Breinton Parish Council

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Sent by email to ethomas@herefordshire.gov.uk

Dear Ed,

- **Planning application – P162920/F**
- **Land at Three Elms, Hereford**
- **Land at Three Elms *Application* - Outline Planning Application with all matters reserved, except access, for the demolition of existing agricultural buildings and an urban extension comprising up to 1,200 homes (Use Class C3); employment development (comprising Use Classes B1/B2/B8); a neighbourhood centre comprising a mix of retail (Use Classes A1/2/3/5), health provision (Use Class D1) and leisure uses (Use Class D2); a new one form entry primary school; park & choose interchanges; together with open and play space, landscaping, highways, infrastructure and associated works.**

Breinton Parish Councillors are making further comments on this application in light of the Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (NLP) response dated February 8th 2017

Before addressing specific points in the NLP response it is important to note that Breinton Parish Council (BPC) remains very strongly of the view that this application does not provide sufficient attention to the areas bordering the site to the north, west or south, including rural Breinton. Insufficient attention is being given to integrating the site into the surrounding built areas or the wider city of Hereford and instead the focus appears to be:-
i) securing approval that maximises the benefit for the eventual developers and
ii) distinguishing the site boundaries with taller, high density, flats, marker or gateway buildings that separate / isolate rather than providing a sensitive transition from what currently exists to what is being inserted

In addition the Parish Council is fundamentally not convinced that parameter plans for the southern part of the site need to be approved so early when the later stages of the development here are potentially a decade away. During this decade critical decisions such as the precise route of any Hereford Relief Road will be made.

Our further comments are set out below linked to specific (underlined) text from NLP in the order in which it appears in their response.

1) Matters relating to transport and flood risk drainage are being addressed by WYG and a response will be provided under separate cover in due course

BPC awaits this with interest and sincerely hopes that it will address the concerns we have previously raised particularly about inappropriate road junctions located to suit the development rather than the movement through the surrounding areas or the wider flows of traffic into and out of central Hereford.

2) ……the illustrative master plan is not an application drawing submitted for approval,,,,,,,,,,,,whilst the illustrative master plan has been designed in accordance with the scope of the parameter plans the content is for illustrative purposes only and it will not become an approved planning drawing.

We fully appreciate that the master plan and the vast majority of the 118 documents provided in support of this application are not being submitted for approval. However we question why they are being provided if not to inform the eventual decision. These documents are in fact the evidence base upon which the application relies and upon which the application will be judged. BPC therefore feels that it is correct to point to inaccuracies in these documents and inconsistencies between the few documents that will be approved and this base – particularly where there are no reasons given for the evidence base to have been ignored. Furthermore these documents are what the local communities are reading. We note that NLP's response also seeks to support its position by references to other documents that will not be approved.

It seems to the Parish Council that the much vaunted master planning approach to this strategic urban extension is of very little value beyond the sites' boundaries whatever benefits it may eventually prove to bring within them. It is therefore up to local people, councils and in particular Herefordshire's Planning Department and Committee to ensure that this development truly integrates into the pre-existing and surrounding communities.

DESIGN

3. Outline planning permission only ……..the parameter plans provide information on access, building height, land use and open spaces that set the maximum parameters within which future development must be designed.

Again BPC fully appreciates the nature of the permission being sought and re-emphasises that it wishes to be consulted on further details of the proposals in future applications and with the opportunity to speak at the planning committee eventually. However the value of any future consultations would be severely reduced if they were limited to relatively minor matters like the appearance, orientation etc. of badly sited buildings of demonstrably inappropriate masses and that bore no relationship whatsoever to the surrounding built environment but for which permission had already been agreed in principle and whose existence was no longer up for discussion. This is why the parameter plans are so important.

