

18 July 2018 From Trevor Woods to the Hoe & Worthing Planning members

Just for your information I have prepared the attached document and circulated it ahead of a meeting I have just received notice of tomorrow evening with Gordon Bambridge, Bill Borrett's companion councillor for North Elmham. Unfortunately he has said in advance he will not have any information other than the very vague things included in Bill Borrett's emails but wishes to gauge parish responses before attending a meeting at Breckland on Thursday. I trust that I have correctly stated the parish position at this time (despite being half asleep) and in the unlikely event that I discover anything at tomorrow's meeting I will let you know.

Attachment

This letter is intended for the information of Hoe and Worthing and nearby parishes and Breckland District Council.

Introduction

During recent days Councillor Bill Borrett, the Breckland Council ward member for North Elmham sent a series of very brief email messages to a number of parishes informing them that at the request of property developers 'Lanpro' he had met with them regarding a proposed submission under the scheme for 'garden cities, towns and villages'. The submission would be made within two weeks to reach the government by 31st July and would include up to 10,000 new homes being built on land between North Elmham, Billingford and Bintree with County School railway station and the B1067 via a new roundabout acting as transport pathways.

Agreement had already been secured with the major landowner and was being submitted in response to a call for sites under the garden communities scheme and the government would create a shortlist of successful proposals from those received. Breckland Council, as the planning authority would have to decide if it is going to support garden towns in general and this proposal in particular and its decision included by the developer in its submission. If Breckland came out in support then the chances of inclusion in the shortlist would be very high and would be reduced in the absence of support. A very indistinct map showing where land owners' agreement had been confirmed was provided, with an indication a second phase would follow at some point towards Broome Green.

It was indicated that parishes should use the very short window available to make Breckland aware of any objections and suggested these should be sent to William Nunn, the council leader who would probably chair the meeting on a date yet to be fixed.

Response

To ensure the case Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting will make is as concise and uncluttered as possible I will arrange it in the form of bullet points but will first indicate that a response to the development proposals is not possible. In order to establish the view of our residents it would be necessary to call a whole parish meeting for an open debate and vote after all of the facts have been researched, collated and presented to ensure that everybody is fully informed. In this case absolutely none of the facts that will be included in this proposed submission to the government are yet known and no clear information regarding the garden towns scheme has ever been provided to us for consultation.

I have however made the elected members of our planning committee aware of the content of the emails received and can express here their incredulity and extreme concern at the apparent intention of our district council to hurriedly reach a conclusion on this matter and garden villages in general. We are strongly of the view that course of action would be highly inappropriate and make the following observations.....

- The scheme for garden cities and then towns and villages has been available for a number of years and Breckland has never issued any information about it to parishes, held any consultation or debate or otherwise sought to establish a policy on the issue. It is impossible to understand how it could do any of these things openly and adequately within a period of less than two weeks, particularly when the notice required for a meeting would take up most of it.
- It is impossible to understand why Breckland would contemplate contributing to an application at the eleventh hour before its intended submission when it has clearly been a very long time in the making without any open consultation.
- The first 'garden' schemes were authorised a number of years ago and have proved to provide some positive planning gains whilst frequently creating fertile ground for discontent. One principal reason for past opposition has been the experience of some communities close to new garden towns who have reported being ignored in the planning process and 'swamped' by the outcome. At the new garden town at Ebsfleet in Kent for example the established residents reported they were told throughout what they wanted rather than being asked for their view. In subsequent publications, including the prospectus extending the scheme to new towns and villages the clear intention of the government has been to avoid the mistakes of the past caused by lack of public inclusion by placing community involvement and local authorities at the very centre for the future; indeed they gave the scheme the title 'Locally-led Garden Villages'.

This prospective proposal has only just sprung into the public domain and there is nobody at any level at the district's planning department who has any knowledge whatsoever about the matter. Similarly no people outside of the council have been consulted or informed about the matter, including any parish or any resident (including those who live right up against where it appears the development will be situated).

The expression of intent that the developers submit must be accompanied by a summary of local support and whether the community has been in the planning process to date. As indicated already there has been no community involvement or information provided to anybody apart from the very belated meeting arranged with Councillor Borrett, where the information provided was unspecific and at best scant.

- The opportunity to submit expressions of intent in respect of developments of up to 10,000 homes came to an end in July 2016. The garden towns scheme is now only for new communities of more than 10,000 homes and these are decided on a rolling basis with the prospectus specifically stating the intention is for there not to be any deadline for submission. It is unclear, as with everything else to this point, why the developers are aiming for submission within the next two weeks and impossible to understand why Breckland should feel it is necessary to contribute to the submission by a deadline chosen by the developers.
- Although the government has made clear that there is no expectation statements of intent will provide every answer, there is a requirement it demonstrates how the provision and funding of current and future infrastructure requirements will be met. A development of 10,000 homes will represent a new community equivalent to that currently existing in Dereham (including Toftwood) where infrastructure in the round is inadequate and future developments already outstrip those planned for. The question of infrastructure provision is already therefore a live and contentious issue in the area where the development is proposed and no indication has yet been given of how this will be resolved.

Conclusion

This is an extremely large proposal in the context of the area, which will provide new homes that are in addition to all of those planned and consulted on in the emerging local plan for the Breckland area. There is almost no information provided about it locally and there has been no public or local authority consultation or involvement apart from a very late meeting with a

local councillor, where extremely vague and brief verbal information was provided. It is not possible to determine public opinion about the matter at this time in view of both the short notice before the chosen date of submission and the paucity of clear facts disclosed by the developers. We have therefore not commented on the development that may be proposed but solely on the process adopted and intended.

Should any information become available in the future then a full meeting will be called in Hoe and Worthing to debate it, consider and discuss all views on the issue and provide a conclusion to the local planning authority. At this point we ask that Breckland considers the points we have raised regarding the inadequacy of the process undertaken by Lanpro to date. We consider it entirely improper that there is a clear policy for dealing with all planning applications for large and extremely small constructions and a consultation process that allows parishes a minimum of 21 days to consider all of the written submissions and make a response. Conversely there is no policy for dealing with speculative new community provision of over 10,000 new homes and no public consultation appears to be planned for this particular site before Breckland decides the matter.

We believe it would be precipitate and wrong for Breckland to do other than respond to any expression of intent at this stage with an indication that it is wholly inadequate and does not meet the submission criteria for a garden town/village.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Wood
Chairman, Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting