



COSBY PARISH COUNCIL

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Notes:

Meeting (Zoom) with Blaby District Council (BDC) (Local Planning Authority)

Whetstone Pastures Garden Village – Vision Document

1st February 2021

In attendance:

Blaby District Council:

Cat Hartley – Chief Planning Officer (BDC)

Matt McConville – Major Schemes Officer (Planning) Whetstone Pastures Garden Village (BDC)

Cllr: Terry Richardson – Leader of the Council (BDC)

Cllr: Ben Taylor – Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development (BDC)

Cosby Parish Council:

Cllr: J Chapman (JC) Cllr: V Rye (VR) Cllr: M Howkins (MGO) Cllr: C Pharoah (CP)

Cllr: M Hillmann (MH) Cllr: I Mullis (IM) Cllr: S Wegerif (SW) Cllr: L Wolfe (LW)

Cllr: J Wolfe (JW) Cllr: S Boocock (SB)

L M Phillimore (Parish Manager)

Mrs S Chapman (Assistant Parish Manager)

Points of discussion and items of note: -

Planning and Project Overview

- Cat Hartley (CH) outlined the requirement and basis of the Local Development Plan with Blaby looking ahead to 2036 / 2038. There are considerable housing targets set for Blaby District by Central Government and housing growth also encompasses employment growth.
 - All Planning Authorities must undertake and hold an up-to-date Local Development Plan (Currently out for public consultation)
 - The current housing requirement for Blaby is 360 new homes per year

- There is a requirement (Duty to Cooperate) a legal requirement to take a quantity of the City Councils unmet need.
 - There are only three practical options for housing delivery include: -
 - Expansion of the Principle Urban Area (PUA) the area that abuts the city boundary.
 - Expand existing settlements (towns and villages)
 - Develop new settlements (Self-sustaining and reducing pressure on existing settlements)
 - Approximately two years ago, Blaby District Council resolved to deliver the major housing growth through new settlements where the infrastructure, education and employment is delivered alongside the housing.
 - Around the same time, Whetstone Pastures was put forward by the owners as a potential way of delivering large scale housing.
 - A range of site options across the district are being explored to determine the best way to deliver housing.
 - Whetstone Pastures is only a potential site, it is not within the Development Plan and there is large amount of work and assessment yet to be done to determine if the site is even suitable.
- Cllr: Terry Richardson (TR) outlined his perspective on housing delivery and the options available to the council and to residents.
 - “Bolt-ons” to existing settlements do not provide the additional services and infrastructure.
 - Countesthorpe is perfect example of being required to absorb substantial housing growth with no infrastructure gain.
 - The position and ambition of the Council is to, if possible, deliver housing growth through new settlements, settlements that can accommodate schools, health centres, shops, roads and jobs that are on the new settlement so people do not have to travel to work.
 - New settlements can be designed and built from the ground up.
 - The myths that new settlements are concreted over with limited green open space are incorrect. New Lubbesthorpe as an example will have 48% of the land as open spaces, with parks, ponds and woods. This often provides more open space for local and surrounding residents than they would otherwise have.
 - New Lubbesthorpe has a very happy community and is very successful, partly because it was designed from the ground up and partly because it was infrastructure led. The new motorway bridge and main access road were one of the first things to be built.
 - There is a “Design Code” which all developers have to comply with.
 - Whetstone Pastures is not in the Local Plan, may not be in the Local Plan, may not be approved and will be subject to a Public Enquiry if it does come forward.
 - There are only two ways to deliver housing: -
 - A positive plan led approach where we have control over of what, where and when or:

- Do not have a plan and leave it to the Planning Inspectorate from Bristol to determine where developers can build.
 - £2m was applied for to fund the assessment and specialist expertise required to undertake the assessments required to establish if a Garden Village could even be deliverable at Whetstone Pastures.
 - Housing can only be built on land that has been put forward by the land owners.
 - There are very few places in the Blaby District area where large scale housing can be delivered so the two choices are: -
 - Keep adding on to our existing settlements “like Cosby” where urban sprawl will start to merge neighbouring settlements or:
 - Deliver through new settlements.
 - The Blaby Growth Plan was approved in January 2020 which laid out our preferred methodology for providing housing and economic development land over the next 20 years.
 - If a fair wind was blowing and everything went without a hitch, if a planning application came forward, it could be 8 to 10 years before a “spade went in the ground” to start the development.
 - As with New Lubbesthorpe, the infrastructure goes in first, the roads, the buses, the cycle ways.
 - The Leader aspires for high quality, well paid employment and great employers. The statistics for our qualified youngsters leaving the area for better paid work are horrendous. We need to provide the quality employment locally.
- Matt McConville (MM) explained: -
 - MM’s role is that primarily of liaison at this time to review the work that they are doing
 - That BDC have full visibility of the potential Garden Village
 - If an application ever does come forward, BDC can ensure that it is as good as it can be and achieves the best result for the community as a whole.
 - These are the first steps in a process that will go on for many years.
 - The Garden Village Vision consultation has just finished and BDC will ensure that all comments and feedback are incorporated into the next stage.
 - Site surveys are underway which will “at high level” help shape the way the potential development could come together.
- Cllr: Ben Taylor (BT) commented that: -
 - The project is so far prior to any application coming through
 - TR is correct with the Blaby Growth Plan which sets the six principles to do with
 - Infrastructure
 - An environmentally green site
 - Zero carbon, energy positive
 - £150,000 was awarded to Blaby to pay for the resources to work with the Whetstone Pastures developers