4. Concern has been raised regarding the maximum height of some residential dwellings at 14m as shown on the parameter plan…….the parameter plan identifies maximum heights for the development in order to provide flexibility for a range of building heights across the site as it Is not intended that all buildings will reach the maximum height. This approach allows for variable building designs to come forward at reserved matters stage whilst a more restrictive building height could result in a more monotonous building typology

BPC believes that, as far as height at least is concerned, the parameter plan is setting the

maximum which likely to be reached in all possible occasions – it will never be under-delivered nor is it likely to be. Phrases like 'it is not intended' simply do not appear in the parameter plans. Unless the eventual permission is strictly conditioned so that not all buildings reach this maximum height and the conditions are permanently upheld then their intention is not binding on any eventual developer. However, should the Planning committee be minded to approve such conditions, they could be discharged on a phased basis as NLP themselves suggest on page 8 of their response.

High quality, variable building designs would be a significant step forward but the Parish Council does not believe that a more restrictive height will result in a monotonous building typology. Indeed, the existing homes to the south of Kings Acre Road might be called monotonous but that built form is exactly what the new development needs to respect and compliment. An inappropriate range of building heights and masses particularly at sensitive boundary areas that ignore what is already present (photographs attached show older and the frontage of the largest, relatively modern development close to 3 Elms) is however of great concern locally and will simply repeat the mistakes at recent developments such as at the entrance to the Furlongs on Roman Road (photographs attached)

5. Overall the proposed height parameters have been set sensitively having been informed by the character and scale of the development in the surrounding area. It is intended that lower density development will be located in the more sensitive environments such as ……..or low level development to the south.

The avenue of 64 mature lime trees along Kings Acre Road is one such sensitive environment and the low level development to the south can only refer to Breinton. However we see absolutely no evidence whatsoever that the height parameters have been set sensitively as far as this area is concerned or that they have been informed by the character, design, density and scale of the built forms in the surrounding area.

6. Taller three storey buildings are proposed along the Primary Road Corridor (PRC)…….the southern part of the site is considered to be more appropriate for higher density development for the following reasons (i – v below)

This reference to the southern part of the site being more appropriate for higher density development appears to us to contradict the NLP comment in 5) above in relation to more sensitive environments

i) in terms of visual impact this location (the southern part) is on a relatively low, less prominent part of the application site…….

Most of the site is low but that does not mean that higher densities and prominent buildings should line the roads at the margin, clash both visually and in mass with what is there already and potentially create an unwelcoming wall, separating the new development its facilities and residents from those in the existing communities.

ii) the access point onto Kings Acre Road provides the opportunity to introduce 'gateway' buildings to demarcate the entrance to the site and could potentially be a good location for a marker building.

BPC disagrees with this fundamentally. This development should conserve what is best of the existing green infrastructure and compliment the current built environment not overwhelm it. Distinction is unnecessary and integration should be the aim.

iii) comments are not applicable on this point

iv) the proposed density will allow the provision of a wider housing mix including flats …….

The only flats along Kings Acre Road in Breinton are a conversion of an existing, substantial house far to the west of the site. BPC does question the provision of a wider housing mix along a boundary road facing what is a relatively consistent existing form of ribbon of development and certainly does not believe that locating new build, three storey flats along Kings Acre Road is a justifiable planning decision.

More generally in relation to a wider housing mix; the Parish Council notes that the Core Strategy level of affordable housing is apparently not achievable on this site. It would appear that the applicants are deciding which parts of the Core Strategy can be ignored and which are mandatory. It seems to the Parish Council that any judgement that is required when balancing potentially competing elements of the Local Plan are for the Planning Authority to make.

The only flats/townhouses at all comparable to the design heights and masses being proposed are at Bobblestock (on the eastern margins of the site), on Sheridan Road (Moor Farm), at the Furlongs development on the Roman Road or the former cider mill site by Sainsbury's. There is relatively little development of this kind of design outside central Hereford. It is an urban feature at best, possibly suitable for specific suburban sites but is certainly not suitable for the rural fringe of an historic city. The development should not be allowed to casually degrade the appearance of what is judged by many to be one of the best entrances/approaches to the city in such a significant fashion,

v) the southern part of the site is closer to existing transport links to the city and the proposed location for a Park and Choose facility will enhance these links. It is therefore considered appropriate to provide a higher density of development in these locations.

