

06/17/0033 ERECTION OF 173 NO. DWELLINGS (TO INCLUDE 25% AFFORDABLE DWELLINGS) WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING, ACCESS, PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, LANDSCAPING, DRAINAGE AND INFRASTRUCTURE ON LAND AT TAUNTON ROAD, BISHOPS LYDEARD

The application fails to meet the aspirations of the Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan in that the Parish Council would wish to see:

- A reduction in the number of dwellings to a number much nearer to 150.
- An increase in the number of bungalows – currently only 4 out of 173.
- Greater use of local sandstone on exteriors rather than red brick to reflect the local vernacular.
- A re-design of the location of the plots nearest to Spinneyfield – in particular, to remove plot 47 from its close proximity.
- An alteration to the road layout within the development to create more of a village atmosphere, for example by the use of curves and generally in line with the TPA recommendations.
- The use of terraced houses along Taunton Road opposite Kings Yard.
- Improvement to the junction of Taunton Road and the A358 including the provision of lighting.
- Speed restrictions on the A358 on the approaches to the above junction.
- Reduction in the number of accesses on to Taunton Road and, in particular, the abandonment of the first turning from the A358 junction on the right-hand side.
- A 20mph speed limit along the whole of Taunton Road.

The Parish Council's detailed reasoning follows. The policies and paragraph numbers are those contained in the Neighbourhood Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Core Strategy of Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) designates the Parish of Bishops Lydeard and Cothelstone to be a Major Rural Centre. In accordance with that designation, the parish is required to host up to 200 new dwellings.

Following upon a public consultation in 2013 the overwhelming choice for siting the new dwellings was the two parcels of land adjoining Taunton Road and Hither Mead.

A Neighbourhood Plan drawn up by the Parish Council in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 was adopted by TDBC in June 2016.

The Site Allocations and Development Management Plan adopted by TDBC in December 2016 (Policy MAJ4) provides that the land at Taunton Road and Hither Mead is allocated for a residential led, mixed use development of around 150 dwellings together with associated recreational space. Details, including strategic landscaping and planting, number, size and mix of dwellings and the form of recreational space will be determined through the Neighbourhood Plan.

During the course of last year, the Parish Council was made aware that David Wilson Homes (the Developer) had agreed to purchase the land upon which it now seeks planning permission. In anticipation of a complex planning application being submitted, the Parish Council resolved to appoint four of its members to act as a sub-committee for the purpose of liaising with the Developer and its advisers and reporting back to the full Council. This sub-committee, also known as the Working Party Group (the Group), has an advisory role only, decisions are only taken by the full Parish Council in open session. The Group has emphasised to the Developer and its advisers that it expects to see full adherence to the Neighbourhood Plan. The Developers met the Group on six occasions, five before the application was submitted and one after. These meetings and the consultation feedback resulted in the Developer making some changes to the plans in line with the NP although some issues remain outstanding and are commented on in this response.

The Developer also held a public consultation in July of this year which was attended by 86 parishioners. This was limited to a landscape master plan prepared by Golby and Luck (Landscape Architects). That plan was largely dictated by the location of a water main which crosses both parcels of land. No numbers or details of any proposed dwellings were then available other than specimens of units utilised on other developments by the Developer.

The Developer lodged its planning application towards the end of September this year. Other than the layout plan which was made available to the July public consultation, neither the Parish Council nor the Group were given the opportunity of considering the detailed plans and any of the considerable volume of documentation, plans and drawings before the application was lodged. The Parish Council was advised that contractual and management pressures had led to the application being submitted when it was.

In the circumstances, the Parish Council resolved to hold its own public consultation in the light of the substantial new information made available in the planning documentation provided by the Developer. This was held on 1st November at the Village Hall. It was attended by over 220 people and 116 comment/feedback forms were either completed on the day or were subsequently received by the Parish Council by e-mail.

During consultation the Developer has addressed a number of concerns following meetings with the Group which broadly comply with the NP but there are still issues outstanding which form the basis of this response.

The Parish Council accepts that notwithstanding the Neighbourhood Plan being adopted, there are residents who would prefer not to see any large scale development in the village. Other residents feel more comfortable because there is a Neighbourhood Plan and feel strongly that this should be adhered to as much as is practically possible.

