

Summary of the Parish Council's Objections to the Luxury Lodge development – Sutton on the Forest

The parish council has taken a very measured and professional approach to the district council's consultations on this proposed development. We have:-

- Engaged with a large proportion of the local community to get a genuinely representative view and hired an independent planning consultant to inform our approach.
- Submitted a number of detailed responses to the applicant's initial proposal and the various additional justifications which they have submitted. We commend further study of these documents to you as part of your consideration.

Our case can be summarised as follows:-

The proposal is for a major new development in open countryside, beyond the developed area of the village consisting of 9 one, and 37 two storey houses, a leisure spa, 80 seat restaurant, play area and a new lake. It is intended as a 'buy to let' opportunity for investors to fund the development piecemeal by purchasing the properties to rent out on a managed basis. In the view of the parish council and of a great majority of local people the development would be harmful to the village and the surrounding countryside.

Harm to the village

- It would not be related to any existing leisure business, nor a conversion of any existing redundant farm buildings. It cannot in any way be regarded as a legitimate form of farm diversification. As such it is clearly contrary to policies CP1, CP2 and CP4 of the Hambleton Development Plan.
- The 'contemporary palate of building materials' consists of wooden walls, aluminium windows, stainless steel chimneys and glass and stainless steel patios. This is totally at odds with the traditional brick built style of the village.
- The site would be clearly visible from many houses in the village as well as the approach roads. As such it would impact adversely on the character and appearance of the village and its conservation area.
- The developer's highly simplistic landscape impact assessment beggars belief by concluding that such a large development of one and two storey houses, a lake and a new hill together with a two storey spa/restaurant visible over a considerable zone of theoretical visibility would have only a negligible impact. This is nonsense and it would be a highly visible eyesore.
- The developers own ecological consultant identified a major risk that the development, when operational, would adversely affect the adjacent nature reserve due to a substantial increase in unauthorised entry.
- It would generate greatly increased traffic on the single track road to the development site. This already carries a disproportionate volume of local commuter traffic. The villagers have undertaken traffic surveys which highlight the potential congestion and danger to road safety.
- There are serious concerns that it would disrupt the already inadequate foul and surface water drainage of the village.

This harm is detailed in the Parish Council's main submission. The developer's long rebuttal of our submission does not seriously answer these points, reiterating their belief that only professional planners can have a valid opinion.

Having listened to our community, taken professional advice and used our own local experience and judgement:-

1. We firmly believe that the proposal is contrary to policies CP1, CP2 and CP4 of the Hambleton Strategy (2008) in that the development in open countryside does not meet the criteria of that plan with respect to permissible and relevant development.
2. We further consider the alien nature of the design and the resulting adverse impact on the local landscape and biodiversity to be contrary to policies CP17, DP30, DP31, DP32 and DP33. The application should be refused on those grounds.

Supposed benefits

The developer pleads the National Planning Framework's *'Golden Thread'* comment citing this as a presumption in favour of any development they choose to invent so long as the economic benefit outweighs the identified harm.

The Parish Council, backed by a substantial majority of those residents responding to the proposal, contend that these supposed benefits are greatly exaggerated, often illusionary and of such little significance both to the development of the Yorkshire Tourist industry in general and to life in the village that they do not by any means outweigh the harm accruing from the development.

Estimates of economic benefit.

These figures are calculated using a guess at the likely expenditure per visitor and grossing that up into the wider economy. There is an unquestioned assumption that all tourism anywhere must be good. There is no attempt to identify any local benefit.

Job Creation.

- The developer predicts about 3 jobs per house. These would be directly employed in cleaning, maintenance, leisure club and restaurant facilities as well as spin off jobs estimated to be created in the wider community and from construction.
- In a village of relatively full employment with ample jobs in local industrial estates and by commuting to nearby York (only 5 miles by regular bus to Clifton Moor industrial and commercial area) there is a manifest difficulty for local services like pubs and restaurants to find employees for such work.
- In this context the proposed development does not represent a significant local benefit.
- **'Welcome to Yorkshire'** admit in their response that such lodges would be occupied by car users seeking to visit the Yorkshire Dales, North York Moors and Yorkshire Coast as well as York and other Yorkshire wide attractions.
- The district council's own tourism strategy indicates that these jobs should be located in the more rural, less well connected parts of the District rather than simply damage existing local business and the recently started village community shop.
- There is therefore no pressing need for a York commuter zone location.

The Parish Council estimate (Our response to the economic assessment subsequently submitted by the developer)

- The cost of these predicted jobs would consume about 90% of the likely rental income accruing to the external investors attracted by this proposition. Either the job creation predicted is a gross exaggeration or it seems unlikely that the leisure club/spa, bistro or shop would subsequently prove to be economically viable.

- The developers own tourism consultants (GLU & Cloud) admit that to extract the required cash from each tourist and so support the jobs, the development would need to resort to wedding receptions, meetings and conferences.
- Any purported local economic benefits are therefore a fantasy invented by GLU & Cloud to overcome the otherwise strong policy objections to this development.

Additional Facilities

- The facilities listed, such as a playground, shop, health spa and bistro, are either already in the village or in nearby lodge developments like Goose Wood.
- These are (like the village playground), maintained by an active local community or are provided by local business and the recently started community shop.
- Increased competition is not a material planning consideration, but when a new facility harms local enterprise, whether commercial or community driven, it cannot be used as a benefit to offset the harm caused by the whole development.

Other benefits

- Other benefits claimed by the developer are in reality mitigation measures to counter the ill effects of the development by way of footpath realignment, limited tree screening and other landscaping, none of which could be regarded as a benefit to offset against the harm already identified.
- Even where benefits are claimed there is no offer of a legal obligation or unilateral undertaking by the developer, for example, to secure biodiversity in the adjacent Moorend Nature Reserve.
- We can only presume that such an undertaking would detract from the already doubtful investment package on offer to purchasers of these buy to rent properties.

The Parish Council's Conclusion

We believe that:-

- This is a poorly conceived proposal from a developer trying to set up an attractive opportunity for buy to let investors in property.
- The developer clearly believes, erroneously, that recent changes to the National Planning Framework allow setting aside of local development frameworks to give carte blanche for any development which they or the construction industry dream up.
- They justify this view by misreading national guidance and repeated references to unrelated appeal decisions.
- If the district council approves this proposal there will not be a field or a community in Hambleton safe from such misguided speculation.

The parish council urges the district councillors to reject the proposal. It looks forward to the opportunity of assisting the district council to sustain that decision, wholly justified by the policies of the development plan, at any subsequent appeal hearing or inquiry.

Sutton on the Forest Parish Council
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