

Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council

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ISSUES & OPTIONS FOR THE SUFFOLK COASTAL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW, OCTOBER 2017

Introduction

Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council questions the advisability of significant housing development along the A12, in the Saxmundham area, given the limited local employment opportunities and the inherent need to use travel corridors that are already at or in excess of capacity.

It is accepted that there will be some housing development in Benhall and Sternfield, but growth should be proportional, capable of being absorbed into the existing village environment, and clearly separate from Saxmundham and other surrounding villages.

Part 1 – Strategic / Cross Boundary Issues

1.1 Vision Benhall and Sternfield are villages in a rural setting and should remain so. It is accepted there will always be a blend of urban and rural areas within the District, which address a range of preferences of life styles, and any movement towards urbanisation of the countryside should be resisted.

Development should not be permitted that puts undue strain on traffic corridors (road & rail), and local services.

1.2 Growth The need to meet Baseline growth is accepted, but growth beyond that is not favoured remote from established commercial centres. Sizewell C is still only speculation, and should be disregarded from growth considerations.

1.3 Growth location Wherever there is development in the Plan area, there will be an increased demand for improved access to Ipswich, being the main commercial hub. It would thus seem to make more sense to develop close to Ipswich to minimise the extent of road/rail improvement. The proposed bypass of four A12

villages, whilst improving the quality of life within those villages, will not reduce the journey time to Ipswich, it will simply increase the length of queue radiating from Ipswich.

1.4 Retail & leisure

The importance of market towns as local centres to serve surrounding villages is recognised, which in our case is Saxmundham. For such towns to flourish, they need to not just provide the daily basics, but encourage visiting, such as having ample parking, and be pleasant to walk around. It would be distressing to see market towns effectively replaced by out-of-town retail centres.

1.5 Infrastructure

The rail service to and from Saxmundham is much used, with many trains running being full in busy periods. The single track sections and short platforms limit any significant increase in capacity. The station serves, not only Saxmundham, but surrounding villages and the towns of Aldeburgh, Leiston and Framlingham. Parking at the station is limited, and use of the town carpark by rail passengers will increasingly impact on the town (see 1.4). Even without significant development in the area, there is a case for relocating the station to provide a proper travel hub to serve the wider area.

The Benhall village school is much valued, and complements other primary schools in the area. Its retention should be ensured.

The nearest GP practice is in Saxmundham. There are about 10,000 patients currently registered. The practice is already under considerable pressure.

Part 2 – Suffolk Coastal Issues and Options

2.1 Vision

The character of the village environments of Benhall and Sternfield should be preserved, and clear separation from neighbouring communities should be maintained.

Benhall was incorrectly designated as a Local Service Centre in the Local Plan (2013), and this has been previously discussed with SCDC. There have been no changes in the facilities since 2013. It has a bus service to Saxmundham / Leiston (but not directly to Ipswich), two small farm shops – good, but not serving ‘everyday needs’, and the Benhall Club – a private members club, not open to the general public, but it does have rooms for hire. These facilities do not meet the criteria for a Local Service Centre.

2.2 Housing

The current number of houses in our villages is:

Benhall Green	225 (31 affordable)
Other hamlets in Benhall	50 (approx.)
Sternfield	58

Since 2009, planning consents for 38 new homes have been granted, chiefly in Benhall Green. Most have yet to be completed. (This represents a 16% increase in Benhall Green, and a 11% increase overall).

An additional modest increase in housing within Benhall and Sternfield may be acceptable, say 10% (approx. 40) over the Plan period. New houses should be sympathetically attached to the existing village, and areas of special landscape within and surrounding the village should be preserved.

All too often developers promote '3 or 4 bedroom family' homes to maximise profits. We would like to see policies developed which would deliver a wider range of housing, particularly catering for first time buyers and down-sizers, looking to remain within their community.

We generally support the re-use of redundant buildings as housing.

- 2.3 Business & industry** We recognise agriculture as an essential industry, and understand the developing needs of agriculture to deliver quality products at a competitive price.
- We believe other industry and business should be in clusters, served with good roads.
- 2.4 Town centres** See 1.4
- 2.5 Tourism** Although not within the AONB, there are several holiday lets within Benhall and Sternfield, as well as a large caravan site with fishing lakes alongside the River Fromus and another caravan site in Red Lane. Whilst tourism may not play as large a part in our villages as those nearer the coast, the villages are valued by tourists, and any development which adversely impacts on tourism should be resisted.
- 2.6 Parking** Parking within Benhall village is already problematic. The only public parking provision is a single lay-by for 4 cars. Any further development should allow for sufficient parking so as not to exacerbate this problem.
- 2.7 Community facilities** There is no village Hall in Benhall and Sternfield, but the Benhall Club, which is a private members club, provides some facility for community activity. We consider that the Club should have protected status, i.e. the Club and its associated grounds are not developed for other use.
- 2.8 Healthy communities** Whilst Benhall and Sternfield are clearly separated from Saxmundham, they are within walking and cycling distance. Sadly, the path is alongside a 60mph road, which makes walking uncomfortable, and cycling dangerous. We would support a safe walking, cycling and riding link between our villages and Saxmundham.

2.9	Climate change	No comment
2.10	Design	We support good design, where it is distinctive, but equally, sympathetic to its surroundings.
2.11	Heritage	No comment
2.12	Landscape	<p>The Local Plan (2013) identified the Fromus Valley, including The Wadd and Benhall Green as Special Landscape Areas. We support the continuation of this designation, and would oppose any proposal for development within the designated areas.</p> <p>Where new housing is developed, consideration should be given to further areas of protected landscape to mitigate the impact on the existing settlement.</p>
2.13	Biodiversity and Geodiversity	The Special Landscape Areas are also important for the ecology of the area including wildlife habitat. This further emphasises the need for their preservation. In particular, there are concerns regarding any increase in water abstraction from the underlying aquifers, and the consequential impact on the environment. It is essential that detailed consideration be given to the water cycle before the Local Plan is finalised.
2.14	Other	No comment
2.15	Potential land for development	See below

LOCATION	SITE REFERENCE		COMMENT
Between Main Road and A12	494,714 (part), 715, 717 (part)	OPPOSE	Any development of these sites would intrude into the open country side between Benhall and Saxmundham, and contribute to the loss of village identity.
Off School Lane	247, 507	SUPPORT	Support is subject to appropriate highway measures along School Lane.
Aldecar Close	817, 818	SUPPORT	818 is within the current village envelope, and 817 is well related to it.
Off Aldecar Lane	819, 820	OPPOSE	Development of these sites would constitute unacceptable intrusion into Special Landscape Areas.
Friday Street	687. 688	OPPOSE	These sites are remote from the village, and would constitute intrusion into open countryside.
Between Main Road and Mill Lane	493	SUPPORT IN PART	Development should not extend eastwards from Main Road further than the site south of Forge Close, currently being developed (to existing hedge line). Support is conditional upon the remaining part of this plot becoming a protected landscape area to minimise impact on the existing village.
	751	OPPOSE	Development of this plot would be 'out of scale' and inconsistent with preserving the character of the village.
West of A12	716	OPPOSE	Any development west of the A12 is opposed as being remote from existing development, and sets an undesirable precedence.

The sites supported would allow for approximately 40 houses, which would increase the housing stock in Benhall and Sternfield by 11% and by 15% in Benhall Green, where all supported sites are. Any further development over the period under consideration would have an adverse effect on the character of the village.