NDP Response to Planning application P173699 – Five houses in Woonton

As is well documented, in 2011 Parishes were informed that they must meet housing targets. In the Almeley community the figure was 33 of which almost half have been achieved already. However we were given the choice of either letting Hereford Council find development sites or create our own NDP policy where the community had a say in where development would take place. We have had a very dedicated team of volunteers who have worked long hours in their spare time to put together a very detailed plan which will be submitted in the next month under section 14. We do understand until then this means it need not be considered but even without an NDP the view of the community is something that should be considered.

The Parish Council has been committed to a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) since 2012. Through the assessment of public opinion this will establish the development policy which would dictate planning decisions in this parish until 2031. The draft of Almeley Parish Council's NDP is now at an advanced stage and contains parish agreed policies to be considered. Therefore this application cannot be considered in isolation but in the wider context of the NDP criteria being formulated by the community.

As part of the NDP process a a call for land was instigated, asking the Parish landowners to co-operate in the identifying sites suitable for residential development. Among the responses to the call for land was one from a land-owner who asked that a redundant farm site at Woonton Farm be considered for the development of 5 dwellings.

To put application P173699 in context, two planning applications, one for six and the other for three houses, have recently been approved in Woonton. Additionally, the owner of the adjacent Woonton Farm has been in detailed pre-application discussions to redevelop a site consisting of redundant barns and yards, these discussions have involved Heritage England, Hereford Council Planning Department, members of the NDP steering group and the planning consultant, subsequently a detailed application is being submitted for Woonton Farm. Our NDP consultant considers that the site at Woonton Farm would be one of the most suitable from among all the sites that were put forward under the NDP Call for Land process, however, this is based on the current level of development in Woonton. The implication to the community is that if another application, such as this one, is approved in Woonton, then the potential Woonton Farm site could be considered unacceptable as this would exceed by far the 20% development threshold.

Having gone through the extensive process of an NDP it has been very demoralising to see sites being accepted from people who are jumping in before the NDP is determined against those who are going through the directed process which we have been instructed to follow by HC. We have found sites to not just match our minimum quota but exceed it and also define a settlement boundary for Woonton and we also know the people of Woonton feel that doubling the size of their community in 2 years is not proportional. Therefore from our NDP point of view it is a very clear case of one or the other.

The NDP is being formulated by the community to protect the parish from inappropriate development and feel that only one of these sites should be approved to prevent Woonton becoming over developed. Application P173699 has been compiled and submitted with no reference to, or negotiation with the NDP process, despite the strong recommendation being given to the applicant in pre-application advice 171294/CE (reference your letter dated 26th July 2107). If approved, this further development would clearly prejudice consideration of the Woonton Farm site which has been reviewed and supported as part of the NDP process and which, it is felt, would be far more sustainable and beneficial to the amenity of Woonton. The application also contravenes Policy RA2 point 1 of the Herefordshire Council's (HC) Core Strategy which states that for smaller settlements such as Woonton, the proposal must demonstrate attention to the character and setting of the site and its location in that settlement.

One of the matters recently considered by the Almeley Parish NDP Working Group has been the question of the form and extent of the settlement boundary for the hamlet of Woonton and its relationship with the surrounding open countryside. Taking into account the outcomes of the public questionnaire in May 2017, the group has now, in consultation with Data Orchard, agreed to recommend that Woonton be given a settlement boundary which encompasses most of the existing buildings at the core of Woonton, the two sites recently approved and Woonton Farm. It does not include the application P173699 site, which is considered open countryside and is classified as Grade 2 - valuable agricultural land. See the attached map showing the proposed boundary (black) and recently approved development sites (red).

Planning applications have recently been approved for the construction of 9 dwellings in Woonton, a small hamlet which, at its core, has 15 houses. If this application for 5 houses is approved, the total number of new houses being added to Woonton would be 14, almost doubling the residences in this hamlet. If the site under consideration at Woonton Farm is also approved, the grand total of new houses in Woonton would be 19, which is over double the current number of houses. If this application was to be approved it would lead to a totally unacceptable situation which would be in clear breach of policies RA1 and RA2. The two sites already approved together with the proposed development at Woonton Farm would more than fulfill the criteria for proportional growth in this small hamlet. Anything more would fail that test and completely undermine the emerging Almeley Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan which is now at the final draft stage and is expected to be submitted for Regulation 14 and commence its formal consultation stage in the near future.

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The proposal, as submitted, introduces two new traffic accesses at the junction of the C1079, which is the main route from the A480 to Almeley, with the lane to Logaston at a 90° bend in the road. This is the principal route used by residents of Woonton to access the local services in Almeley Village and by Almeley residents travelling to and from the main commercial centres for the area, namely Hereford and Leominster. The number of journeys for both groups is likely to increase with additional housing, leading to a greater volume of traffic. Most visitors to Almeley, both private and commercial, use this route, as do buses, school traffic and agricultural vehicles. Those who use this road know that this junction already has to be approached from the west with caution.

The proposed site sits directly opposite and to the south of a registered common, Pool Common, which is shortly to be purchased by Almeley Parish Council as a public open space. Pool Common currently has uninterrupted spectacular views of Ladylift and Yazor Woods, round towards Merbach Hill and away to The Black Mountains, and is one of the few locations in Woonton accessible to the public where far-reaching views can be enjoyed. The proposed development would completely obstruct that view and in so doing, would diminish the value to the public of the Common.

In summary, Almeley Parish Council (Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Party) objects to this application for the following reasons.

1. The applicant did not follow the NDP procedure, as advised by the planning office. If the application is approved, it undermines the emerging NDP.
2. If approved, application P173699 would have wider implications on the NDP selection of land for development and it could set a precedent for ribbon development along Logaston Lane.
3. The site for application P173699 which is Grade 2 agricultural land, it is currently farmland and is classified as open countryside not in the settlement of Woonton. The proposed site is outside the settlement boundary that has been proposed for Woonton under the emerging NDP. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued by the government states in section 11 that planning policies and decisions should encourage the effective use of land by re-using land previously developed. This has been incorporated into HC's Core Strategy Policy RA2, which states that housing proposals will be permitted when their locations make best and full use of suitable brownfield sites.
4. The two new proposed access points in application P17369 are in close proximity to and actually straddle the Logaston Lane junction with the C1079. This does not satisfy the requirement as stated in Core Strategy Policy MT1 which has a requirement that the local highway network can absorb the traffic impacts without adversely affecting the safe and efficient flow of traffic.
5. Construction of dwellings on the site proposed in P173699 would diminish the amenity of Pool Common by obscuring views to The Black Mountains.
6. Approval of this application would be likely to lead to the loss from the NDP site allocation of one of its recommended sites in order to comply with its stated objective of meeting, but not greatly exceeding, the housing allocation target set by Herefordshire Council.

As a community our understanding was when we took on this process that we would be supported by HC to make our own choices on development in our own community. All we ask is we see some evidence of that support and allow us to provide our views rather than watching our work being side-lined by the other applications outside the emerging development line before you decide to give your full support to any development.

The NDP group therefore advises the APC to recommend the rejection of this application.

NDP Steering Group 14th November 2017

cc
Cllr Clive Skelton
Cllr Roger Phillips