The Neighbourhood Plan offers an opportunity to rebalance the housing provision in the local area to reflect changing demographics where there are already insufficient larger family houses and too few small dwellings for older people to downsize or retire to. A village the size of Bishops Lydeard ought to be able to accommodate residents throughout their life-time should they so wish by providing the different types of housing necessary to achieve this (5.1.3).

With this in mind any new development should complement what is there already and together provide a mix of starter, family, worker, retired, sheltered, extra care, residential and nursing homes to give people the opportunity to remain in, return to or move into the village or immediate local area (5.1.4).

The challenge with so much new housing proposed at one end of this already linear settlement is to establish easy links back into the heart of the village and make new development feel part of the village. These links should include views and vistas concentrated back towards the village (and hills beyond), and safe connections through foot and cycle paths to discourage unnecessary car journeys. Planting woodland along the new southern edge of the village would separate it from the busy A358 (reducing noise and air pollution, although bunding may also be necessary) and ensure Tatham Farm remains apart. This would help the new development to feel part of the village even though it may have its own central green space and small community facilities (5.1.5).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Taunton Deane Borough Council look for 25% affordable housing on schemes of more than five houses and where there are three or more affordable houses, they seek a tenure split of 60% social rented housing and 40% intermediate housing. Intermediate housing is either affordable rented or shared ownership. In this application the Developers propose 25% affordable housing and the affordable tenure split will comprise 60% Social Rented and 40% Shared Ownership.

The Parish Council welcomes the 25% affordable housing planned and the mix of social rented and shared ownership.

HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE – POLICY H1

Policy H1: Housing for Older People states that subject to a viability assessment, any new residential development site of 5 or more net additional dwellings in Bishops Lydeard will be expected to make provision, evidenced by local need, for accommodation suitable for occupation by older people. Such accommodation shall fulfill all the following criteria:- be either 1 or 2 bedroom properties; and be situated as close as possible to village facilities and services within the development site

Justification for the housing policy for older people is that currently there are too few smaller dwellings for people to downsize or retire to and residents are either remaining in houses which are too big for their needs or having to move out of the village when they might prefer to downsize and stay. The term 'older people' refers to those aged 55 or older, though it is likely that the individuals requiring this type of housing will be considerably older (5.1.10).

The village already has some sheltered housing, a residential and nursing home at Dunkirk House which has a new dementia care unit, the parish alms houses and some small cottages with two bedrooms or less. Homefinder Somerset figures (at 1st March 2015) indicate that 53 householders have registered Bishops Lydeard as their first choice preference to live; half of these require a 1

bedroom property. The need for additional smaller properties has also been identified through the local demographic data, the consultation process, and the residents' survey (5.1.11).

Preferred options were for single storey properties to be included in any new housing development for older residents with the necessary facilities (such as scooter store). These properties should be built with future adaptations in mind to allow residents to remain in their homes for as long as possible (5.1.12).

Another option for older residents might be a granny annexe, which could be an extension to an existing family property, or part of a new build larger family home and which might alternatively be used for independent young adults on low incomes who are still living at home (5.1.13).

Access to village services such as local shops, buses and open spaces become more important as people age and general mobility reduces. Therefore properties for the active elderly who are still living at home should be sited closest to existing village facilities and link directly onto foot and cycle paths and mobility scooter routes (5.1.14).

The planning application under consideration would provide a total of 40 X 1 and 2 bedroom properties potentially available to older people (23% of total number of properties). 31 (77%) of these would be affordable housing and 9 would be for sale as open market housing.

The Parish Council understands that there could be an additional 40 properties of an appropriate size in the village for older people to downsize to. However, there are only 4 specially adapted bungalows for older people and the Parish Council would have preferred to see more in the plans. These are listed as intermediate housing for shared ownership which should mean they remain as dedicated housing for older people. The Parish Council approves their siting closest to village amenities. The other properties are 28 x 2 bedroom houses and 8 X 1 bedroom flats). The Parish Council acknowledges the need for smaller properties and the opportunities these could offer to both older and young people.

