

Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council response to:

DC/26/1490/OUT | Hybrid planning application to include: (a) full permission for the primary drainage infrastructure and associated construction access; and (b) outline planning permission (all matters reserved except access) for residential development, employment and community development, roadside services, land for Primary School and Pre-school, and associated development including open space, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG), infrastructure, landscaping and associated works (development to be brought forwards in phases). | South Saxmundham A12 Saxmundham Suffolk

At the time of the first Consultation (Dec 20/Jan 21), much of the land allocated in the Local Plan for this development was within the Benhall boundaries, not Saxmundham: all of the commercial land west of the A12 and approximately half the housing land. This would have fundamentally changed Benhall from a small rural village with a distinct character and identity thanks to its make up of almost no second homes, 14% plus of social housing - under 300 homes in all. To have such a significant development as this new Garden Neighbourhood split across a Parish Council and a Town Council was not, we felt, workable. Benhall PC contacted Saxmundham TC and we discussed requesting a Boundary Review with a view to all the land for the Garden Neighbourhood being within Saxmundham. This was approved and now only a small section of SANG remains within Benhall. However, the development abuts – and thus impacts – Benhall at various points.

Benhall (data from census of 2021) has a population of 569 in 262 households in an area of 8 sq km. The majority of residents live east of the A12 but the majority of the land area is west of the A12. And 20% are considered disabled. Over 10% live in social housing (a figure that has reduced over the past few years as housing associations sell properties). There are 19 fully residential park homes for over 55s, very few second homes, 3 AirBnbs and 2 campsites. The village will be considerably increased with the approval of DC/21/2503/OUT-41 homes (from the 2020 Local Plan)- a percentage increase of 16% (in reality considerably higher percentage in Benhall Green itself, nearer to 20%, as the 262 homes include Benhall Low St, west of the A12, and Friday St/part of Snape Watering).

Sternfield has 103 residents in 50 households in an area of 4 sq kilometres.

The key points for Benhall and Sternfield PC and our residents:

1. The need for avoidance of coalescence between Benhall and Saxmundham.

Benhall is a rural village with few facilities other than the Benhall and Sternfield Ex Servicemen's/Village Club, a primary school, pre-school, a farm gate shed selling vegetables, a farm caravan park with fishing ponds and a much smaller touring caravan park with one cabin to let. Whilst Saxmundham is our 'service centre' providing shopping, healthcare, some sports facilities, railway, it is a market town of 2,173 homes. It is important that Benhall maintains its special rural village character and cohesion. It must not creep into becoming part of Saxmundham.

2. The need to ensure that active travel (cycling, walking, wheeling, horse-riding) routes in the area are maintained and enhanced

Please read the following in conjunction with the very comprehensive comments (with Holding Objection) from SCC PROW. We agree with all the points they have made. We believe that connectivity and safety of current and new 'active travel' routes are essential: all current, new and upgraded routes relating to South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood need to be seamless, linking to other PROWs in the area. No routes should be 'stranded'.

- a) We note that in the Masterplan Framework legend: there are footpaths designated 'walking and wheeling': what exactly are they? Cycling, wheeling and horseriding are not permitted on footpaths. Are these 'walking and wheeling' footpaths on the MF intended to be upgraded to bridleways? We would like to see detailed clarification of this. We believe there should be at least one circular, seamless route for all users (cycling, walking, wheeling, horse-riding) linking the site to Saxmundham, Benhall Green, across the A12 to Benhall Low Street, south to Friday Street and back to Benhall.
- b) We note that Highways comment as follows: 'We require further information on how all user types can access continuous and necessary routes within the development infrastructure, as well as details of the facilities and intersections, such as cross-sections and zoomed in plans'. We would also like to see these details as we believe that, at presently shown, there will be 'stranded' sections which will prevent seamless movement for active travel.
- c) We note there is a new crossing of the A12 planned (bridleway?) but there is no mention of the current bridleway crossing of the A12 and it is not shown on the map. It is located just above the foot of the SANG area in Benhall. This is a very dangerous, though much-used crossing (it is at the point the the A12 changes between single carriageway to dual going south and vice versa going north, a situation which encourages traffic to speed. Because of its location it is likely to be a popular leisure crossing of the A12 for SSGN residents, including children. So this crossing is linked to SSGN and should be upgraded as part of the development.
- d) In 2025, ESC allocated over £400,000 CILS funding to the creation of a Cycling, Walking, Wheeling, horse-riding route between Benhall and Saxmundham, by upgrading the current footpath behind the hedge along the B1121 to a bridleway as far as Saxmundham South Entrance. This route will also be an asset to the residents of the Garden Neighbourhood so needs to be linked seamlessly to the Garden Neighbourhood active travel routes. At present, the link from the northern end of this new CWW route, at Sax South Entrance, is footpath only. This should be upgraded to bridleway for seamless access to and from the Garden Neighbourhood. It has been mentioned that cycling and horse-riding would be restricted as there is a railway bridge to cross whose parapets are too low. However, this is easily solved by asking cyclists and horse riders to dismount (and providing mounting blocks for horseriders on each side of the bridge. See British Horse Society for guidance and examples of such mounting blocks already in use)

3. **Employment and commercial areas west of A12**

This area is rural, agricultural and very lightly populated. There are many much-used PROWs. Whilst it is accepted that the A12 corridor is inevitably going to be

developed, all this area to the west of the A12 needs to be protected, both from this development and future developments. The effect of this development and the current and planned NSIPs, is leading to a serious reduction of farmland (much needed for food security) and open countryside (essential for the mental and physical health of East Suffolk residents and for the tourism sector).

