

STILTON PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO PLANNING APPLICATION - 70
RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS, TOGETHER WITH THE PROVISION OF A NEW ACCESS
FROM HIGH STREET, OPEN SPACE AND NEW FOOTPATHS/CYCLE WAYS AND
DOCTOR'S SURGERY.

LAND WEST OF 26 TO 34 HIGH STREET REF. NO. 18/02192/OUT

SUMMARY

Stilton Parish Council has considered the proposal taking into account information provided to it and its assessment of comments from the village. The Council believes it would cause demonstrable harm to the village and therefore opposes the development; it notes that this is in support of virtually all villagers who have expressed their views. In particular, the scale of the development is contrary to existing Plans and Strategies and the proposal fails to take into account the full impact upon the village. The proposal exaggerates evidence for its claim that Stilton should be a Service Centre and the Council wishes to stress the limited amenities, services and employment opportunities available in the village. The Council also draws attention to the particular traffic problems in the village which would be exacerbated by development, as indicated in Cambridgeshire County Council's recent report, but which have been neglected in this planning application. The Council notes that noise measurements were taken under conditions when noise levels would be expected to be at their lowest. The Parish Council believes that proposals for amenities (doctor's surgery, children's playground and allotments) suggested by the developer have no real substance nor backing from third parties; it is also aware that inclusion of such things in outline plans may be changed at a future date. The Council notes a number of instances where information is lacking in the proposal and identifies issues that the developer needs to address for the application to be properly assessed.

Introduction

1. This submission is made by Stilton Parish Council after due consideration of the plans submitted to Huntingdonshire District Council, the presentations made by Andrew S Campbell Associates and discussions by villagers in open forum at Parish Council meetings on 14 August and 13 November, as well as written responses to the planning application. It considers the various aspects of the planning application and draws attention to some erroneous and misleading statements in the application as well as shortfalls in information that need to be addressed before proper consideration of the application can be made.

A. The county plan

2. The Parish Council is in full agreement with the existing designation of Stilton as a "Small

Settlement" as in the existing Core Strategy for the County established in 2009 and the Local Plan to 2036. It is recognized that Stilton has limited ability to accept anything other than smaller developments.¹

3. The Parish Council totally disagrees with the developer that Stilton should be considered a Service Centre. The size of the village, its infrastructure, and its particular traffic problems leave Stilton far short of what is required for a Service Centre. The developer's arguments for a Service Centre are often misleading and we wish to note errors in the sub-section below.

Inaccuracies in the proposal and associated documents

4. In the Planning Statement (section 2.1) Stilton is described as a village of over 3000 with 1450 dwellings. These figures, we believe, are taken from the 2011 census as recorded by the Office for National Statistics. However, the figures for "Stilton" are based upon a collection of post codes which include the village of Holme (2011 census population 636) as well as a number of hamlets and other dwellings well outside of Stilton village. We have calculated a more realistic figure using the current electoral roll; this gives the number of dwellings in the village as 976. The population, therefore, is much closer to 2000.
5. Stilton's amenities fall far short of what is described in the planning application. The Planning Statement (section 4.1) describes the village as having "a new community centre, sports pavilion and parish centre adjoining our site". This is a case of "triple counting" as all three are one and the same building (the Pavilion) which has a single hall, kitchen and changing rooms for two teams (sufficient for the one football pitch which also doubles as the village recreation field).
6. The suggestion that Stilton has "a full range of recreation faculties" (section 4.1 of the Planning Statement) is also misleading. As already noted the single football pitch and adjacent miniature junior pitch have to double as the village recreation field. This area is not big enough for cricket and there is no outside space for other sports. While Stilton benefits from a skate park, there are no other sports facilities except table tennis and indoor carpet bowls which are held in the Pavilion hall; this venue is not suitable for badminton, indoor football, netball, basket ball etc. because of its design.

¹ The 2002 Local Plan alteration designated Stilton as a "Group Village" where schemes of up to and including 8 dwellings were permitted. The Core Strategy 2009 designated Stilton as a 'Small Settlement'. Policy CS3 allowed residential infilling for up to 3 dwellings and minor scale of up to 9 dwellings where site specific circumstances demonstrated that this would form the most sustainable use for the site.