HOUSING FOR FAMILIES – POLICY H2

Policy H2: Housing for Families states that subject to a viability assessment, any new residential development site of 5 or more net additional dwellings in Bishops Lydeard will be expected to make provision evidenced by local need, for accommodation suitable for family occupation, including affordable units, defined as at least 3 bedroom properties with potential to extend to provide additional accommodation.

Homefinder Somerset figures (as at 1st March 2015) indicate that 53 households have registered Bishops Lydeard as their first choice preference to live, approximately 22% of these require 3 and 4 bedroom properties (5.1.17).

There are larger houses in the village and surrounding area, however, these tend to be older properties which do not come on to the market very often (such as farm houses for example). Most new larger properties are luxury housing and concentrated at Lethbridge Park, a relatively new outlying hamlet sited in the grounds of an historic house. A further new development of 28 four and five bedroom properties and conversion of the mansion house and orangery to 18 apartments is currently underway

in the grounds of Sandhill Park, a mansion house, which when complete will also offer luxury housing (5.1.18).

Extensions to existing properties where there is space can provide additional accommodation. This can also benefit both independent young adults earning (but not enough to buy/rent themselves) or offer a granny annexe for elderly parents wishing to downsize. However, there are limited opportunities in the village with a lot of older terraced properties where space is not always available, so more affordable family sized houses are needed. Where extensions are suitable and need planning permission, these will be supported by the Parish Council (5.1.19).

The planning application under consideration would provide a total of 85 X 4 and 5 bedroom properties available to families (49% of total number of properties) although all of these would be for sale (open market housing). In addition there would be 48 x 3 bedroom properties (28% of total number of properties) which might suit smaller families. 12 (25%) of these would be affordable housing and 36 would be for sale.

The Parish Council understands that the plans include properties of an appropriate size for families to upsize and/or move to (17 X 5 bedroom properties and 68 X 4 bedroom properties). The high number of 4 bedroom properties could offer an alternative to those thinking of extending 3 bedroom properties referred to in Policy H2 above, although it is appreciated that open market housing is available to all buyers. It is understood that the village primary school currently has capacity for almost 30 children. The Parish Council acknowledges the need for some larger family housing and the opportunities these could offer to families who would like to upsize but stay in the village or move in from elsewhere.

HOUSE SETTING AND OPEN SPACE – POLICY H3

Policy H3: Housing Setting and Open Space states that the sites allocated for residential development in Bishops Lydeard will be subject to a development brief prepared by the developer in consultation with the Parish Council and to be adopted by TDBC. This should address the following criteria: adequate play areas for young children; off street parking to minimise on street parking; minimum levels of street and path lighting; maintain views to village centre; establish a community woodland along the new V-shaped southern village boundary; conserve existing mature trees, hedges and respect Tree Preservation Orders; link new foot and cycle paths to existing network; road links to allocated sites will be from Taunton Road; complete flood risk assessment and retain areas liable to flooding as green open space or woodland; provide adequate green open spaces, including informal open spaces for dog walkers with dog bin provision; consideration should also be given to the possible provision of a skate park and other facilities for young people; include a number of self-build plots.

The challenge new housing faces when located at one end of a historically linear settlement, is not to feel isolated and turn away from the village towards Taunton. It is therefore important to establish easy links back into the heart of the village and make any new development feel part of it (5.1.25).

These links should include views and vistas concentrated back towards the village (and hills beyond) and use of new open green shared space between the new development and Hither Mead. New community woodland planting should be concentrated along the new southern V- shaped boundary of the village which separates it from the busy A358.

Existing mature trees or old hedges should be conserved and incorporated into the development. Additional tree planting should include edible species such as fruit trees including hazel and walnut. The new woodland should be a mix of native tree species with a shrubby edge. Biodiversity should also be encouraged by developing wildlife areas next to existing wildlife habitats (5.1.27).

Other links into the village through foot and cycle paths should help to discourage unnecessary car journeys and connect with those already established through Hither Mead. Residents should be able to walk, cycle and use a mobility scooter in safety. The development should be designed around people, with the car being confined to roads which do not impact directly on where people will be walking and cycling. All road access to the new development sites will be from Taunton Road. A four-way junction somewhere between the existing Taunton Road / Hither Mead junction and the Taunton Road junction with the A358 is expected. Traffic lights or a mini roundabout should be placed at this junction to slow traffic as it approaches Taunton Road and the centre of the Bishops Lydeard. Nearly all of those who responded to the residents' survey felt that open green space in the village was important and reflected the rural feel of the area as a valued aspect of living there (5.1.28).

