

THURSTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Rt. Hon Sajid Javid MP
Department for Communities and Local Government
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By post and email to: sajid.javid.mp@parliament.uk
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5th July 2017

Dear Mr Javid,

Request for the Calling In of Mid Suffolk District Council Planning Applications 5070/16, 2797/16, 4963/16, 4942/16 and 4386/16

Thurston Parish Council wishes to formally request the calling in for determination by the Secretary of State of Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) Planning Applications 5070/16, 2797/16, 4963/16, 4942/16 and 4386/16, all of which are due to be determined by the MSDC Planning Referrals Committee on 12th July 2017 and are all recommended for approval.

The applications are for the following:

1. Appl. Ref. 5070/16: Outline Planning Permission sought for the erection of up to 200 homes (including 9 self build plots), primary school site together with associated access, infrastructure, landscaping and amenity space (all matters reserved except for access) – Land at Norton Road, Thurston.
2. Appl. Ref. 2797/16: Application for Outline Planning Permission (with all matters other than means of access reserved) for residential development of up to 175 dwellings with associated car parking, landscaping, public open space areas, allotments, and vehicular access from Sandpit Lane (duplicate to application 2797/16) – Land South of Norton Road, Thurston.
3. Appl. Ref. 4963/16: Outline Planning Application for up to 250 new dwellings, open space and associated infrastructure, up to 4.4Ha of land for educational uses for Thurston Community College, and a new Primary School site, including details of access on land west of Ixworth Road – Land West of Ixworth Road, Thurston.
4. Appl. Ref. 4942/16: Residential development consisting of 64 dwellings and associated highway, car parking and public open space – Land at Meadow Lane, Thurston.

5. Appl. Ref. 4386/16: Erection of 138 dwellings. Construction of new vehicular access and provision of cycle/pedestrian link to Barton Road. Provision of road and drainage infrastructure, landscaping and open space – Land on the West Side of Barton Road, Thurston.

The officer reports to the MSDC Planning Referrals Committee can be found here:

<http://babermidsuffolk.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=181&MId=1109&Ver=4>

Our grounds for requesting the calling in of these planning applications are as follows:

1. Cumulatively, these sites will deliver approximately 830 dwellings. Potentially these could all come forward at the same time. Such a level of development is considered to be of a strategic scale yet has not been subject to a thorough assessment of its impacts.
2. Thurston is a village of less than 3,000 people and approximately 1,400 households/dwellings. These proposed developments would increase the size of the village on any of these measures by two-thirds within five years. Such major change should be planned properly through the development of the local plan or neighbourhood plan in order to ensure that they do not result in unsustainable growth of the village.
3. Suffolk County Council Highways Authority stated, at a meeting of key stakeholders on 27th February 2017 (including Thurston Parish Council), that a transport study looking at the cumulative impacts of the five development proposals was being commissioned. We are not aware that this work has been undertaken or that any such work has been used to provide a proper understanding of the cumulative impacts of these five developments on the highway network in and around Thurston.
4. In its representations to the planning applications, Suffolk County Council (SCC) Highways Authority stated:

“To date none [of the Transport Assessments accompanying the planning applications] have shown the cumulative impact of all five developments but at some locations SCC considers this may be severe, particularly where the network is already close to or exceeding capacity.”

Yet it then concludes that:

“On this occasion, we consider that by taking a co-operative approach for all five developments there is an opportunity that the planning process can provide improvements to both mitigate against any severe impacts and any lack of transport infrastructure.”

The lack of cumulative assessment and the measures proposed to supposedly mitigate the severe impacts of these developments have not been tested, or in some cases, even identified. Many of the mitigation measures, the Highways Authority states, require further work to confirm that a solution is possible or beneficial or should be addressed in future revisions to the Local Plan. Such an approach to considering fundamental strategic change to Thurston is not considered to be sufficiently robust to allow determination of the planning applications.

5. Matters relating to primary education are not being dealt with in a manner that provides sufficient certainty in determining the planning applications. It has been established and agreed that there is insufficient capacity in the local primary schools to support this level of growth and so either a new primary school should be provided (with two of the applications proposing new school sites) or the existing primary school should be expanded (subject to there being sufficient space on the existing site). However, there is no mechanism to ensure that, if the new school were not to come forward when new school places were needed, then development should be delayed until such time as the matter has been resolved. Suffolk County Council Education Department initially requested a condition to this effect to be attached to any grant of planning permission, however this request was subsequently withdrawn. Instead, the case officers' report for each of the applications states:

“The delivery of a new primary school is a necessary pre-requisite to mitigate the potential pressure on education infrastructure from the development and it has been agreed that a restrictive phasing condition is not necessary given the progress that has been made on options.”

It is not considered that sufficient progress has been made on options, or that it has been demonstrated that sufficient contributions could be secured from these developments through Section 106 (which is the stated approach by MSDC to securing this key piece of infrastructure), to justify the grant of planning permission.

6. Thurston Parish Council is preparing a neighbourhood plan for the parish. It recognises its responsibility to plan positively for growth and has engaged with all the respective applicants about promoting their sites through the neighbourhood plan process where they can be fully assessed in terms of their sustainability, both individually and cumulatively. With applications for all sites, the neighbourhood plan preparation process is being rendered meaningless as it will be impossible for the community to constructively plan for its future when, in the short term, there will be such significant and fundamental change created by these five developments. By way of example, the proposed mitigation measures for matters such as walking and cycling accompanying these applications demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of the way residents would move around the village. These are matters that could be better dealt with through the development of a neighbourhood plan.
7. The preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan has been frustrated by the local planning authority, MSDC, and its inability and/or unwillingness to provide the Parish Council with an understanding of what the objectively assessed housing need figure should be for Thurston and its 'functional cluster'. Whilst it was not obliged to do so, MSDC repeatedly advised the Parish Council that it would provide guidance in this area to allow the process of site allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan to proceed.
8. Thurston is singly bearing the brunt of MSDC's failure to get an up-to-date Local Plan in place. The Parish Council, since the start of the process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan, has been provided with a number of timetables for the preparation of the Local Plan, all of which have been missed. The March 2017 Local Development Scheme states that there will be a public consultation on the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan in 'Summer 2017' yet the Parish

Council understands that this consultation will not be completed until the end of October 2017. Meanwhile, Thurston will largely bear the impact of this failure and consequent issues with its five-year housing land supply for the whole of the district.

It is essential that as the Secretary of State you call in this planning application in order to ensure that confidence in Neighbourhood Planning is maintained and so that the thousands of hours of hard work carried out by communities such as Thurston in preparing plans does not go to waste.

Yours sincerely

Vicky Waples

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Clerk to Thurston Parish Council

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