**BENHALL AND STERNFIELD PARISH COUNCIL**

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on Monday 21 October 2024 at the Ex-Servicemen’s Club, Benhall**

**Councillors present**: Riven Brace (Vice Chair), Chris Durrant, Charlotte Fox, Sue Nicholson, David Secret, Mark Stebbings, Alan Woods

**In attendance**: Katherine Abbott (Parish Clerk)

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received and approved from Councillors Bev Barclay and Paul Nicholson.

**2 Declarations of Interest for items on the agenda**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 Open Forum**

At the request of the Vice Chair, Councillor Sue Nicholson provided a summary of the application to date.

The application sought up to 41 new dwellings off B1121 at Shotts Meadow. Discussions had started with East Suffolk Council (then Suffolk Coastal) in 2018. The Parish

Council had always felt – and argued forcefully – that this proposed too many houses in one development to be added on to a small village and was a sudden big percentage increase in size. The Parish Council had proposed three other sites which together could provide at least this number of homes and could be phased to help integration into the village. The proposal was overridden. So, this development was included in the East Suffolk

Local Plan (adopted in September 2020) and was thus, in a sense, pre-approved to proceed. The first official Consultation by East Suffolk Council was in 2021 but there were some key difficulties for the Applicant to overcome. Further plans and documents were provided by the landowner in 2022 and 2023, but the Highways Authority was not satisfied with access – neither for vehicles, nor for other users such as cyclists, walkers, wheelers – and the application remained ‘stalled’.

At the beginning of October 2024, a new proposal was made on how to solve the access issues. To see the Parish Council’s objection to this proposal which, in no way, helped with safe, integrated access into the village for all users, residents could go to www.benhall.org.uk or, to look up the details of this – or any other

Planning Application – visit East Suffolk Council’s website, choose Planning and ‘Public Access’ and search either by location or the key word DC/21/2503/OUT.

Councillor Nicholson also referred to the draft response by the Parish Council to the application. An extension to the deadline had been granted and the response now needed to be submitted by 30 October 2024.

The Vice Chair invited questions from the members of the public present. The responses were provided by Councillors Sue Nicholson and David Secret.

Q: Have there been any conversations by the Parish Council on the new proposals at all?

A: There was a long site visit with the Planning Officer from East Suffolk Council earlier in 2024 who had acknowledged the Parish Council’s concerns. The Highways Authority has not yet submitted its response as a statutory consultee. The Parish Council has had two meetings with the Highways Authority previously, but not in this consultation period.

Q: Where is the new proposal from?

A: The Architect.

Q: What are the objections on permeability?

A: The response is very long but has been shared with many residents. The application does not address issues around permeability and safety. In its response, the Parish Council has quoted from the relevant policies within the Local Plan around the specific criteria which the access proposal fails to meet. The Parish Council has also referred to the Sustainable Transport Policy which the application also does not comply with.

Q: Is this a *fait accompli*? Will it happen under the new Government’s plans? I am concerned the fields which produce food will be lost and that refuse collections (at the proposed site) may not be possible. Is the farmer’s access a means of proposing more houses in the future?

A: In the opinion of the Parish Council this development should not have been included in the Local Plan as it is an inappropriate increase in housing. The Parish Council’s planning working group had multiple meetings with East Suffolk Council to try and stop its inclusion. The Local Plan is approved by the Planning Inspectorate, the Parish Council attended those deliberations, but its request to exclude the development was not granted. The Highways Authority’s response, as the expert in the matter of access, will be crucial. It is possible that there may be longer term intentions associated with the request for access by the farmer. The proposed access will increase mud from fields on to the development’s roads, large farming vehicles reversing will be a hazard etc., these and other points are included in the draft response. The additional fields were included in the draft Local Plan last time but were not approved. The next iteration of the Local Plan is at an early stage of development and due for completion in 2027.

Q: This needs to be viewed in the context of development sites springing up all around the villages, many associated with energy projects.

A: We do need to acknowledge the bigger picture but for this response we need to focus on the local issues so that we get the best possible result.

Q: It is ironic that the application proposes building at the top of a hill, so removing the flood plain. Where will the water go?

A: The application is for an outline site and seeks to work out what could work in theory; it is not at a stage which requires detail about drainage etc., but this would be required at the next stage of the planning process. Previously, changes were made to reserved matters without consultation; a separate note will be submitted to the ESC Planning Officer stating that this time consultation must be carried out on any changes at any stage of the process.

Q: Fields 2 and 3 may be developed in the future but currently Field 2 needs access for large farming equipment which would go through the proposed development.

A: In the Parish Council’s response, we seek a full and separate planning application for this proposed access. We think it is very likely the Highways Authority will also highlight this in its response. Farmers require planning consent to build new accesses off the highway and the Parish Council has a strong case for seeking a separate application on this matter. The Parish Council would be happy to meet the landowner to discuss.

Q: What influence do the Highways Authority have in such matters?

A: It currently has significant influence; however, the new Government’s plans may impact this.

Q: What is the Parish Council’s advice to residents on submitting their responses by 30 October?

A: In preparing your personal response you may wish to look at the Sustainable Transport Policy for this development and, with reference to this, provide your views on the access and whether it will work, or not, in your view. Responses should avoid emotion, NIMBYism, ‘no-one told us before we moved in’ etc., but instead be cold and practical. The more residents that submit responses the better, but template responses should not be used.

There being no further questions, the Open Forum was closed.

There were no questions from Councillors on the draft response. The Vice Chair thanked Councillor Sue Nicholson for her work in preparing a strong and comprehensive response.

It was proposed by Councillor Stebbings, seconded by Councillor Woods and by unanimous vote resolved

* that the draft response by the Parish Council be submitted by 30 October 2024, and
* that a separate note from the Parish Council be provided to the Planning Officer by the same date to state that public consultation on any changes at any stage must be conducted.

The meeting concluded at 7.33pm