7. The description of Stilton having a "full range of shopping and service facilities" (section 4.1 of the Planning Statement) is also misleading. The village has a single trading shop, though this does have a post office counter. Halls, the chemist, also have a counter in the shop with a small dispensary. Parking for these facilities is very limited (see section C below)
8. The fact that there are so many public houses/hotels in Stilton (section 4.1 of the Planning Statement) is a result of its history since it was once on the Great North Road. However, these hostelries, while an asset to the village itself, also create significant pressure on the village as a result of visiting traffic from outside the village (see further discussions on traffic in sections below).
9. With regard to employment within the village, the Council wishes to point out:
 - (a) The steel fabrication works employing 100+ people is sited about one mile outside the village on the other side of the A1(M);
 - (b) The other significant employer (Beebys Limited) employs approximately 120 persons. It is a cleaning and landscaping business with nearly all staff working off site. Beebys is currently looking to move to larger premises outside of Stilton;
 - (c) The County Council Highways depot has few people working on site;
 - (d) Few people living in Stilton work for these major employers.
10. To sum up, Stilton's infrastructure is very poor compared with many other villages of a similar size which might be considered as Service Centres. Buckden, south of Huntingdon, is of a similar size but has a large array of shops including a butchers, a petrol service station, a large primary school, a doctors' surgery, dentists' surgery, large village hall with several meeting rooms, library, separate building and facilities for the football teams, several football pitches, a cricket pitch, large children's play area, several tennis courts, long-term allotments and a bowling green with club house. Furthermore, there are few employment opportunities in Stilton.

B. Traffic - volume and speed

11. The Council wishes to stress that because of the creation of the A1(M) there is only one major route into and out of the village. Nearly all traffic (well in excess of 90%) use North Street to access the motorway, the A15 to Yaxley, or the service road to Sawtry. As a consequence, the volume of traffic in North Street and the centre of the village is high, especially at peak times. Any development to the south of the village will add to the volume through the centre. The configuration of the cross roads at the centre and the issues of parking in this vicinity (see section below) create dangerous situations for both vehicles and pedestrians, again this will be made worse with additional traffic from the south. While the applicant's Transport Statement concludes that the road to the south of the centre (High Street) has the capacity for additional

traffic and that any additional traffic will have little impact on the busy intersection at Norman Cross, it makes no reference to the impact of the increased volume of traffic through the village centre and through North Street. This will have an unacceptable impact on highway safety in these areas especially in view of frequent speeding (see para 12 below).

12. The application does not address the issues of speeding along North Street (the main route into the village) or through the centre and High Street. There is a one mile straight length of road from entering the village down to the Pavilion at the other end of the village (a stretch of the Great North Road); such a road inevitably results in excessive speed at times. The Stilton Community Speed Watch have indicated that approximately 15% of traffic *significantly* exceeds the speed limit of 30 mph when a session is taking place in North Street. Experience indicates that when the team is not present this is substantially higher as people are more likely to use excess speed when they are not being monitored. The traffic survey carried out for another recent planning application reflects this; it reports that the 85 percentile speeds at the same point in North Street were 42.7 mph northbound and 40.5 mph southbound – both substantially above the speed limit. Additional traffic from the south of the village would add to these problems and create further hazards for pedestrians and cars turning into or out of junctions/driveways along North Street.
13. While the Transport Statement makes reference to the large volume of traffic using the roundabout at Norman Cross, it makes no reference to the 5,350 dwellings to be built at Norman Cross (the Great Haddon new township). The roundabout will have to service a large proportion of the vehicles leaving and entering that very large development. Traffic volumes then are likely to reach gridlock at times with very significant problems for traffic travelling to and from Stilton.
14. The Transport Statement uses TRICS information which it suggests, at peak times, indicate movements of 39 and 43 into and out of the development respectively - though it does not mention the total (as indicated in the appendix) of 417 movements per day. But these traffic movement figures seem to be highly unrealistic; in particular, the Statement claims that there is less than half an outward vehicle movement per household at peak times. This is not commensurate with what one would expect from such a community and reinforces the Parish Council's belief that the Statement grossly underestimates traffic movements into and out of the development. The proposal assumes that most living on the development will walk to the school and shop. Experience shows that this is not so. Most parents travel with small children by car, even short distances, arguing that it is safer and quicker (the average walking speed of 3 mph quoted in the Transport Plan is not achievable with small children). Other villagers also use their cars to travel around the village, e.g. to the village shop. As the TRICS data quoted have no range of values or uncertainties attributed to them it is difficult to see how Stilton would fit into the diverse range of dwellings that the TRICS data are based upon. Better

information is required in order to assess the real impacts upon High Street (and the centre of the village and North Street) and Church Close. Traffic estimates should also take account of the possibilities of a surgery and allotments in the development (see sections below).

15. The effectiveness of public transport is also overstated. In reality the current service is wholly unsuitable for the majority. Unless employed in the centre of one of the cities or towns serviced by bus, it would be more economical to use a taxi. The link to Huntingdon railway station is also not fit for the purpose of anyone wishing to work in London. By way of example, when catching the first bus, which leaves the village at 6:51, a traveller would arrive in London at 8:55 and after a normal working day arrive back in Stilton at 19.58, some 13 hours and seven minutes later for what was a 7.5 hour working day!

