

COMMENTS BY COUNCILLORS KEMP AND NUNN ON OFFICER'S REPORT TO PLANNING COMMITTEE ON BULL LANE LONG MELFORD B/16/00777

SUMMARY

The report is inaccurate, misleading or has reached unjustified conclusions on the following issues of substance:

Impact on landscape. The assertion that the agricultural aspect of the north side of Bull Lane is more important than the agricultural aspect of the south side (where the development is proposed) is totally unjustified and incorrect.

Location context. The analysis completely ignores two examples of what should be taken into account under CS11: ribbon development and connectivity.

Walking distances to the village. The analysis is seriously misleading. Walking distances are much greater than Department of Transport 'acceptable' distances.

Other major developments in the village. The analysis is at best confusing and inconsistent and at worst misleading regarding the affordable homes, sheltered housing and homes tailored to local needs in respect of the Ropers Lane and Fleetwood/Orchard Brook developments now under construction. The cumulative impact of these developments together with the application being considered here on the village infrastructure such as doctors' surgery, school and parking has not been analysed. Together these developments would mean 208 (12.3%) more households in the village.

Housing Needs Study. The results of this are presented even though the officer acknowledges the shortcomings of the methodology and advises caution in assessing the results. The results should carry no weight whatsoever.

Mix of housing. The report highlights non-compliance with Babergh's SHMA recommendations for housing mix and expresses disappointment with the number of bungalows proposed but then still recommends approval.

Locally identified community needs. The report states that no statement of local needs has been received and therefore the applicant has not adequately demonstrated how this element of CS11 would be met. But it then states that CIL payments will make up for that. But CIL payments do not have to be used to meet local Long Melford needs.

Lack of sustainability. The report asserts that the development is sustainable. It is not. It fails 18 of the 19 sustainability tests in CS15.

Design and layout. It is clear that the design and layout fail to 'respect the local context and character' as required by CS15. Both the National Trust and Suffolk Preservation Society have said the suburban design is unacceptable in the context of the historic setting of Long Melford.

No mention of CS 17: The Rural Economy. This is a major policy and Long Melford is specifically mentioned in the first line of the text. Yet it has not been considered in the report. Surely it must be before a decision can be taken by the Planning Committee.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Impact on the landscape

This is covered in paras 43 to 48 and (in the context of the Conservation Area) paras 66 to 69.

Para 45 states:

The proposal will create a significant change in land cover and clearly therefore in the character of the site.

Para 68 states:

The existing undeveloped agricultural land north of Bull Lane is a significant feature of the conservation area's setting and makes an important contribution to significance

Both these statements are true. Bull Lane is an attractive rural entrance to Long Melford and should remain as such.

But Para 68 goes on to say that the agricultural land to the south of Bull Lane (ie the proposed development site) is a less significant feature than the land to the north. And then...

Para 69 states:

The land to the south of Bull Lane, including the development site, is considered to make only a minor contribution. Because of this the level of harm the proposal causes to the conservation area's significance as a designated heritage asset is considered relatively minor.

It is nonsense to suggest that the land on one side of Bull Lane has a more significant effect on the attractive rural entrance to the village than the land on the north side. It is both sides taken together that create the entrance and the benefit to the Conservation Area.

Similarly the para 48 conclusion is nonsensical:

It is considered that subject to detailed conditions relating to the landscaping of the site, there is the opportunity to reasonably minimise the adverse impacts of the development on the character of the landscape and local visual amenity having particular regard for Policy CS15.

The landscaping will do nothing to hide the fact that a peaceful rural approach to Long Melford will be replaced by suburban ribbon development.

Later on in the report

Para 173 quotes Place Services as saying:

...the overall context of the site will fundamentally change

Locational context

Covered in paras 72 to 74.

Para 73 states:

Proposals should be well related to the existing settlement

It then goes on to give five issues as examples of what should be taken into account.

Para 74 concludes:

Therefore, the proposal also complies with this part of policy CS11.

But this completely ignores the first and second of the five examples given in para 73:

- *Whether the proposal would constitute ribbon development on the edge of the village*
- *How the site is connected to the existing settlement, jobs, facilities and services including location of site access and availability of sustainable transport links*

As stated above, it clearly is ribbon development on the edge of the village. And the site is not well connected to the existing settlement.

Walking distance to village facilities

Paras 75 and 77 state *the village facilities are within walking distance* and para 127 states *although not within 400m (5min walking distance of the village centre) it provides the opportunities to create new pedestrian links*

But this is disingenuous. The actual walking distances from the middle of the proposed development are very much further:

Co-op 1.12km

Primary school gate 1.26km

Doctors' surgery 1km

These compare with the Department of Transport's 'acceptable' distance of 800m.