This is a strange reliance on transportation links for an application that so thoroughly rejects public transport routes through the development or sensible cycle route connections from it to the wider city. It is unclear precisely how the southern part of the site is being defined but there are transport links along the northern site boundary (including a cycle way) and particularly the eastern boundary where there are also shops and a doctors. Please see our previous comments about the inadequacy of the proposed Park and Choose provision (November 2016) and its inability to attract local residents in addition to visitors, commuters etc. We will reserve our detailed comments on transportation matters until we have received and considered the response from WYG.

In short the Parish Council does not believe that any of the reasons given by NLP make a strong case for the southern part of the site, particularly Kings Acre Road, more appropriate for high density development.

7. JTP has considered alternative height options for the three storey buildings…….The sections therefore illustrate the relationship between the existing and proposed building heights at the Kings Acre Road boundary…….and how this would be altered by reducing the maximum height to 12.5 m

The new work from NLP recognises but does relatively little to allay the Parish Councils legitimate concerns about the inappropriate treatment being proposed for the north side of Kings Acre Road. However the revised proposals are a small move in the right direction.

8. Concerns have also been raised in relation to the density of development particularly in relation to existing buildings on KAR. As set out in the planning statement the residential density will primarily be determined at reserved matters stage…..

Please see our comments under point 3 above about the need to improve the parameter plans so that they more adequately reflect the surrounding areas. It is dis-ingenuous to believe that once a parameter plan sets a density that there will be much, if any, move to a lower one. Please also see our previous objection to the proposed density locally (3rd November 2016). In our view, densities at the margins of the site should reflect what is already there as far as is possible. It is surely not good planning practice to accept a 'harder than necessary' boundary that separates the new development from the current built form. The proposed Hereford Relief Road will provide a hard western edge to the development and there is absolutely no reason to replicate this to the south. The site is certainly large enough to have the highest densities further away from its margins within the natural bowl of the Yazor Brook catchment while also preserving as much as is possible of the setting of the Huntingdon Conservation Area.

Relationship to the north and south of Huntingdon

9. We note that the Design and Access Statement provides a local character study which assesses a number of development areas in Hereford City comparable to the scale of the proposed development. These assessments have informed the proposed parameter plans….

Our previous letter on 3rd of November commented at length at what we see as the inadequacies of the local character study so is perhaps not surprising that the parameter plans are so ill informed in relation to Breinton. Quite simply none of the five areas are close to the development site and certainly none of them resemble the existing southern frontage. It is completely understandable therefore why these proposals clash with what currently exists. There may well be a wall of development that divides the new housing from existing residential areas rather than welcoming people in. This is a mega-development only comparable in living memory to Belmont south of the river. The lessons there about inadequate connectivity and integration with the rest of the city should be learnt and greater care taken at the site margins of 3 Elms to ensure that history does not repeat itself, especially along Kings Acre Road.

10. We note that concerns were raised by Breinton Parish Council regarding the design relationship between the proposed development and the existing properties on Kings Acre Road. This site boundary was assessed and considered as part of the above assessments. Importantly it is considered that whilst the properties to the south of Kings Acre Road comprises two storey ribbon development, the design approach at this stage must allow for the future development of the HRR and potential development potential on third party land(?) which will change the nature of the north side of King's Acre Road. Given the timescales involved for the development it is essential that flexibility is provided in the parameter plans so that the detailed development on the site can reflect these potential changes to the development context over time. For example the provision of these transport improvements could render this part of the site more appropriate for flats as opposed to large houses.