C. Traffic - parking and congestion

Parking on the proposed development

16. There is no detailed site layout plan and experience shows that parking on new housing developments is invariably inadequate. There are already areas of Stilton where there are serious problems and this is a real concern. Allowing for space to be allocated for adequate parking for a modern day family where two cars are often a minimum, particularly in a village with limited facilities and restricted public transport. For example, families with two adult children both having their own vehicles to get to and from college or work is not unusual, such a family requires at least four parking spaces with additional space needed for visitors. The need for additional parking is demonstrated in nearby Hampton, where the number of cars is 2.3 per household, the highest in Peterborough, including wealthy areas of the city. Also in Peterborough there are increasing problems from houses with multiple occupancy where there are several adults sharing a dwelling. These factors can result in 3, 4 or even 5 cars for a single dwelling. The Council believes that planning authorities need to learn from the mistakes in other areas and not compound them on new developments.

Parking in village centre and outside school

17. The application does not address the known issues where, as a recent accident highlights, there are significant problems with traffic congestion in the village. The situation is compounded by buses trying to negotiate the narrow roads, in particular Church Close and Church Street, which are perpetually restricted with many parked cars. There are a number of instances where buses have been unable to negotiate parked vehicles and have had to reverse a significant distance to find an alternative (unauthorized) route. Parking problems are particularly bad in the centre of the village where the shop and public houses are located. Parking here is restricted and oversubscribed which leads to severe hazards to cars and pedestrians in this area. Cars

parking on yellow lines in this area add to the danger. Additional housing in the village will inevitably add to this problem, particularly as the proposed development is close to some of the problem areas in Church Close but also sufficiently far away from the village shop and school that the new residents will inevitably use their cars to travel there. The Parish Council believes that significant changes would be needed to avoid unacceptable highway safety with any increase in traffic numbers.

18. As previously noted, most parents will take their children to school by car, though it may suit the developer to suggest otherwise. This not only adds to the traffic but creates major parking and safety problems outside the school at certain times of day. Owing to the narrow width of the road there, and with parking on both sides of the road, congestion is already severe with grave risks to pedestrians crossing the road (which would include any pedestrians from the proposed development). Additional vehicles will add to the danger.

D. The village school

19. The village school is of limited capacity and most year groups are oversubscribed. Already very small children are being taxied out of the village to other schools in neighbouring villages. The new development will add to this problem. Whilst, in theory, the school could be extended, there are limitations to the site and it is highly unlikely that funding would be available for the requisite expansion. Already, the use of a mobile classroom has been confined to the front of the building because, as noted by the emergency services, access to the rear of the current building is too restricted. The Council believes there will be similar limitations regarding extension to the buildings, so increasing the size of the school could be problematic. This needs to be properly evaluated with respect to the proposed development.
20. The Council wishes to note that the village school in Stilton is a "Church of England Academy" not a "community school" as indicated in the Statement for Consideration at the Local Plan Hearing July 2018 (section 4.1). This can have implications regarding admissions that can affect availability of places for village children. The proposal should take account of this.

E. Doctor's surgery

21. While the developer has made suggestions (via an email available on the Planning Portal) for including a doctors surgery in the proposed development, the Council have been provided with no concrete proposal for building the surgery. Furthermore, discussions with practitioners at Yaxley surgery indicate they do not believe that a surgery in Stilton would be an overall benefit. It could also present the practice with difficulties of staffing. Andrew S Campbell Associates had indicated to the Parish Council that they would provide evidence from the

Chief Executive of Lakeside Healthcare (which operates Yaxley surgery) to indicate he was keen to establish a surgery in Stilton, but this has not been forthcoming. Furthermore, we know of no NHS agreement for the building of a surgery in Stilton.

22. The Parish Council is concerned that the proposed surgery, if it materializes, would significantly add to the traffic flow through the village. Patients travelling to and from the surgery are not included in the Travel Statement and without knowledge of the size and operation of the surgery the additional traffic is difficult to estimate.
23. There will be additional problems with the surgery's parking on the development unless a significant car park is provided. Even with a single GP in attendance there will also be at least one nurse and a receptionist. Assuming there will be at least three patients at any one time, more if the nurse is treating patients, the surgery will require an absolute minimum of 6 car spaces but probably more. Two of these spaces would need to be for disabled drivers. The Parish Council is unable to judge the feasibility of putting a doctor's surgery on the site without better information on the site layout. If the surgery is to be towards the eastern end of the site there could be problems with the attenuation pond (see section I).
24. Regarding the operation of the surgery, it is unlikely to be of significant help to many aged residents as it is on the edge of the village, and Yaxley or Sawtry surgeries will be closer for many who live outside the village. Furthermore, the long-term operation of a surgery is not guaranteed. Indeed, Lakeside may even choose to sell it on with changed use as a residential dwelling or commercial property.