- If it does come forward and it is approved, it has everything that it needs to be “done right”
- The land was put forward within the Call for Sites
- These are very early preparations that are under way
- Should, a planning approval ever come forward, Blaby DC will be able to say that it has done everything that it could to deliver on what the residents want and the Elected Members expect.

Questions and Answers

Cosby Parish Council is rightly proud and protective of the village of Cosby and will want to fully understand all and any impacts on Cosby.

From the outset of Whetstone Pasture Garden Village, the Parish Councils ambition has been to gather as much information as is possible in order to make the most informed decisions,

Cosby Parish Council wants to ensure that if questions are asked by residents of Cosby, the answer that they give will be qualified and accurate.

1. VR thanks the Blaby team for their excellent presentation and information sharing
2. SW. Expresses his thanks for the information and comments that he has learnt a lot more than he already knew.

3,500 houses has increased to 6,000 is a serious concern but the way it has been explained tonight with the level of green open space and amenities sounds pretty good but that message is not getting across to the general public – yet.

CH – It is a no-win situation. You need to put a number down to start somewhere but we know very little about the site at this time.

The reality at this time is that BDC do not know how many houses the site can accommodate and part of the engagement around the vision is to help shape the number of houses that could be delivered. There is no fixed number and banding numbers around is never helpful.

Bigger is not always scarier – when it comes to housing development because it means that you can get more of the stuff that you want in the development.

With around 4,000 to 5,000 homes it would support a secondary school, a bigger health centre, a supermarket and really good levels of employment.

The type of houses will also affect the number of houses but at the moment, BDC just do not know.

TR. Would you be better off with 3,500 houses and no secondary school or 4,000 and a secondary school, with sports clubs and youth clubs?

If a development becomes more self-contained by being slightly bigger, that would be better than it being too small.

3. IM – Should the Planning Inspectorate approve Whetstone Pastures, does it cause any problems with it being between Blaby District area and Harborough District area?

TR – All Leicestershire Councils are part of the Members Advisory Group and work closely on strategic partnerships and collective working. There are ongoing conversations between Blaby, Harborough, Charnwood and Hinckley and Bosworth but nothing is in place at this time but yes, we would not want a Garden Village at Whetstone Pastures and then one next door in the Harborough District area. We should work together on getting the best outcome.

4. CP – Considering the potential for 50-55% of open space, how could this be maintained if 5,000 houses are built instead of 3,500?

TR – New Lubbethorpe as an example will have 48% green space but the type of houses and the layout of the site does not mean that more land gets concreted over. Only 7% of land in the UK is actually built on.

Matt McConville (MM) – At this time, BDC do not have the level of information available to even perceive what the site may look like, part of this is the Master Planning stage.

As it is a Garden Village, there are expectations in terms of living standards, open spaces, health and wellbeing, active lifestyles are elements that have to come into the equation. We do not want an over-developed site that does not deliver the benefits that we are looking for and are required within a Garden Village.

There is no indication as to when a Master Plan will be available.

5. Mike Howkins (MGH) – Is a new motorway junction essential to make the scheme work?

TR – It cannot work without a new junction. The local roads cannot cope with that level of development. Junction 21 is a problem and cannot take any more traffic.

Things like the HIF Bid have to be applied for whether the development comes forward or not, the investigative work has to be done to establish “IF” the development came through, what infrastructure would be required.

CH – Agrees that a new junction would be essential

6. Veronica Rye (VR) – Is it government policy that the other councils have to take the City Councils unmet need?

CH – In legislation (in law) there is a Duty to Cooperate. By law all authorities within the Housing Market Area (HMA) have to work together to meet the housing need.

Leicester City Council had an unmet need of around 7,000 homes that the surrounding districts were going to have to accommodate.

That unmet need has just increased by another 10,000 homes meaning that around 18,000 (Not finalised) homes will be distributed around the surrounding councils.

Blaby needs to plan pro-actively to accommodate some of the unmet need to maintain control and not be subject to PINS (Planning Inspectorate) making the decisions for us.

At a rough analysis, Blaby will have to deliver around 12,000 homes by 2050. In context, that is two times the size of Countesthorpe that Blaby has to find land for.

7. VH – What were the timescales for New Lubbesthorpe?

TR - From inception to first spade in the ground was about 12 years, normally this would be around 10 years.

Blaby currently has a housing land supply of 7 years and this housing land supply has to be maintained above 5 years to be able to manage and defend planning decisions.

New Lubbesthorpe is one of the best-selling sites in England because it was well planned.

