

Mr John Dolman  
Stafford Borough Council  
Planning Department  
Civic Offices  
Riverside  
Stafford  
ST16 3AQ

8th April 2015



Dear Mr. Dolman

**Ref: Planning Application No. 15/21806 /OUT 90 Houses Land Adjacent Rakestone, Stowe Lane, Hixon**

The Hixon Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group wishes to register its strong objection to the above planning application.

In May 2014, the Steering Group delivered an eleven page questionnaire to all 770 households in Hixon parish area, including Lea Heath and Pasturefields. 460 completed questionnaires, equating to 59.7%, were returned; a huge response by any measure.

The Steering Group accepted that Hixon should take its proportion of the 1200 new dwellings to be built in the eleven key service village over the lifetime (2011 to 2031) of the adopted Plan for Stafford. An equal division of the 1200 new dwellings across the KSVs would mean each having to accommodate approximately 110 properties over a twenty year period. Notwithstanding that Hixon, by population is the sixth largest KSV, the Steering Group recommended a total of 125 new properties in Hixon parish up to 2031. Before the questionnaires were delivered a planning application for 76 houses off New Road, Hixon (Application 13/19249OUT) was approved by Stafford Borough Council planning committee. The Steering Group revised the questionnaire to reflect this change and asked households whether they thought 50 new houses over the next 17 years was appropriate. The questionnaire also asked whether housing developments should be restricted in scale to a maximum of 20 to 30 units.

In answer to the first question about 50 new dwellings, 61% of respondents thought a combined total of 76 already approved in New Road, plus 50 new houses, was the right amount, 26% thought this was too many and 6% thought it was too few.

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When asked about the size of new housing development being limited to a maximum of 20 to 30 units, 60% thought this about right; 25% thought too many and 7% thought too few.

It is abundantly clear that the application for 90 new houses off Stowe Lane (behind the Green Man pub) is against the wishes of the people of Hixon.

Currently permission for 131 houses in Hixon has already been given since the timeframe of the Plan for Stafford Borough began, with a further 10 pending a decision and a further 50 going through the validation process - plus this 90! The majority of Hixon residents have agreed to 126 maximum.

A Local Housing Needs Assessment for Hixon parish was carried out in 2011 and this showed a need for 7 affordable homes for local (Hixon parish) people - these are currently under construction by Stafford & Rural Homes/Housing Plus under the Rural Exception Housing scheme.

### **PLAN FOR STAFFORD 2011-2031 AND HIXON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

- The site is outside the Hixon Residential Development Boundary as defined in the Stafford Borough Council Local Plan 2001
- The site is outside the well-advanced Hixon Neighbourhood Plan draft Settlement Boundary on file at Stafford Borough Council;
- Part 2 of the plan for Stafford Borough, which sets the new settlement boundaries, is also well - advanced;
- To permit the development would undermine and prejudice the outcome of the Hixon Neighbourhood Plan;
- Furthermore, any decision on this site or any other development in Hixon, will be premature ahead of the emerging Hixon Neighbourhood Plan which will cover the whole of the parish area and has been accepted by Stafford Borough Council.

Hixon is one of eleven Key Service Villages in Stafford Borough which are required to share the building of 1200 new homes between 2011 and 2031. An equal division of the 1200 new dwellings across the KSVs would mean each having to accommodate approximately 110 properties over the lifetime of the adopted Plan for Stafford period.

By population, Hixon is the sixth largest of the eleven Key Service Village, so it could be argued that Hixon should take fewer than 110; perhaps less than 100.

**Hixon already has 131 houses permitted for development.**

**The application for an additional 90 in Hixon is therefore contrary to the spirit and intentions of the adopted Plan for Stafford.**

### **SITE ACCESS, HIGHWAYS AND PEDESTRIANS**

- The previous application for 101 houses (14/20863/OUT) was refused on multiple grounds, including those objections from Highways. These objections from Highways have not been addressed in this application i.e. the access is within the derestricted zone and adequate visibility

splays cannot be provided, Stowe Lane is not being widened, pedestrian facilities are not being provided on Stowe Lane. Therefore this application is in conflict with NPPF policies and with SBC policies, contrary to the interests of highway safety and contrary to the interests of pedestrian (and horse-rider) safety.

