

TILLSIDE PARISH COUNCIL.

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15th September 2009

Development Management Team
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Dear Mr Lowe

Full planning application 09/B/0230 Amended Plans – Construction of Houses at Mill Hill, Chatton

Introduction

Tillside Parish Council has considered the information received on 26th August detailing revised plans and documentation. Councillors have since met with a number of residents to solicit their views on these documents.

Meeting with residents, Councillors were alarmed to discover the absence of written notification of revised plans from the planning authority to neighbouring residents and also to those submitting objections on the original plans. This was only rectified on 9th September after the intervention of residents. As the period for consultation is 21 days, ending on 30th September, we believe it is unreasonable to submit this application to the planning committee on the 1st October and recommend a later date be considered.

The manner in which the consultation has been conducted on this application suggests a lack of impartiality on the part of the planning authority. The original application informed consultees that the Parish Council was involved in a pre-consultative process, which it was not, and now residents are not even informed regarding the existence of revised plans. Overall the process appears to have been conducted in a way that favours the applicant.

Returning to the revised plans, the community of Chatton is justifiably proud of the first Mill Hill housing development, completed in 2003, and comprising of cottages and houses which combine to enhance and harmonise with the character of the village. Councillors are not opposed to the right kind and scale of development and maintain the view that first Mill Hill development sets the standard against which this application should be considered.

Design and Layout of housing in this application contains a number of deficiencies

Although councillors welcome a number of the considerable changes made in the revised plans, we believe that the revised plans contain a number of failings which must be rectified to ensure that these plans be practically viable and gain the support of the community.

The introduction of a more informal layout and courtyard groupings together with more variety of house design including single and two storey houses is a welcome improvement. However, the group of 4 single storey terraced dwellings orientated in a north-south direction contains a number of deficiencies:

- The enclosed rear gardens contain dustbin storage areas but with no access to front for servicing.
- The rear gardens of all 4 dwellings border the garden of 15, Mill Hill resulting in a severe invasion of privacy for this resident
- No facility for wood storage is provided which is likely to result in deliveries of wood being dumped to the front of these dwellings using the space allocated for car parking.
- A gable end occupies the favoured south facing view across the Till Valley

Councillors recommend that alternative layouts for the group of single storey housing be investigated. Repositioning these terrace units may require that the development area is expanded in an easterly direction in order to preserve the open spaces important to this conservation area. As land to the east exists with no intent for future building, as stated by the applicant, we recommend the alternative layouts consider this option.

The affordable housing units depend on a wood burning stove as primary heating source and include heating of water via a back boiler. Councillors have concerns that this specification has implications which have not been properly considered. These implications are :

- A 3t delivery of cut logs from a local supplier costs £390. Smaller quantities will be more expensive again.
- No facility for wood storage has been allocated to affordable homes, noting that purchased logs require seasoning for 12 months prior to use.
- This is an expensive option for affordable homes with no facilities to store or cut wood
- A multi fuel stove (coal and wood) should be considered.
- Similarly no wood storage facility is allocated for open market homes, unless the intent is to use garage storage for this purpose.

Concerning Councillors previous objections that the original application failed to take account of guidance on new building in conservation areas (as laid down in PPG15), we welcome changes to materials specifying natural stone and slate. Although we note that render is not completely omitted, being used adjacent to dormer windows.

The risks associated with highway safety remain a concern.

The revised application has been reduced from 17 to 15 houses. This will still potentially triple the number of vehicles using the present access to Mill Hill, which is directly linked to the B6348 connecting Wooler to the A1 through Chatton. The proposed road access is too narrow, in the view of residents, given this increased volume of traffic. This is of particular concern when cars are parked on the access road, ensuring a reduced passageway for moving traffic.

In recent years, residents have become increasingly concerned with higher volumes of traffic passing through Chatton. In addition, increased levels of heavy vehicle traffic are alarming. Furthermore, issues of speeding through the village on the B6348 have regularly been raised with the police by both residents and Parish Council. Safety will also be compromised by increased traffic when considering that the back lanes serving the Mill Hill cottages are utilised for parking access and delivery transport, particularly where vehicles are required to reverse down the back lane into the Mill Hill access road. We strongly recommend that traffic calming measures are included in this development and included in the S106 agreement.

The prospect of construction traffic using the only proposed access into the site is of serious concern for safety and amenity of residents. Councillors recommend that a separate access road for construction traffic be considered and included in this application.

Residents note that the footpath route to the village has been repositioned. However, children requiring access to the top end of West End are unlikely to use this extended footpath route but rather take the Mill Hill access route which has no footpath provided and requires crossing the road. The footpath is indicated lined with grass verges. This represents a high maintenance option with a risk of dog fouling. Councillors recommend a low maintenance option be used without grass verges.