Parts of the allocated residential land are unsuitable for housing, for example the length running immediately alongside the A358. This is suggested as one stretch of community woodland (the other alongside the boundary with Tatham Farm). The low lying flood plain and stream adjoining Hither Mead might provide another green open space or woodland attracting wildlife and still serving as a flood plain (5.1.29).

Once these green areas are established after a few years of being managed by the developer, they are usually adopted by the local authority. In the past this has been Taunton Deane Borough Council but in the spirit of localism and diminishing budgets, consideration should be given to the Parish Council to succeed as owners with responsibility for management and precept accordingly once the relevant open space is adopted. An appropriate commuted maintenance payment would be expected with transfer of ownership through a legal agreement.

The planning application under consideration is for 173 properties: a mix of 8 X 1 bedroom flats; 4 X 2 bedroom bungalows; 28 X 2 bedroom houses; 48 X 3 bedroom houses; 68 X 4 bedroom houses; and 17 X 5 bedroom houses. Of these 43 (25%) are affordable housing, a mix of social rented (60%) and shared ownership (40%). However the total number of houses planned exceeds 'around 150 dwellings' mentioned in the District's Site Allocation Plan (SADMP).

The Parish Council understands that the planned layout would enable two thirds of the properties to face the village and the hills beyond which should help make any new development feel part of the village which was asked for in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The green open space is estimated to be one quarter of the site which increases to half the site when you add in the (enclosed) gardens. The water main discovered running through the length of the site cannot be built on and would therefore form a green thread with a path from one end to the other with low lying land at either end. However this has meant there is a smaller green open space shown than was sketched in the Neighbourhood Plan between Hither Mead and the new houses. The application shows six larger houses to be built here with a smaller green open space and some privacy planting.

The green open space shows a dedicated play space for young children and other natural obstacles are planned along its length. Provision of dog bins would allow responsible dog walkers to safely make use of this space as well.

Some additional planting is planned to complete the narrow strip of woodland along the bypass although it would be an exaggeration to refer to this as community woodland. New planting along the boundary of the Hither Mead back gardens would be on their southern edge and should be carefully thought through so as to offer some privacy but not result in too much shade.

In order to reflect the established street scene along Taunton Road which is considered desirable, the length of hedge along there would need to be sacrificed. However, the other established hedges and large trees would remain. New allotments are not planned. It is understood that there are some vacant allotments in the village.

The application shows that off-street parking provision is designed beside or in front of most properties with some on-road visitor parking as asked for in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Minimum levels of street and path lighting have been asked for and the new path would link to existing foot and cycle paths and we ask that this also accommodate disability scooters.

Low lying areas which might collect water would be retained or designed in to reduce the chance of flooding. One such area might double up as a small replacement mountain bike track or a skate park but further consultation with older youngsters should be undertaken. No self-build plots have been planned.

Entrances into the development are planned from Taunton Road reflecting the schematic diagram (sketch) in the Neighbourhood Plan. However almost without exception, there is great concern about the proximity of the first turning right into the new development and people are adamant that this junction needs to be moved further away from A358 to be safer.

HOUSING DESIGN AND DENSITY – POLICY H5

Policy H5: Housing Design and Density states that the sites allocated for residential development in Bishops Lydeard in the TDBC Published (Submitted) SADMP will be subject to a development brief prepared by the Developer in consultation with the Parish Council and to be adopted by TDBC. The development brief must address the following criteria; include a range of densities, with higher densities closer to the village facilities and services and all provided with reasonable garden and outdoor amenity space, be in keeping with the local character, be in accordance with a design code to be agreed as part of the brief, achieve Secured by Design standards, incorporate wildlife friendly planting and landscaping to encourage biodiversity and on Taunton Road new houses that are built should reflect the street scene opposite with the style of houses. Taunton Road will also contain the entry roads into the new developments.

The Parish Council believes that the application should be varied or amended so as to achieve the following outcomes.