Will people walk over 2.2km (1.4 miles) to and from the main grocery store?
Will parents walk over 2.5km (over 1.5 miles) return in the rain to take the kids to school and collect them? No. Most people will drive – how is that sustainable development?

And what are these new pedestrian links? A footpath is proposed within the development to link to an existing footpath at the development's edge; and access to the existing railway walk/nature reserve (muddy in wet weather and unlit) is provided; but that's it. There are no new links.

Other Long Melford developments already approved

The Ropers Lane and Fleetwood Caravans/Orchard Brook developments are mentioned misleadingly in several places, sometimes with the implication that they do not have affordable housing or housing tailored to local people's needs: Paras, 79, 93, 96, 169

The facts are:

- the Fleetwood Caravans/Orchard Brook developer worked closely with the village and tailored its plans to stated needs. As a result it included 13 sheltered units and some bungalows in the plans
- Ropers Lane has 35% affordable homes

Both the developers of these sites actively sought the views of the Parish Council whereas Hopkins Homes has twice turned down invitations to meet.

Housing Needs Survey

Paras 89 to 92 give results from the applicant's Housing Needs Survey, which has consistently been criticised for flawed methodology and nonsensical results by the Parish Council. Then para 100 acknowledges the PC's criticism and effectively says give no weight to paras 89 to 92 – so why are they there?

Importantly para 100 ends:

Officers consider that this element of CS11 has not been complied with.

No weight should be given to the housing needs survey and the results should be ignored as meaningless.

Mix of housing

Paras 94 to 99 discuss the mix of housing proposed.

Para 94 states:

This application proposes 11 x 4 beds which is 24% of the open market provision. The SHMA 2012 recommends that only 6% of all new supply should be in the form of 4 bed roomed accommodation.

Para 95 states:

In this application there are 7 x 2 bed open market homes proposed, only 2 are bungalows, which is disappointing considering the age profile for Long Melford and the surrounding villages where 26.8% of the population are aged over 65. This compares to the average for Babergh which is 21.4%.

If the application does not comply with requirements and the lack of bungalows is 'disappointing' why recommend approval?

Moreover Para 98 states:

Following the updated mix of dwellings confirmed by the applicant, these policies are considered to be complied with.

This seems completely contradictory to paras 94 and 95.

Locally Identified Community Needs

Para 102 states: The SPD identifies that proposals should be accompanied by a statement that analyses the community needs of the Village and how they have been taken into account in the proposal. In this case the applicant has not submitted a community needs assessment.

Para 103 states: In the absence of such a statement, the application submission has not adequately demonstrated how the proposal would meet this element of policy CS11.

Surely the lack of a required document should mean the application is rejected.

But Para 103 goes on to state (and para 102 states something similar):
However, Officers would advise that the proposed development will generate contributions towards community infrastructure, to be spent on local services and infrastructure, therefore supporting rural communities, local services and facilities. In this regard, despite the absence of the needs assessment, the proposal delivers benefits through CIL that are considered to satisfy this element of policy CS11.

But CIL is normal practice and there is no guarantee that the CIL payments will be spent on local Long Melford services and infrastructure.

Cumulative impact of development in the area

Para 104 states: The SPD identifies, at paragraph 13, that "cumulative impact should include existing commitments and other proposals in the same village and existing commitments and other proposals in the cluster where they are likely to have a wider impact for example in terms of traffic generation, capacity of schools and health services....".

There follows a statement regarding the number of other developments approved in the Long Melford (another 137 homes according to Para 106). But there is absolutely no analysis of the impact of those developments; only a statement in Para 109 that:

Para 109: The technical advice received from highways, Anglian Water and the lead flood officer demonstrate that the development can be accommodated within the village and that the services, facilities and infrastructure have the capacity to accommodate the level of development proposed.

There is absolutely no discussion of the impact of the other 137 homes being built in addition to the 71 proposed here (making a total of 208) will have on issues such as:

- parking in Hall Street, which is already very difficult or impossible at times and will be made worse
- the doctor's surgery, which has already said it is full and patients will have to travel to the Lavenham surgery for consultations
- the school, which has already said that some age groups are at full capacity

There is absolutely no justification for the unfounded assertion in

Para 110: It is therefore considered that given the responses from statutory consultees and the scale of development proposed, the cumulative impact of the development will be easily accommodated within the existing infrastructure of the village and will not lead to a detrimental impact on the social, physical and environmental wellbeing of the village The proposal therefore complies with this element of policy CS11.

It is inconceivable that the cumulative impact of 208 new homes (an increase of 12.3% on existing households in Long Melford) will not lead to a detrimental impact and pressure on facilities.

Summary of Assessment Against Policy CS11

Para 111 states:

The individual elements of CS11, in relation to Core Villages, have been assessed above. Notwithstanding the balancing exercise required in respect of heritage assets and public benefits, which will be carried out later in this report, the proposal cannot be said to fully comply with policy CS11. The proposal does not demonstrate that the development meets local needs, both in terms of housing and community facilities.

