was concerned that there were no plans to install safe pedestrian footpaths on the development side of Sandpit Lane. The plans indicate that the single entrance road to the development will come straight out onto Sandpit Lane with no pedestrian footpath. The route into the village along Sandpit Lane 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 shops or amenities on the opposite side of the road. Also no reference has been made to the fact that all pavements within and to the development 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.

There is however a genuine concern at the adverse impact at peak times that the one single entrance onto Sandpit Lane will have on pedestrian and vehicular movements. The Neighbourhood Plan Team

would like to see, as a minimum, this entrance point replicate the splay that was originally proposed for the entrance onto Norton Road thereby allowing safe passage for both pedestrians and vehicles.

The Neighbourhood Plan Team would like to see a comprehensive travel plan which assesses the impact of such a development on the whole road network in Thurston including pedestrian and cycles routes to allow informed opinions to be made.

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 railway 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 further like to draw to the Parish Council's attention to 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 further negative impact on traffic, bus stops and road congestion within the village.

Armstrong Rigg Planning on behalf of Hopkins Homes has also mentioned in a later submission that Ixworth Free School is some 5 miles from the proposed development and has spare capacity. The Neighbourhood Plan Team would be interested to know how this is compatible with the assertion that this "helps to promote more sustainable travel". As this relates to the provision of education for those above 11+, the Neighbourhood Plan feels that further consideration should be given to the provision of education for those of primary school age.

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
- road safety issues with particular emphasis on those accessing the A14 via the pinch point at the railway bridge on Sandpit Lane – Thedwastre Road and onto Pokeriage Corner
- pedestrian safety along Sandpit Lane for accessing village facilities as there are no safe crossing points
- impact of the vehicular movements from a single point of entry
- 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 education provision 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 to take place within Thurston, it still does not support the re-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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