F. Allotments

25. As with the surgery, the Parish Council is unconvinced that these will materialize and will be of a suitable quality with the required water tap, fencing etc. There has been little indication where these are likely to be - save for a suggestion, by Campbell Associates, of an area that the Council understands would not be made available to it by the current owner of the land. Furthermore, the suggestions made for the allotments were only for a term of 20 years, which would be an unacceptably short period for the Council.
26. As noted above for the doctors surgery, the allotments will also generate more traffic through the village and they are likely to add to current car parking problems in or near the development.

G. Children's play area

27. There have been suggestions that the developer would provide a much needed children's play

area for the village. The Parish Council is cautious about such promises as there is no concrete evidence that such a playground would materialize. Furthermore, while the proposal suggests that a playground would be provided on the development site or on Parish Council land near the Pavilion, Mr Campbell at a meeting with the Parish Council suggested that the playground could be on a parcel of land adjacent to playing field which is owned by one of the developers. The uncertainty in the positioning of the playground does little to give the Parish Council confidence in the offer.

H. Noise

28. The recently submitted noise report (one reason for the delay in completing this submission) suggests that noise levels are acceptable. However, The Council notes that the "attended monitoring at Location 1" (Table A3.2) was carried out when the wind direction was blowing from the west (18th October) and from the north (22nd October). Wind speed was less than 1.5 m/sec (3.4 mph) and conditions were dry. Everyone in Stilton is aware that at the southern end of the village noise from the A1(M) is at its greatest when the wind is from the east, south-east or south, and in wet conditions when the wind is strong! Given the timing and conditions at the time of the testing, the credibility of the findings is suspect.
29. The unattended monitoring was also made in dry conditions with low wind speeds (less than 5 m/s). Furthermore, the wind direction was described as variable so the Council has not been provided with sufficient relevant information to make a proper assessment of the impact of noise on the development.

I. Services

30. The Planning Statement indicates that there are no issues with regard to the treatment works for foul water drainage, the Council wishes to be reassured that the existing drainage system itself has sufficient capacity from the south end of the village.
31. In consideration of the Flood Risk Assessment, the Council notes that the Development Plan does not indicate any SuDs (Sustainable Drainage Systems) but they are called for in the assessment. The document also suggests that private parking areas would provide significant attenuation volumes, however, given the topography of the site these are unlikely to be achieved. We note that an area of 25m² will be required at the bottom of the site, i.e. around the junction with High Street, to accommodate an attenuation pond but this is not shown on the plan and we believe it would be difficult to accommodate in the available space.
32. There is no indication regarding whether the existing electricity supply is adequate. From experience with its Pavilion, the Parish Council is aware that capacity is limited at the southern

end of the village. Has the developer considered this?

33. There is no indication whether the existing water supply has sufficient pressure at the southern end of the village. We are aware of some limitations. Has the developer considered this?
34. There is no indication of whether the existing gas supply is sufficient for the development. Has the developer considered this?

J. Setting precedents for further development

35. The Parish Council is extremely concerned that a development at this scale will set precedents for further large developments. This one of two proposals put forward at this time - and it is no coincidence that this is before the Local Plan (suggesting Stilton remains a small settlement) is finally adopted. If both of the current proposals are approved it would lead to an increase of 16.4% in the number of dwellings in the village. This in turn is likely to attract still greater expansion and make greater problems.
36. The Parish Council is especially concerned that the development at the southern end of the village will lead to large scale development in this particular area. Campbell Associates informed the Parish Council at its meeting in November that the current 18-hole golf course would be changed to a 9-hole course next year with the remaining land becoming "parkland" or "nature reserve". The Council is of the opinion the parkland would very soon become the subject for a much larger planning application across much of the golf course. This would completely change the character of the village and create immense problems for all the issues outlined above.

K. Conclusions

37. The Parish Council is not against small scale development in the village and continues to support such initiatives. However, it believes it concurs with a vast majority of Stilton villagers in opposing this large-scale development. The scale of the development is against the existing County Core Strategy and Local Plan to 2036 and would cause demonstrable harm to the village. The Parish Council finds that the arguments made for Stilton to be a Service Centre are misleading, and no proper account has been taken of the traffic problems in the village which would be made significantly worse by the development. There are a number of instances where information is lacking or where measurements have been taken that do not adequately reflect normal conditions. In addition, the Council are not reassured by promises made for improving the poor amenity resources of the village.