Our point is that the parameter plan does not provide flexibility for access, rather if it is approves so far in advance of actual need, it increases the possibility of their being four junctions on the Kings Acre Road in a half mile stretch. If / when the route of the HRR is finally decided the possibility of bringing all these proposed junctions together should be

explored to minimise the removal of individual trees and the undoubted threat to the integrity of what is a sizeable landscape feature in its own right. We remain strongly of the view that approving the parameter plan in relation to Kings Acre Road is premature and refer back to our comments of November 3rd 2016. We will not comment any more here on why this part of the site is absolutely not more appropriate for flats save to point out
i) the recent scientific evidence of the damage vehicle pollution causes to residents of local roads and
ii) that the majority of the houses along Kings Acre Road facing the development site are not large nor is there space remaining on the frontage here after the Park and Choose site has been provided to build (m)any large houses which are not what the area needs according to the most recent Housing Needs surveys. Indeed we can evidence the care which developers of the past took in siting, designing these properties

11. The parameter plans would allow the residential development to the east of the PRC to be up to three storeys which as mentioned is intended to allow the provision of a gateway or marker building to the site. …….the development will be subject to further design scrutiny in terms of character and appearance at the detailed design stage thus providing the opportunity to ensure that the final design of the development to be delivered will be appropriate in the context of the properties to the south of Kings Acre Road

Please refer back to our comments in this response at 3), 4), 6(i), 6(ii) and 9 which we believe to be relevant but will not repeat here

Ecology / Biodiversity
WhiIst the access (to Kings Acre Road) has been strategically positioned to limit the loss of lime trees on this road, however we note that the supporting text to Policy HD5 (para 4.2.67) identifies that vehicle access options exist to connect to Kings Acre Road, thereby anticipating the loss of trees on Kings Acre Road to allow this to happen We understand that an application has been submitted for a Tree Protection Order for lime trees on the Kings Acre Road, although we note that some trees will be necessarily be impacted by the implementation of the HRR and the proposed access to the strategic urban extension and consequently the avenue of trees is unlikely to remain undisturbed in the long term. This would be a key access point for the strategic urban extension and in line with para NPPF 118 it is considered that the benefits of the scheme would outweigh the loss of the Lime Tree

The Parish Council does not pay large amounts of attention to the text of the Core Strategy unless it is actually carried forward into planning policies. Nor do we quote selectively from the NPPF and its associated guidance preferring instead to balance the various competing requirements. However; the Parish Council places considerable weight upon the arboricultural comments on this application. We agree with him that more than one tree will need to be destroyed if adequate sight lines are to be created for motorists. We note that NLP's comments above do not distinguish between a single tree and the more substantial damage that will be done to the integrity of the entire avenue of 64 trees if many trees are removed. We also refer you back to the points we make under10 (above) and would suggest that such wholesale damage can be easily avoided if decisions on access to Kings Acre Road were not within the parameter plan at the present time. As we understand it, delaying this decision until more facts are known, particularly in relation to the precise route of the HRR will not affect the phasing of the development. In this connection we would be particularly interested in seeing the details of the Indicative Construction Environmental Management Plan referred to in Appendix 4 of the NLP response.

Again we regard it as dis-ingenuous to suggest that the benefits of a single lime tree benefits would outweigh those of a major housing scheme but there is a growing amount of evidence about the environmental cost of this proposal. If these are taken together with the potential social and economic costs highlighted by Heineken and Cargill in their objections we would suggest that this development may not be as beneficial as first appeared.

We look forward to hearing from your colleagues about progress on the TPO application for the avenue of lime trees

We also look forward to hearing from you about the revised timetable for this application that apparently has been agreed.

In conclusion the Parish Council believes that since the Core Strategy leaves the detail of the masterplan for Hereford City to an Hereford Area Plan (and that this document is still apparently at least a year away) as well as the feeling that the current site specific master planning for 3 Elms so clearly fails the surrounding areas that it should be the role of the Planning Department and Committee to ensure that this strategic development does truly integrate with and serve the rest of the city as was originally intended.

Yours sincerely,

Graeme Adkin
Clerk, Breinton Parish Council