Reduce the number of houses

There is some confusion about the number of units which are envisaged for this site. The Core Strategy suggests that there should be “up to 200” new dwellings in Bishops Lydeard by 2028. The SADMP plan adopted by TDBC suggested that there should be “around 150” on the land at Taunton

Road/Hither Mead. This application proposes 173 housing units. 173 rather than 150 is 13% extra. It also seems as if almost all of the number of new dwellings proposed are to be built at the same time, well in advance of 2028.

At the consultation event residents have expressed concern at the number proposed. If 173 are approved then the development must include good open spaces, and provide good quality development of which the village could be proud, reflecting all the aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Reflect the street scene on Taunton Road

Section 3.1 of the application talks about the existing housing provision but makes no reference to the fact that the predominant house type in the older part of the village, and along most of Taunton Road facing the proposed development, is terrace. In terms of the “street scene” at the Gore Square end of the Taunton Road section their intention seems to be to put small detached houses very close together, rather than build any terrace there. Is this why there is no reference to it in that section? It is the view of the Council that there should be terraced housing at the Gore Square end of Taunton Road, as required by the Neighbourhood Plan.

Reflect local architectural styles

Section 3.3 makes an arbitrary reference to “traditional architectural styles reflective of the local vernacular” but gives no real justification for the statement. It seems that standard “house types” on offer, are, somehow, reflective of the character of the built environment in our village. The Council does not accept this. The Council would wish to see more red sandstone in prominent and more visible locations. Currently only 5 houses out of 173 are to be faced in stone. **The Council would wish to see considerably more use of stone. There are no specified stone walls in the proposals. The Council is not seeking a Poundbury pastiche of traditional styles and materials but rather some more genuine attempts to reflect local architectural character. The Council has repeatedly urged the Developer and house builder to visit Cofford St Luke where there are some good examples of the good use of stone, as much on walls as on houses.**

The Council is wary of some commitment to “localise” these house types by the use of sandstone, pink render or some other mechanism if that is not explicit in the application and approval. The Council does not believe the aspirations set out in the Plan can be accomplished if this issue is merely “in the detail”. **The Council requires an explicit and detailed commitment that the Developer can be held to once an application is approved.**

Housing density and green space

Throughout the Neighbourhood Plan process residents were clear that any major development in the village should maintain the rural character by providing public green open space as well as the green space provided by gardens.

There is “linear green space” within the proposed development but this is due to a site constraint. The Developer is unable to build on the high pressure water main that runs through the site. The green space allocated is therefore very different to that envisaged in the “schematic diagram” included in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Council accepts that the path of the water main will therefore need to be open space, but also wishes to see structured green space provision throughout the development.

This issue also connects with the points about roads and traffic made elsewhere in this response. The Neighbourhood Plan encourages walking and cycling and “tame the impact of the private car”. This can only take place if there are sufficient safe routes for walkers and cyclists to move through the development and will not be easily achieved at the density of housing proposed.

Sustainable development

The National Planning Policy Framework places much emphasis on “sustainable” development but also renders the term almost devoid of any content, almost all development is “sustainable”. The Neighbourhood Plan suggests that as well as very high insulation standards the development should also include ground source heat pumps, solar photo-voltaic panels on roofs to generate electricity and solar thermodynamic panels to heat domestic hot water.

Superfast Broadband

New development should demonstrate how it will continue to and be compatible with local fibre or internet connectivity, a Connectivity Statement should be provided with the relevant planning applications.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE and FOOT & CYCLE PATHS - POLICIES TR1 and TR2

Policy TR1 – Transport Infrastructure: *The sites allocated for residential development in Bishops Lydeard will ensure that:- development is planned and designed to minimize additional traffic through the village centre, adequate bus stops and shelters are provided at convenient locations, safe routes for walking and cycling are provided which conveniently connect with existing networks, on-site transport infrastructure is provided and brought into use before first occupation of part of the development which is served by that element of infrastructure. Any necessary off-site infrastructure shall be provided and brought into use in accordance with a timescale to be agreed by the local planning authority and secured by a planning condition or planning obligation, as appropriate. Furthermore all new dwellings will include a charging point for electric and hybrid vehicles to the Somerset County Council standing advice specification.*