- The proposed development would be accessed off a length of Stowe Lane outside the 30mph areas of Hixon and Stowe-by-Chartley;
- The increased use of Stowe Lane due to this development would lead to an increase in the likelihood of Highway danger;
- The proposed access would not provide adequate visibility for safe egress from the site;
- The existing carriageway width of Stowe Lane between Hixon and Stowe-by-Chartley does not have pedestrian footways on either side of the road.
- The proposed development does not include for any new footways along Stowe Lane;
- Pedestrians safety would be comprised by a significant increase in the number of private cars and commercial vehicles that would arise from building 90 extra houses;
- It is ludicrous to believe that pedestrians leaving the proposed development would take any notice of signs telling them not to walk onto Stowe Lane (as suggested by application documents);
- The footpath linking the proposed site and Greenfields is very narrow, suitable for pedestrians in a single line only, not for pushchairs etc.
- Increased use of this currently very seldom used link would cause a nuisance to the occupants of Greenfields, many of whom are retired.
- Similarly, adding to the pedestrian and cycle usage of Legge Lane, High Street, Smithy Lane would cause an increase to road safety problems due to the lack of pavements and the current congestion on Smithy Lane by the shop and take-away.
- Stowe Lane provides a link between a historical footpath connecting Hixon and Hixon Airfield, pedestrians will continue to use this irrespective of any warning signs;
- Statements in the application documents relating to the suitability of Stowe Lane to provide safe visibility and passing points for vehicles are without foundation;
- Unless there are proposals to re-locate the beginning/end of the 30mph zones, it is not possible to provide suitable visibility splays at the proposed entrance to the development off Stowe Lane - there is no requirement for Highways to permit such re-location of the 30mph zones and previously Highways have said that the speed limit zones along Stowe Lane should remain as they are currently, to protect the rural nature of the lane and to maintain the distinction between Hixon village and Stowe by Chartley village;
- Stowe Lane is no wider than 5.5m at any given location between the 30mph speed limits at Hixon and Stowe-by-Chartley. At various points the width is no more than 4.2m. The carriageway width is 4.1m at the narrowest point;

- Provision of passing places will not solve the problem of the increased traffic along Stowe Lane, for either vehicles or pedestrians/horse-riders - the road simply isn't wide enough to take the increase in traffic that would result from this housing estate. The entire length of Stowe Lane would have to be widened significantly to take the increase in traffic arising from this development, which would ruin the rural aspect of Stowe Lane and of Hixon and Stowe by Chartley in general;
- The proposed vehicle passing points along Stowe Lane are no more than unmade, muddy verges created by vehicles attempting to pass each other;
- One of these so-called passing places has a 3-foot drop at the edge of it, which makes it unsuitable as a passing place;
- Photographic evidence (see enclosed photograph taken near the proposed site entrance off Stowe Lane on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015 at 14.30pm, clearly demonstrates that buses and commercial vehicles cannot pass each other without one vehicle having to reverse. On the occasion of the enclosed photograph, the bus facing the camera was required to reverse 70metres towards Hixon.
- In Stowe-by-Charley village the width of Stowe Lane is only 3.8m near the junction with St John's Close;
- The carriageway width of Station Road through Stowe-by-Charley village is 4.6m;
- Any further developments permitted in Hixon would add to the already extremely bad traffic problems on both New Road and Church Lane at the junctions with the A51 - these traffic problems have been recognised by Highways but there are no plans currently in place to alleviate the situation.

