**DC/21/2503/OUT -Outline Application with some matters reserved. Erection of up to 41 dwellings (with details of access to be considered). Land South of Forge Close, Benhall- OBJECT**

Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council accept that Policy SCLP12.43 of the Local Plan, adopted in September 2022, allocates 1.76 ha of land south of Forge Close, Benhall for the development of approximately 50 dwellings. As a Parish Council, we strongly believe in developing community, and out comments are aimed at ensuring this development will be fully integrated with the village, not a separate ‘add-on’ Estate. The heart of the village and village life centres around the Benhall Village Social Club, the village green and the primary school.

It would appear that the majority of the points we made over 2 years ago have been ignored, which we find very disappointing and therefore OBJECT to the revised plans put forward. There is very little new information for us to consider: there is no revised Design and Access Statement, only revised Plans. ***Under the circumstances, we ask the Benhall & Parish Council be permitted to send further comments once this documentation is available. And that these comments should be officially added to this document, even if after the official deadline.***

As currently shown on the Application, there is no link between the current village and the new housing, for the following reasons:

1. The ‘shared amenity space’ in the corner of the site adjacent to the railway line 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 this amenity space moved to an area between the development and the village. This would make it a safe space for all ages, away from railway tracks (even if the security fencing required by Network Rail is in place) and vehicles, but would also provide a space which nearby homes in other parts of Benhall could share. Thus creating a link between Benhall Green and Shotts Meadow.
2. Access: The original Design and Access Statement and revised Plans indicate that there is a footway link from the current development of 9 houses to Forge Close. We have seen the agreement for the usage of this private path: Flagship Housing grants a right on foot to the residents of the current 9 houses in Shotts Meadow. The path is blocked by a locked gate. In addition, this path exits into a car park/garages. It is barely suitable for its current usage and we believe it is totally unsuitable for use by the residents of a further 41 or more houses. And very recently, the residents of the current 9 houses on Shotts Meadow have agreed to take over the management of the common areas from the developer: they have confirmed that they will not grants any rights through their development, nor through the private pedestrian pathway to the village.

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. Highways and Infrastructure also make this point and add that it is not a suitable width.

We would like to see a full review of the various options/alternatives for all-weather footpath/cycleway access into the village.

1. Footpath 26 shows it is surfaced to the perimeter of the development : but what about the continuation to Mill Lane?
2. The original Transport Assessment claims there is a footway link alongside the B1121 from the current development to Forge Close. This is not correct : we provided photos with our original comments – as have Highways and Infrastructure. The ‘footway’ is in fact a grass verge. It is intermittently mown along the roadside edge for visibility.
3. On the opposite side of the road from the current development, the pavement was very badly degraded and unsafe for access to the Railway Farm Shop. The Parish Council have made a contribution to its upgrading (equivalent to approx. 30% of our annual Precept). We feel it shows our goodwill as we had originally proposed that the costs should be met by the developer. Please note that the current owners of the Railway Farm Shop have now closed it and offer only pre-ordered veg/fruit boxes.

So it would appear that this development is entirely car dependent as the only facilities of any kind are in Saxmundham: the footway into Saxmundham is very degraded, narrow and there is no cycleway. The Parish Council has made initial approaches to Seamus Bennett who chairs a ‘task & finish’ group at ESC which has been set up to take forward proposals in ESC’s Cycling & Walking strategy. But unless that results in a new cycle route between Benhall and Saxmundham, cars are the only realistic form of transport for residents of this development.

By the entrance to the development is a safer place to cross Main Road (rather than at Forge Close where there is restricted visibility) to access the pavement to Saxmundham. However, the traffic volume is increasing and we feel that this would be an appropriate time to construct a halfway pedestrian refuge as a means of future-proofing for when cycling and walking options become available. We would also support a reduction in the speed limit from its current 40mph to 30mph.

Safety:

1. See above re ‘shared amenity space’ location next to the railway line.
2. From the use of the description ‘field gate’ on the revised Plans, it would appear that the landowner/farmer wishes to access his other field/s via the roads within the Estate. We do not think it is either safe or appropriate to have agricultural vehicles using roads within a residential development, particularly of this size..

Landscaping:

1. Dense and mature landscaping needs to be incorporated adjacent to the Beeches to maintain privacy.
2. We note that the site extends beyond the existing mature hedge: we proposed it is moved to the site boundary (as you know, mature hedging can be moved if done correctly, at the appropriate time of the year).
3. The original Supporting Statement states that the existing hedge along the B1121 will be preserved. We agree that this is important 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.

Other:

1. 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.
2. Will the roads, and shared amenity space, be Adopted? If not, it is hard to see how the new development can be integrated into Benhall.

We understand that this is an outline Application only and that the ultimate developer may well vary the Plans. We ask that Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council be consulted on any such changes, and any Reserved Matters (this did not happen with the original development of 9 houses).

We are keen to sit down with the ultimate developer and work with them to help ensure that Shotts Meadow phase 2 is fully integrated physically into the village, and the new residents themselves with the social, educational and leisure opportunities of Benhall village life.

Nb: This is an updated and consolidated version of our previous responses from the earlier Consultations.