The employment area which is shown in the Local Plan will clearly go forward but Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council object strongly to the addition of the other 'A12 services: which could include hotel, petrol filling station, drive thru (fast food outlets)' and feel these should be considered completely separately from the Local Plan designated site. ie a separate Planning Application judged on its own merits. ESC do not have a Policy for roadside services in the 2020 Local Plan so this also leads us to believe that this part of the Application should not be allowed through on the back of the Local Plan site.

Benhall and Sternfield PC do not understand the benefits, financial or otherwise, of the A12 services to Saxmundham and the local community? Indeed, as we aim to create healthier communities, with better diets, we cannot support more fast food outlets close to the new homes, and Benhall, Sternfield and Saxmundham generally.

We therefore **OBJECT strongly** to the addition to this Planning Application, of the area not shown in the Local Plan ie for hotel, drive thru eateries, electric charging stations etc. A separate Application should be required.

4. **Roundabout/SUDS Construction Access:** We note that the roundabout and SUDS construction proposes to use the narrow access off the A12 to Kiln Lane. There are 3 homes here which are dependent on this as their SOLE access (as there is no longer vehicle access across either the Kiln Lane or Grays Lane railway crossings). The lane is the width of a typical family car and there are no passing places. We therefore **OBJECT** to this aspect of the Application. Another way of building the roundabout and SUDS needs to be found. We note that Highways make this point as well.
5. **Homes in Kiln Lane**
We have repeatedly asked Pigeon to contact the homeowners here to discuss the impacts of the development on their properties but have not received confirmation that this has taken place.
6. **Benhall Church**
is a listed building close to the commercial areas and needs to be protected from any negative effects. We have proposed to Benhall Church that they respond directly to this Consultation. Note Historic England .
This church is graded 2* listed. Note that its listing ref is: 1090302
7. **Benhall St Mary's Primary School**
Benhall St Mary's Primary School in Benhall should be fully consulted and considered to ensure it is not negatively affected by the development of a new primary school within approximately a mile. Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council are very concerned

at the possible loss of this school because of the new Primary School in the Garden Neighbourhood. Benhall Primary School is almost as close to the south of the development as the new Primary School will be to the North.

NB: the majority of Benhall Primary's current pupils are from Saxmundham.

We asked the Chair of Governors to respond directly to this Consultation.

8. **Sewage:** We note that Anglian Water Object to the Application and that the Benhall (Aldecar Lane) works cannot handle the requirements of this Application. Indeed, testing at Benhall Marsh shows that AW are already failing to meet environmental water quality requirements. We would like to add that the Anglian Water works suffer from a difficulty and safety of access: they enter Benhall from the B1121, go past the advisory 20mph narrow lane past the Primary School* (this section, from the B1121 and past the School to School Lane is being designated a shared active travel route – see DC/21/2503/FUL below); from there the route to the AW sewage works is single track past 2 sides of the village green (the playground is much used by children from around the area) and single track Aldecar Lane from there to the sewage works site. The only passing places on the main length of Aldecar Lane are private driveways.

There is no alternative access during bad weather: On occasion, sewage delivery vehicles have tried to come the alternative, also single track, route of Sandy Lane and found themselves trapped by the narrow ford. The ford is any case impassable by any vehicle when the water levels rise.

School Lane, the other access of the B1121 is very narrow, has a very tight bend and is being changed into a Cycling, Walking, Wheeling route with a modal filter. For the volume of sewage this and other developments will generate on top of the current amounts, any sewage works should have an alternative access.

*In addition: *Please note **DC/21/2503/OUT** (Outline Application with Some Matters Reserved - Erection of up to 41 dwellings (with details of access to be considered)) / Land South Of Forge Close Benhall Saxmundham Suffolk) : this Application is now Permitted. The active travel route from the site to the School, bus stop, Benhall Village Social Club and the Benhall/Saxmundham cycling/walking/wheeling route, will be sharing the same narrow access from the B1121. We feel it is inappropriate to share the active travel route with Anglian Water tankers going to the sewage works.*

We therefore **OBJECT** to this aspect of the Application and feel that an alternative site for the handling of sewage should be found to serve this development.

9. **Water:** we understand that Essex and Suffolk Water were in correspondence with Pigeon regarding water capacity for this development but not since 2018. Can E and S Water provide the supply needed?
10. **Healthcare:** we do not believe that the current GP surgery in Saxmundham will be able to cope with the increase in demand from SSGN. It is not realistic to try to improve the provision of care in the current location which is too small and prone to flooding. You have seen the proposal for a new health hub and this is what we

would support. Indeed it would seem that this would bring far greater benefits to Saxmundham, Benhall and Sternfield and the surrounding communities, than a new primary school. The full development should not proceed without suitable provision of health services.

11. **SANG:** we would like to see a proposal of how the SANG areas (one of which is within Benhall) will be maintained and paid on a long-term basis. Benhall and Sternfield Parish Council are not able to pay for this.

In closing, we expect you to take into account the issue of the cumulative impact of all the currently known NSIPs on our communities. Whilst we understand that generally Planning guidance is to take into account only existing and consented projects, Government guidance 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: Advice on Cumulative Effects Assessment' says that 'other existing and or approved development is taken to include existing developments and existing plans and projects that are 'reasonably foreseeable' '. As well as the effect on our communities of the many energy projects, this cumulative impact assessment should also include the Essex and Suffolk Water project.

Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council
28 July 2026