This in itself should be reason enough for the application to be refused.

Sustainability

The sustainability of a development is key to both NPPF and local plan requirements.

This is covered in Paras 116 to 156 of the report.

The conclusion is

Para156:

Policy CS15 is a detailed policy setting 19 individual criteria as to how sustainable development will be implemented in Babergh. The proposal has been assessed against these criteria and, whilst a number of the criteria are met, it is not possible to conclude that the development accords with policy CS15 as there are a number of criteria within policy CS15 that the proposal is either silent on or which the development does not comply with. In this regard, the proposal can only be treated

as being partly in compliance with policy CS15.

This conclusion makes it clear that it has not been shown that the development is sustainable and therefore the application should be refused.

Some detailed points on individual paras:

Para 116:

Policy CS15 is a long, wide-ranging, criteria based policy, setting out how the Council will seek to implement sustainable development. It contains a total of 19 criteria, covering matters such as landscape impact, job creation, minimising energy and waste and promoting healthy living and accessibility...

Long Melford Parish Council's planning consultant analysed the 19 points in the Council's April 2017 submission and concluded that the application did not score positively on 18 of the 19 criteria. That is damning and officers have not contested that view.

Para 117:

Policy CS15 seeks to minimise the need to travel by car using alternative means and improving air quality...

The discussion in the rest of that para completely ignores travel to local Long Melford shops and other facilities. As stated above under 'Walking distances to village facilities' the distances of 1km and more are not 'acceptable' according to the Department of Transport. People will use their cars.

For longer journeys, the bus service referred to that passes the site runs only once an hour Mon to Sat. It does not connect well with the trains from Sudbury to London and there is no evening service. Again, people will use their cars.

Para 125:

It is considered that the highway network will not be unacceptably impacted as a result of these proposals...

and

Para 130:

The County Highway assessment regarding traffic is based on evidence provided by the applicants transport consultants...

No assessment has been made of the extra pressure on parking in Hall Street (see 'Cumulative impact of development in the area' above) or at the dangerous junctions of Bull Lane with Hall Street at one end and the bypass at the other.

Para 132:

In terms of Bull Lane/Hall Street there is no scope for further improvements due to existing buildings. The pedestrian route to the village centre will have enhanced signing to encourage use of the Woollards Gardens route.

The Woollards Gardens route will not be used by most people who wish to go to many of the village facilities, such as the village hall, church, three popular public houses/restaurants, the butcher, the baker, the deli and a wide variety of other shops as it will add significantly to the distance they have to walk because it would mean doubling back on oneself once in Hall Street. They will continue to use the dangerously narrow gap next to the Bull Hotel.

Design and Layout

Para 140:

The general approach to elevations throughout the proposed development has been aimed to respond to the local vernacular, taking design cues from the positive context of Long Melford.

This may have been the aim but it has not succeeded. As various bodies say:

National Trust:

The Trust is of the view that this is a sensitive edge of settlement location and that the transition from open countryside into the village should be carefully treated, the current appearance is of a typical suburban layout and is inappropriate for this context and contrary to Policies CN01 and CN08.

Suffolk Preservation Society:

The Society objects to the proposal which...will erode the rural context of this historic village...The proposal will extend the village in a ribbon like manner... these measures will suburbanise the countryside, eroding the historic setting of the village.

Sketch Design:

The design does not relate well to its landscape setting, and does not follow guidance of the Suffolk Design Guide (chapter 3.10 to 3.11)... It is obvious that the design of the proposed development is driven primarily by the desire to maximise the level of saleable building accommodation and does not show sufficient appreciation to the existing surroundings or understanding of the village context.

It is clear that the design and layout fails to 'respect the local context and character' as required by CS15.

Working with the developer

Para 184 states:

In this case the planning authority has worked with the applicant to ensure that the mix of dwellings better reflects the housing mix identified in the applicants housing need survey.

This makes no sense because in para 100 the officer questions the robustness of the housing needs survey and advises a precautionary approach

No mention of CS17: The Rural Economy

It is astonishing and a major omission that there is no mention in the report of CS17, which specifically mentions Long Melford in its first line of text.

CS17 lists six measures that the rural economy will be supported by. None of these includes new housing estates built on agricultural land outside the built up area of the village.

One of them is specifically supporting '*sustainable tourism and leisure based businesses (including those offering a diverse range of visitor accommodation, activities or experiences)*'.

The proposed development will discourage tourism by suburbanising a historic medieval village, ruining the lovely rural approach and making parking for tourists even more difficult.

The impact of the proposed development on CS17 must be assessed before a decision is taken by the Planning Committee.