#### **SITE SUITABILITY AND DESIGN**

- The application documents submitted contain false, inaccurate and miss-leading statements that do not stand up to any scrutiny;
- The misrepresentations in the application documents undermine the validity of the whole application;
- Notwithstanding the application being Outline, there is sufficient information provided to conclude that the proposed development would be high-rise (2.5 storeys) and high density in a rural location;
- The scale of the development, density and proposed 2.5 storey high buildings would be a significant intrusion into open countryside;
- The proposed development is unacceptable and at odds with the low density, low level (mainly bungalows) which characterise the Stowe Lane, Greenfields and Back Lane areas of Hixon;
- Contrary to application documents, there are no 2.5 storey dwellings neighbouring the site;
- The proposed development would be harmful to, and have a detrimental effect on, the character and distinctiveness of the immediate area around the proposed development site and Hixon as a whole:
- The proposed development is totally out of keeping with the landscape of the area, this being open on 3 sides at present. This development would be an intrusion in to open countryside and is totally out of keeping with the immediate area and Hixon village as a whole;

- The proposed development (if permitted) would set an undesirable precedent for similar high density developments in Hixon, leading to urbanisation and loss of local rural character and distinctiveness;
- Rather than 'integrate' into the existing village of Hixon, the proposed development site is predominantly open on three sides and does not relate to existing dwellings in Stowe Lane or Back Lane;
- By its scale, the proposed development would be unsustainable in relation to the services, amenities and facilities, currently available in Hixon;
- Stafford Borough Council planning density guidelines say...."**All new housing must be compatible with the character and distinctiveness of the community.**"

### THE TRUTH ABOUT HIXON

- The authors of the design and access statement have deliberately set out to falsify the status of Hixon and in so doing have out-raged local residents.
- The authors of the Design and Access statement have used lazy and incompetent desk top research, inevitably resulting in statements that are blatantly wrong;
- Hixon Is not a Town;
- Hixon is a rural village;
- Hixon has no Leisure Centre;
- The outreach Doctor's surgery that used to be available in Hixon Memorial Hall on Tuesday and Friday mornings is currently suspended - residents have to travel to Great Haywood or beyond to access a doctor or nurse;
- Public transport in Hixon is rated by residents as 'poor or 'very poor';
- Stafford Borough Council planning reports have previously described Hixon as "*located in a peripheral location which is not well-served by public transport or the strategic highways network.*"
- There is no public transport on Sundays;
- There is no public transport after 7pm on any day;
- Research shows that industrial estates around Hixon do not provide 'employment opportunities' for local residents. Over 90% of Hixon residents who travel to work or education, travel away from Hixon;
- Residents of 90 new homes would significantly increase that statistic leading to an increasing carbon footprint and traffic congestion;
- In a Stafford Borough Council planning leaflet "Delivering the Plan for Stafford, Issues and Options" (2009) planners wrote "Although Hixon is a significant employment location, the limited provision of services and facilities may require a new village centre to be provided if major housing development occurs." This application would be a major housing development for Hixon.
- Hixon Memorial Hall is 90 years old and needs significant investment;

- St Peter's School would need to erect portable classrooms on playgrounds to meet additional schoolchildren roll numbers;
- Traffic congestion at the junction of the A51 and New Road is already excessive at peak evening times.
- Research shows that in excess of 95% of Hixon residents who travel to work do not work in Hixon and use private cars to drive their place of work. 95% of people working in Hixon travel in from areas outside Hixon, causing the bulk of the traffic problems seen on Hixon's roads.

## **SUMMARY**

The Government's Locality Act demands that the views of the local people are taken into account when large-scale major housing development is proposed in THEIR community.

Developers may have the financial clout to try and railroad through their avaricious plans, but they do not have the right to try and crush local communities into submission.

The adopted Plan for Stafford was approved by a Government Inspector and should be robustly defended so that Hixon, and other Key Service Villages, are not swamped with excessive housing developments. The Plan for Stafford is a twenty year plan with sixteen more years to go.

**The NPPF can be used to refuse this application 15/21806/OUT, it says....**

Planning permission could be refused where *"the development proposed is so substantial, or its accumulative effect would be so significant that to grant permission would undermine the plan making process by predetermining decisions about the scale, location or phasing of new development that are essential to an emerging Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan."*

**This proposed development can clearly be refused on the above grounds.**

**Hixon Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, on behalf of the residents of Hixon, calls for planning application 15/21806/OUT to be refused.**

Yours sincerely

Mrs. Catherine Gill

Secretary of Hixon Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group