

EXTRACT FROM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES – 10 OCTOBER 2019

- 53 **HOLT - PO/18/1857 - Outline planning application for the erection of up to 110 dwellings with 2 hectares of land for a new primary school, public open space, landscaping and sustainable drainage system (SuDS) with main vehicular access point from Beresford Road and secondary pedestrian, cycle and emergency access from Lodge Close. All matters reserved except for means of access; Land off Beresford Road, Holt for Gladman Developments Ltd**

The Committee considered item 7 of the Officers' reports.

Public Speakers

Mr R Carter (objecting)
Mr C Greenwood (objecting)
Mr A Bamforth (objecting)
Mr J Mackenzie (supporting)

The Major Projects Team Leader presented the report and displayed plans and photographs of the site, including the proposed access points, an indicative layout plan and photograph of the existing school site. She reported that the latest figures provided by the Education Authority showed there had been 186 pupils on the school roll in May 2019. The Highways Officer was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a position statement prior to the meeting which did not raise any new matters.

Councillor D Baker, local Member, stated that the site was within the Countryside policy area and was therefore contrary to policy. He considered that the school land was an inducement to grant planning permission on a site for which a previous application for 170 dwellings had been refused in 2014. There was no current need for a replacement school as pupil numbers had fallen over the last 5 years and the County Council had no budgetary provision or timeline for building it. He was also concerned that a new two-form entry school would lead to the closure of small local schools. He considered that the proposed single access through Beresford Road was inappropriate as it would become a bottleneck, a rat run, chaotic and dangerous. The proposal would add to the 500 new homes already scheduled for Holt, the population of which was set to double in five years. Whilst there was a need for affordable homes, he considered that they should not be built at any cost in an area which was against policy, and that the environment and countryside should be protected.

Councillor Mrs G Perry-Warnes, local Member, considered that although the forecast for primary school capacity supposedly established a need for a new school, the proposed location was not the most suitable site and the proposal was contrary to Policy SS2. She was concerned that Holt could be left with no public benefit to justify a departure from Development Plan policies if the funding for the school did not materialise. Her major concern related to highways issues in respect of the increase in traffic on nearby roads and associated road safety implications, detrimental effect on quality of life for local residents associated with inconsiderate driving and parking, and impact on the wider road network, particularly Hempstead Road which was already a safety concern due to the increase in traffic from other developments. She considered that the single access via Beresford Road was unsuitable and inadequate. Whilst the Highway Authority had raised no objection, she considered that there was sufficient concern to justify a re-examination of the highway issues. She requested deferral of this application pending an independent highway survey.

Councillor A Brown stated that he was addressing the Committee as Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning, and as Member for Stody Ward which was within the Holt Primary School catchment area. He expressed disappointment that there was no Highways Officer or representative of the Local Education Authority at the meeting, which he considered to be disrespectful.

With regard to the need for the school, Councillor Brown considered that it could be argued that the new school would be of benefit to the community which could outweigh contravention of planning policies, and that the development of additional housing in Holt could create the necessary demand for capacity. There was no indication of the possible uses for the existing school site. With regard to viability of Norfolk County Council providing a new primary school, the County Council had only committed to a feasibility study and he stated that there was no legal reason why there should not be an option agreement on the land for the development of the school at this stage. He supported the request by Councillor Perry-Warnes for an independent highway report. He proposed deferral of this application for further information to be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Mrs S Bütikofer stated that she was speaking as County Councillor for Holt. She stated that the school was a pivotal factor in this application. She explained how the requirement for primary school places was calculated. The same calculation was used throughout the whole of the county and did not explicitly take into account the demographic and sales profile of purchasers of dwellings in Holt. In the event of the new dwellings not generating the expected number of pupils, NCC had stated clearly that other options may need to be considered, which was the reason for holding the land for 10 years. NCC had confirmed that there was capacity in other primary schools in the area. The scheme had not been prioritised by NCC and funding had only been set aside for the development of a plan. She stated that the site was not the NCC preferred site but other options had fallen away. She received many more representations as a County Councillor regarding Hempstead Road than anything else, raising concerns about highway safety of that location, and she could not understand the Highway Authority's views. She considered that the location was completely unacceptable and supported the request for an independent traffic management survey. She also requested further substantive evidence of the need for primary school places in Holt.

Councillor G Mancini-Boyle considered that a one-way system could have been introduced if access had been given to Lodge Close. He had calculated that the proposed housing development could result in around 160 vehicles, with over 300 in the event of the school being opened. He considered that the proposal was not a viable site for a new school.

The Head of Planning and Major Projects Manager referred to concerns which had been raised outside of the meeting with regard to amenity issues relating to vehicle movements associated with a new school in this location, but which had not yet been discussed.

Councillor N Lloyd stated that when he visited the site he had been struck by the inconvenience to existing residents. He considered that the area would become gridlocked with parents bringing children to the school in cars. He was also disappointed that there was no reference to climate emergency in the report.

The Head of Planning explained that given its position with regard to the existing and emerging local plans, the Local Planning Authority had to be guided by National Planning Policy which had not yet caught up with climate emergency. He was unable to advise the Committee to give material weight in planning judgements to issues which were not currently part of planning policy.

Councillor P Heinrich stated that there would be at least 100 vehicles arriving in the morning and afternoon. He considered that engines would be idling when children were dropped off at the school, causing air pollution and environmental damage, and at picking up time parents would be parking to wait for their children and socialising with other parents, causing severe damage to the amenity of the area for new residents as well as existing residents. He considered there was no logical reason to impose this environmental damage on existing residents.

Councillor Mrs S Bütikofer referred to concerns which had been raised in a nearby town regarding the impact of parents dropping off and picking up their children with no regard to the local community.

The Chairman expressed concern that there could be safety issues with parked cars as small children were not very aware of road safety.

The Chairman asked for a proposer for the Officer's recommendation. There was no proposer.

Councillor Brown proposed deferral of this application to seek due diligence with regard to the need for primary school places and financial commitment from the Education Authority to the provision of a new school, and a traffic assessment.

In response to a question by Councillor D Baker as to the effect of the deferral, the Head of Planning explained that a further report would be submitted to the Committee for consideration following receipt of an independent traffic report and further information.

Councillor N Pearce seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED

That consideration of this application be deferred:

- 1. to seek proof of the need for primary school places and greater financial commitment to the school by the Education Authority; and**
- 2. to seek an independent report in respect of the highway and access issues.**