Overall, this application does not take proper account of the increased risks of highway safety ensuing. The access to the proposed development will exacerbate the present traffic situation with increased risk to pedestrians and drivers in the village and other alternatives should be investigated

This planning application is in a village with poor community facilities and amenities.

Planning Policy Statement 7, in addressing Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, states that Government objectives for rural areas relevant to planning policy include that people who live or work in rural areas should have reasonable access to a range of services and facilities.

One of the main priorities identified in the Parish Plan of 2003 was the need to address the lack of community facilities within the parish and in particular indoor community facilities. The applicant suggests that village facilities include a Parish Hall. This is misleading and recent correspondences with the Estates have referred to it more accurately as a Parish Hut. In the Estates own stated view the Parish Hut is in poor condition and requires demolition.

Following the closure of Chatton First School in 2008, discussions and correspondence have been ongoing since June of that year between a Village Hall Steering Group and the Estates concerning a lease on the former Chatton School for use as a Village Hall. A draft lease has recently been sent through. Councillors urge the planning authority to encourage the applicant to complete this process and ensure, in the spirit of PPS7, the community of Chatton have access to community facilities.

An infusion of young people into the community which the village sorely needs is unlikely to occur unless affordable homes are genuinely available for local families. The mistakes associated with the first Mill Hill development in which a number of homes were claimed as affordable but later became unattainable for local families as a result of open market pricing, must not be allowed to occur again. Covenants must be legal binding and the terms subject to consultation with NCC and Parish Council. Councillors recommend that the proposed 4 weeks allocated in the section 106 agreement to find local prospective occupiers for affordable homes be increased to 8 weeks in order to ensure this scheme benefits local members of the community.

Councillors and the community fear that the proposed development will result in increased number of holiday lets which will fail to support community life and services. Covenants preventing use as holiday or short term lets must be introduced for both affordable and open market housing.

Housing schemes in neighbouring Cornhill and Powburn remain largely unsold. The loss of Chatton First School must have an impact in determining the attractiveness of this scheme and what size of development is viable. The applicant has not addressed this issue

The revised application includes a proposed children's play area adjacent to the footpath. However the implications of maintenance and liability insurance have not been considered. Parish Council, having committed to an existing children's play equipment area adjacent to the school, will not assume responsibility for the proposed play area. We recommend as an alternative that the school field is gifted to the village as a community play area under the section 106 agreement. This will allow both play equipment area and adjoining school field to be properly managed and maintained. In addition, both facilities are central to the village offering facilities to all children in the village.

This application includes incomplete and inaccurate wildlife and ecology reports

The planning report suggests a low potential for bats in the area. Residents of Chatton will confirm regular sightings during summer, with huge numbers of bats emerging from their roosting sites. Barn owls are prevalent and very much a feature of the area.

No reference is made to owls or any required precautions noted as regards this development. Badgers are a common sight around the village. The pond area adjacent to the proposed site contains newts and water vole. Adders were seen in the adjacent field last year.

This application contains no proposals for a proper investigation of the History and Archaeology of the proposed site

Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) sets out the Secretary of State's policy on archaeological remains on land, and how they should be preserved or recorded in the countryside.

Sites in the area are recognised for their potential archaeological interest. Previous developments were not allowed to commence without a program of archaeological work. Similarly, previous developments also took notice of the archaeological potential of the site in containing remains of a medieval village.

The desk study reports in this application refer to an earliest date of 1861 under site history (section 4.2) and states there are no archaeological features within the site in the three line paragraph devoted to archaeology (section 4.9.6). A history of Chatton, authored by Simon P. James, is available in "*Chatton : A Portrait*" published in 2003, provides an extensive account of the history of the village noting by way of introduction that "*the present day village stands on a site with a rich history stretching back far beyond the Middle Ages*".

In 1999, Pre-Construct Archaeology for GeoQuest Associates, who had been assigned to assess the area reserved for the first Mill Hill development, excavated the remains of some of the cottages to the south of the road. Beneath these remains, GeoQuest discovered a number of medieval features. No reference is made to this recent investigation in an area adjoining the proposed development

Guidance for managing the Archaeological and Palaeoenvironmental resource in the Till and Tweed valleys has been published by Archaeological Research Services Ltd. and the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. This booklet is distributed by NCC as a resource to planners and developers. Given that North Northumberland is exceptionally rich in archaeological remains, protecting this important heritage is important in the context of the history of the region as well as attracting tourism to the area. The applicant has made no reference to use of this resource.

Conclusion

Tillside Parish Council strongly recommends that the Planning Committee refuses the proposed revised application 09/B/0230 and urges that the deficiencies in the revised application are rectified.

Councillors wish to make clear a willingness to further consult with Northumberland Estates in order to define an acceptable housing development in terms of scale and which ensures harmonisation with existing and neighbouring housing in the Chatton Conservation Area.

Parish Council wish to restate their intention to address the Planning Committee when this application is considered.

Isabel Hunter
Parish Clerk