Policy TR2 – Foot & Cycle Paths: *New residential or employment development and associated infrastructure will:- provide appropriate public foot and cycle paths to connect with the existing foot and cycle path network.*

The Council has recently instructed Transport Planning Associates (TPA) of Bristol to advise it generally in relation to highway and traffic problems affecting the village. Following upon the Developer’s submission of the subject planning application, TPA made submissions to the Developer on the 3rd October in the following terms:

1. There are a number of locations where landscaping and associated footpaths cross the ‘road’. A fundamental detail with successful ‘Shared Space’ schemes is to design the space so that it feels as if the road is crossing a pedestrian space rather than the other way around. This ambiguity will also help manage low traffic speeds and improve safety. Making the width of the ‘road’ a single

lane as narrow as possible ideally 3.25m (3.5m maximum) but with the length of the single lane crossing point as long as possible, ideally 10m, (6m minimum), and with associated landscaping will give the impression that the car is crossing 'people' space. The choice of the surface material of the crossing is also vital to give the impression that it is a pedestrian space. Concrete blocks with a rumble strip at each approach would be the preferred treatment. It is also vital that these spaces are not signed and do not include road markings. They can be designed as no-priority 'pinch points' as defined in Somerset CC Technical Advice Note 08/17 Traffic Calming Para. 7.13. Also Clause 7.13.11 of the Advice Note supports no-priority with the omission of control traffic signs. This has not been the traditional approach in Somerset but is supported by this new Advice Note and supports a sympathetic design that would reinforce the setting as "people first" and with low traffic speeds that the Neighbourhood Plan is promoting.

2. There are long sections of streets designed as a kerbed carriageway with 2m footways both sides that confirm the street as primarily a traffic route. If a shared surface cannot be successfully incorporated then at least one of the footways should be omitted.
3. There is a large area of 'coloured surfacing' on Taunton Road opposite Mill Lane. This can often be more effective if it is in panels separated by sections of asphalt. There would be an opportunity to relocate a section of 'coloured surfacing' between Mill Lane and the proposed crossing point by No 163. This length of Taunton Road is otherwise approximately 150m long which could be regarded as excessive. To help manage low traffic speeds this length would benefit by inclusion of at least one feature within this length.
4. The specification of the 'coloured surfacing' is a major concern. The recent example at Monkton Heathfield in a red colour looks dreadful. The traditional material would be concrete blocks (soft colour but visibly different from black asphalt) and as used at other sites in Somerset.
5. The crossing point by No 163 could be formed as a pinch point as per item 1. This combined with the other features along Taunton Road would help ensure Taunton Road has managed low speeds and is integrated with the development as a single coherent space, rather than operating as a traffic corridor that otherwise divides the development into two halves that are then artificially connected by a controlled pedestrian crossing. If designed in this way there would be no requirement for the zebra crossing.
6. The location of the 20 Zone will be an important consideration. A location where a dramatic entry point/gateway can be designed is important. A location to the East of Mill Lane would be appropriate as Mill Lane already has the character of a 20 Zone. Regrettably Hither Mead is an engineered wide carriageway/segregated footways whose character is not one of a 20 Zone, so inclusion of Hither Mead within a 20 zone would be difficult.

Apart from a brief acknowledgement, neither TPA nor the Council has received any response from the Developer or those advising it.

The Council believes that incorporating the above proposals would ensure that the proposed development is integrated with the rest of the village to match the aspirations of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Designed streets as proposed can ensure that the balance between people and car is appropriate both to the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan and also the proposed village 20mph zone.

It is clear from the comments received from residents at the Parish Council's public consultation that there is much concern arising from the considerable increase in traffic which will be generated by this development.

It is felt that the junction with the A358 needs improvement. In particular, lighting should be provided.

Furthermore, speed needs to be restricted to 30mph on the approaches to this junction from both directions along the A358.

The speed restriction existing on Taunton Road should be reduced to 20mph.

It is considered that there are too many accesses onto Taunton Road. In particular the first turning to the right from the A358 junction should be abandoned and consideration given to relocating it onto Hither Mead.

CONCLUSION

The Parish Council is unable to support this application in its present format.