

Tony Fisher
Strensall with Towthorpe Parish Council
The Village Hall,
Northfields,
Strensall,
York

4th June 2018

By Email Only: clerk-strensallpc@btconnect.com

Dear Mr Fisher,

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR STRENSALL WITH TOWTHORPE, YORK: REGULATION 14 CONSULTATION DRAFT

We write in response to the request for representations on the Draft Strensall and Towthorpe Neighbourhood Plan.

Barratt and David Wilson Homes are the largest house builder in the Country and are actively promoting land interests across the City. We therefore welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

We acknowledge that neighbourhood planning can play an important role in helping to shape the communities they strive to live in. This should however be balanced with the need to ensure that any documents, such as the emerging Neighbourhood Plan, that will form part of the Development Plan complement each other and ensure any strategic aims are met, including identifying sufficient land to fully meet the current and future needs of its residents.

We note that consultation is currently being conducted on the first full draft Neighbourhood Plan and comments collected will then be used to work on a submission draft.

A large part of the current draft Plan sets out the results of the survey of the Village carried in 2016. We understand the results have been analysed and this has led to the steering group identify a number of 'key issues' which the Steering Group hope can be addressed through the Plan. These are then grouped under a number of headings. For ease of reference, we have provided our comments under these respective headings:

Housing Development and Infrastructure

The Draft Plan explains that there was a large body of opinion that the village was already suffering from over-development and that there is a lack of supporting infrastructure. It also explains that there is strong opposition to building on Green Belt land and further large scale development would lead to ever-increasing urbanisation.

Contrary to this, we also note that the draft plan goes onto explain that other people also raised concerns regarding the lack of truly affordable properties to buy or rent. It explains that people felt that this may lead to young people having to reluctantly leave the Village in search of cheaper properties or may restrict other people wanting to downsize.

Clearly the Neighbourhood Plan should respond fully to the needs and aspirations of all those currently living within the Parish or those wanting to move to the parish not solely those that are most engaged through this process. Based on our experience, those with the greatest need to get on the property ladder are the least vocal and become the 'silent majority'. To ensure their needs are fully captured, as a starting point, the Neighbourhood Plan should not

be seen as a tool to restrict development. Instead it should be aspirational and fully cater for current and future residents in order to ensure the Village becomes as sustainable as possible.

While we acknowledge that residents have concerns regarding the loss of land identified as Green Belt, such land should not be regarded as sacrosanct and there may be exceptional circumstances where such land needs to be developed. This could include providing sufficient levels of housing required in order to support the sustainable growth of the Village.

It is noted that the Draft Neighbourhood Plan identifies the proposed closing of Queen Elizabeth Barracks as a possible opportunity to provide required infrastructure, including housing and employment. The City of York Council have also identified this opportunity and are now proposing to allocate the site for residential development within the Local Plan.

However, we would take this opportunity to again highlight that there have been no firm assurances from the MOD that the barracks will close within the plan period. To simply defer all the infrastructure requirements onto one site, coupled with the uncertainties around when this site will actually come forward, is significantly flawed. Instead, we would recommend that the steering group look at identifying and allocating a site which is more suitable and available in the short term.

Services and Facilities

Paragraph 3.6.1 explains that many respondents felt that as the Village had grown, the services and facilities had decreased. This includes a number of small shops that closed over the years and not been replaced. Finally, it highlights that the closure of the village post office in 2016 resulted in the loss of a place that functioned as a social space.

Clearly the loss of any services or facilities within a village such as Strensall is bound to have a negative effect and contradict the governments overall ambitions to create sustainable communities. Indeed, national planning policy dictates that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

As noted above, we have concerns that the Neighbourhood Plan as currently drafted fails to identify sufficient provision for new housing within the parish. This will not only impact on the ability for younger people to get on the housing ladder but is also likely to lead to the continued demise of the existing services and facilities that residents rely on. Clearly, services and facilities can only continue to operate where it remains viable for them to do so. The provision of new housing within villages such as Strensall often results in significant additional inward investment.

Summary

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the current draft neighbourhood plan. However as drafted, we have fundamental concerns with some of the aims and aspirations of the Plan and strongly feel that it fails to fully respond to the needs of the current and future community. Despite the clear acknowledgment that there is a fundamental need for additional housing, most notably affordable and there is a need to give greater support to the existing services and facilities, we note that the decision has been made not to allocate any land for housing. Instead, reliance is placed on the Queen Elizabeth Barracks to close and made available for development within the plan period.

Such a decision fails to embrace the benefits additional development can bring and is therefore in conflict with the governments aspirations to boost housing supply.

We trust these comments will be noted and taken into consideration during the final stages of preparing the Neighbouring Plan. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with representatives of the steering group to discuss the contents of the draft Plan.

If you have any queries regarding the contents of this letter, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely



Liam Tate
Planning Manager