

TILLSIDE PARISH COUNCIL.

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Dear Tony Lowe

Full planning application 09/B/0230 – Construction of 17 houses at Mill Hill, Chatton

Tillside Parish Council is disappointed with the application submitted. The community of Chatton and Northumberland Estates are justifiably proud of the first Mill Hill housing development, completed in 2003, and comprising cottages and houses which combined to enhance and harmonise with the character of the village. Councillors are not opposed to the right kind and scale of development and believe the first Mill Hill development sets the standard against which this application should be considered.

Parish Council oppose the present application following meetings with the community at which the application documents were reviewed and base our objections as follows:

The design and character of the proposed houses is unacceptable in a designated conservation area and fails to take account of guidance laid down in PPG15

Northumberland County Council acknowledges that Conservation Areas are about character and appearance. They further state : *“The special character of these areas does not come from the quality of their buildings alone, but can derive from many factors including individual buildings, building groups and their relationship with open spaces, architectural detailing, materials, views, colours, landscaping and street furniture”* and these factors along with others *“combine to create a distinctive sense of place worthy of protection”*

NCC further makes clear their commitment to achieving high standards of design quality and strong protection of Northumberland’s conservation areas by supporting designs which harmonise well with local character.

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, imposes a duty on local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

Planning Policy Guidance 15 confirms that planning decisions in respect of development proposed to be carried out in a conservation area must give a high priority to the objective of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area. If any proposed development would conflict with that objective, there will be a strong presumption against the grant of planning permission (though in exceptional cases the presumption may be overridden in favour of development which is desirable on the ground of some other public interest).

PPG15 also points out that particular attention shall be paid in the exercise of planning functions to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area. Local planning authorities should show special regard *“for such matters as scale, height, form, massing, respect for the traditional pattern of frontages, vertical or horizontal emphasis, and detailed design (eg. the scale and spacing of window openings, and the nature and quality of materials). General planning standards should be applied sensitively in the interests of harmonising the new development with its neighbours in the conservation area”*

The present application shows 17 houses with similar construction and materials comprising of stonework finish up to ground-floor level and smooth rendered finish at first floor to roof levels. Cast stone is used for water tables, lintels, cills and quoins. The selection of materials contrasts directly with the first Mill Hill (and more recently Mill Hill Farm) developments where natural materials (sandstone and slate) were a planning requirement in order to blend in with the setting and character of the village.

Residents of existing properties in the village wishing to extend or repair, must use materials having regard to the high standards set for a designated Conservation Area. In the interest of visual amenity, it is not acceptable to permit developers to reduce costs with substitution of lower cost materials which will adversely impact exterior appearance.

PPG15 guidance is not followed when considering the high density layout of housing in this development. No regard is given to e.g. scale, the traditional pattern of frontages and detailed design that would ensure a development that harmonises the new development with existing or neighbouring housing stock. Similarly no consideration is given to groups of buildings and their relationship with open spaces.

The present application will not integrate sensitively with the rest of the village or neighbouring housing. Neither will it preserve or enhance the unique character of Chatton as a Northumbrian Village. As a result, the appeal of Chatton as an attractive destination for tourists would be eroded.

The risks associated with highway safety will increase as a result of the proposed development

The present application indicates 41 parking spaces for 17 houses. An associated number of vehicles will use 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 far too narrow for this increased volume of 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 and where vehicles are required to reverse down the back lane into the Mill Hill access road.

The 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.

The present application is unimaginative and lacks ambition

By contrast with recent developments in Chatton, this application proposes 17 houses similar in style to an urban development. The choice of construction materials, the high density layout of houses all of a 2 storey design, suggests a lack of imagination that simply attempts to transplant an urban housing style that will not harmonise well in a traditional Northumbrian Village.

Existing and neighbouring housing is a mix of single storey cottages and 2 storey houses. The proposed design and style of the proposed development will not integrate well with the existing village and will not mirror the current housing stock.

If accepted, this development will result in urbanisation of a traditional village. The developer should be encouraged to preserve and enhance the rural character of a village presently enjoyed by visitors to Northumberland.

The proposed application is in a village with poor community facilities and amenities.

In Planning Policy Statement 7, addressing Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, 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 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.

Referring to the Parish Hut in the parish plan of 2003 ,”the building comprises of one main room, a small kitchen and a toilet” . The main room is not adequate for public meetings as it is limited in size. In winter the building is inhospitable and meetings are usually attended wearing overcoats. The Parish Hut is considered unsuitable for use as a polling station by NCC. Presently, the water supply is disconnected as a result of the school closure.

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. Although discussions are ongoing, progress is slow and there is no guarantee that a satisfactory lease will result. Meanwhile the School stands empty.

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 unreachable 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.

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.

The applicant's suggestion that the village is served with a local bus service to Belford is inaccurate.

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

The wildlife and ecology reports are incomplete and inaccurate

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.

Sweet Chestnut trees are mistaken for Lime Trees. Numerous references are made to Lime Trees in the first Mill Hill planning documents. Why have previous reports on the area or planning conditions of prior developments not been taken into account or at least considered? The protection measures for Lime Trees recorded in previous planning documents must be considered and similar measures installed.

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.

History and Archaeology of the proposed site has not been fully investigated

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 and 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 application 09/B/0230.

Councillors wish to make clear a willingness to consult with Northumberland Estates with view to defining an acceptable housing development in terms of scale and ensuring harmonisation with existing and neighbouring housing in the Chatton Conservation Area.

Parish Council wish to address the Planning Committee, when this application is considered. Please advise the date of the meeting when decided.

Yours Sincerely,

Isabel Hunter
Parish Clerk