8. VR – Aside of Whetstone Pastures, are there any other large sites that are being looked at?

TR – there is another site along the M69 near Stoney Stanton but even if both Whetstone Pastures and Stoney Stanton Garden Villages come forward, Blaby District Council will still have to find land another 4,000 or so, homes.

Every political party is committed to building 300,000 per year so no matter what party is in Government, the housing requirement will not change.

The Blaby vision is that every authority should be able to look after their residents and provide the right housing and services from cradle to grave.

CH - The SHELAA looks at all possible sites for consideration and is updated every year and fed by the Call for Sites.

As sites are sifted, assessed and dismissed and or accepted eventually forming the SHELAA and supporting the Local Development Plan.

9. JW – When the distribution of Leicester City Councils unmet need has been agreed, can the number of houses that Blaby need to take change?

CH – no, once the numbers have been agreed, they can only change when the City Council produce their next Local Development Plan in around 15 years time.

10. VR - You said that there were only three ways of delivering housing. Expanding the Principle Urban Areas, expanding and developing the existing settlements or developing new settlements.

Can the existing Principle Urban Areas be expanded as a reasonable proposition or are they already expanded as far as they can be?

CH – that is a difficult question to answer at this time as this is all part of the technical work within the Local Development Plan where one of the largest considerations is the highway and transport modelling.

As each site is looked at, specialist consultants undertake the modelling to examine whether any site can be built out and if so, what is the impact on the network and how could the impact be mitigated or, the conclusion may be that a particular site would have such an impact on the network that cannot be mitigated and the impacts are too severe to consider any building out.

It is far too early within the development of the Local Plan to draw any conclusions which will help inform the “Locational Strategy”.

The existing Principle Urban Area (PUA) has seen a significant amount of development, especially within the current Local Plan and the reality is that the PUA will run out of land to build on.

What is not acceptable is for endless building where the quality of life in those existing areas and PUA result in a lack of green space, a lack of places to be healthy and the quality of life for residents just becomes unacceptable.

That is one of the reasons why Blaby DC is looking at new strategic sites and new settlements

LP – the successful defence of the decision to refuse planning approval for the large housing development on Croft Road was wholly down to the strength of the Local Development Plan. At the Appeal, the District Authority were able to demonstrate that the application was in an area conflicting with the Local Plan and if it was approved, the “Spatial Distribution” which was already skewed away from the PUA and into the Small and Medium size villages, would further skew the distribution and the services and infrastructure would be unable to support the development.

11. VR - TR mentioned that there was originally opposition to New Lubbesthorpe but now there are only positive comments about Living there. Are there any testimonials that Cosby PC could have to show to local residents?

TR – no, there are no testimonials as such but anecdotal evidence suggests that residents are very happy there. A lot of work was put into making New Lubbesthorpe a community from the outset, such as Churches Together put a representative there, the developers built somewhere to act as a community centre, there is already a Parish Council which is moving forward.

New residents on New Lubbesthorpe are predominately the children of other local residents.

The two District Councillors do not receive any negative comments about living in New Lubbesthorpe, despite there being 3 volumes of written objections prior to the development coming forward.

Nobody wants new building near them, but nobody ever tells Blaby where they do want new homes to be built. We have to be able to provide the homes that our children and grandchildren need. Rural Exception Sites are one option, but they cannot deliver enough housing on their own.

Blaby is one of the only Planning Authorities in the country that is actually meeting its Affordable Housing target of 25% - currently 24%.

Closing comments:

TR - Being a Councillor is the best job that I have ever had and I regard it as a job because we are trying the shape the place that we love against all of the rules and regulations that we have to comply with.

Do we need houses? Yes.

Do we need the right sort of houses? Yes.

Do we build them in the right place?

Are we being asked to build too many? Probably Yes.

All political parties have the same aspirations so it does not matter who you vote for, there is no difference in the housing numbers between them.

However imperfect our system is, by and large we have people involved who you can kick out and vote someone else in.

Do I think Blaby do this probably better than most councils? Yes.

The secret is that we are not frightened to make the decisions and run the council in the way that we believe is in the best interests of our residents.

We welcome these types of events and if you want us to come back again, just let us know.

We are going to have to build houses, they have to go somewhere and Whetstone Pastures is one of the areas that we think they can be built.

BT - As Cabinet Member for Planning, Whetstone Pastures is a long way off and all we are trying to do is plan for the eventual situation, if it comes forward and whether it is approved or not approved.

There is no Master Plan at this time which makes it very hard to answer questions about what the development would even look like.

Being able to deliver future developments in such a green way, zero carbon and energy positive where people want to live in and take care of is the surely the way forward.

SW - Thank you very much, I am personally very enlightened and I think that some of my fellow Councillors are as well. I appreciate your time, your honesty and for being straight with us. I am impressed and I hope to see you all again some time.

Meeting ends: 8.30pm

Blaby's Six Key Principles for Development and Growth

- Infrastructure led
- Integrated and self-sustaining
- Active and Healthy
- Well designed
- Well connected
- Accessible for employment, business and skills