

## BENHALL & STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

### DC/21/2503/OUT Land South of Forge Close, Benhall

It is accepted that Policy SCLP12.43 of the recently approved Local Plan allocates 1.76ha of land south of Forge Close for the development of approximately 50 dwellings. The area relating to this Policy is clearly defined in the Local Plan. Notwithstanding that the paragraphs 1.4 and 2.2 of the Supporting Statement claims that the application is in accordance with the Local Plan and measures 1.8ha, it is very clear from the plans submitted that the applicant is seeking to develop a larger area of approximately 2 ha, some 10% larger. In so doing the application necessitates the removal of an established hedgerow, which would otherwise be preserved.

Since the application fails to demonstrate *a) sufficient conformity to the defined area specified in SCLP12.43 and b) does not meet a number of the criteria of SCLP12.43*, the Parish Council **OBJECTS** to the application.

The Parish Council has further considered the application on the basis that it can be amended to comply with SCLP12.43, and comments as follows:

- 1 The overall layout of the housing is an uninspiring series of rows of houses. It is difficult to see how this demonstrates the claims of 'local distinctiveness' and 'local context' in Sections 6.15 and 6.16 of the Supporting Statement.
- 2 The 'shared amenity space' in a corner of the site adjacent to the railway does not achieve the aims of SCLP12.43 d) – 'provision of well integrated public open space to act as a focal point for the development ...'. *We would like to see the 'shared amenity space' moved to the area between the development and the village as shown in the Local Plan. Not only would this make it a safe space for all ages, away from railway tracks and vehicles, but would also provide a space which nearby homes in other parts of Benhall Green could share, creating a link between Benhall Green and Shotts Meadow.*
- 3 The application does not fully address the issue of connectivity to footpath 26 to Mill Lane, or even consider the opportunities for cycle access to Mill Lane. (SCLP12.43 g)
- 4 2.15 of the Transport Assessment claims that there is a footpath link from the current development (Shotts Meadow) to Forge Close via The Beeches. This is not correct. The developer of Shotts Meadow has shown to the Parish Council the agreement for a pedestrian link as approved by East Suffolk Council. The agreement grants a right on foot to the residents of the 9 properties in Shotts Meadow (only) through land owned by Flagship Housing. *This restricted footway is blocked by a locked gate (See PHOTO 1).* Shotts Meadow is a private development (not adopted), so no public rights from the application site, through Shotts Meadow to Forge Close can be presumed. The Beeches is also a private road. The residents of The Beeches were opposed to granting a footway through their land for the first development, and we understand that their views will be the same for this application. SCLP12.43 g) requires a footway to be provided from the development to Forge Close, and this application fails to demonstrate how this will be achieved.

- 5      2.17 of the Transport Assessment claims that there is a footway link alongside the B1121 from the current development to Forge Close. This is not correct. *See PHOTO 2 of the overgrown grass verge which is where the footway is shown on the Applicant's Plans.* It should be a condition of this application that such a link be constructed.
- 6      The footway from Benhall to Saxmundham runs alongside the B1121 on the opposite side to the development. The Parish Council is supportive of developing safe non-motorised routes. Therefore, safe access should be required from the development to the footway on the opposite side. To this end we suggest that a crossing of the B1121 be constructed with a central pedestrian refuge. This fits in with Section 6.8 of the Supporting Statement, which identifies the need for speed reduction features. *In addition, in the interests of reducing car dependence, a safe non-motorised route is needed between this development, Benhall and Saxmundham. We have photographs (attached) showing the very narrow, rough, overgrown nature of the footway opposite the development. Indeed, we have reported it to our District Councillor but she has resigned before being able to action this. It was also reported to the County Councillor on 21 March 2021 but there has been no response. There is no suitable access out of the development for wheelchair users. See PHOTO 2*
- It is worth noting that this estate development is reliant entirely on private cars for transport. There are no cycleways nor useable footways safe access to local services and transport in Saxmundham. The Railway Farm Shop opposite the entrance to Shotts Meadow has no mains electricity. It sells farm produce and has community allotments but is not a convenience store and does not sell basics such as milk.*
- The poor, narrow footway, lack of cycleway, and distance of approx. 2k between the access road into Shotts Meadow and the services and transport links in Saxmundham mean it is unrealistic to expect that residents can walk or cycle into Saxmundham for shopping and essential services, then return carrying their shopping.*
- 8      Section 7.27 of the Supporting Statement states that the existing hedge alongside Saxmundham (Main) Road will be preserved. The Parish Council acknowledges the importance of this to ensure a uniform and appropriate roadside feature. To this end we suggest that a defined width (say 3m) of enhanced hedgerow be provided with appropriate maintenance provision.
- 9      Dense and mature landscaping needs to be incorporated adjacent to The Beeches to maintain privacy.
10.    The developer should assess the impact on the development from night-time freight trains accessing the proposed Sizewell C site, and incorporate any mitigation into the application.

Overall, we feel this application is deeply flawed in that it *a) completely car dependent and b) fails to demonstrate how the development will become integrated within the community of Benhall Green*. With little over 200 existing homes in Benhall Green\*, this development will add 20% to the number of homes, and probably more in terms of population. As a Parish Council, we strongly believe in developing community, and hope that this issue of integration will be addressed so that the new residents will be able to enjoy village life, centring around the village green and the social club – *and hopefully the new shared amenity space to be created within this 41 house extension to Shotts Meadow*.

*\*There is a relatively small central area in Benhall Green, with the primary school at its heart and village green on the edge. Outside this area, although designated as Benhall Green, the houses are scattered in the countryside.*

PHOTO 1:



PHOTO 2:





*PHOTO 3*



*08 July 2021*