

## **Parish Council response to the 2 preferred sites regarding the South Norfolk Village Cluster Housing Allocation Plan consultation**

**48 parishioners sent in written responses to the Parish Council; 26 parishioners met with councillors in either 5 consultation sessions or 2 parish council meetings to offer their opinions on the sites with the combination representing 67 different households.**

### **Rockland St Mary with Hellington Parish Council response to Site SN2064REV (Behind surgery)**

**Question 107: Do you support or object to the allocation of the preferred site SN206REV?**

**Rockland St Mary with Hellington Parish Council does not support the allocation of the preferred site for the following reasons:**

The site is close to and convenient for facilities such as Post Office/shop, the primary school, a part-time doctor's surgery, and a bus service (which is infrequent, daytime Monday to Saturday only). However, situated where it is- at the busiest part of the single route in and out of the village - parishioners have expressed deep concerns about vehicular and highway safety issues. Volumes of traffic converge at this point, particularly at peak times of the day, including delivery vans to the shop, Post office vans, Our Bus, large school coaches, Langley School minibuses (at least 12 of these), refuse/recycle vehicles, very large farm vehicles along with commuter traffic. Throughout the daytime there is a steady flow of pedestrians (more at school opening and closing times) and cars parking temporarily to use the popular shop/Post Office, the GP surgery and a nearby swimming pool let for public use. It should also be noted that when the A146 is closed (not an infrequent occurrence) then Rockland suffers the consequences of large quantities of diverted traffic through its one main street.

Although visibility from the site access itself is quite good, entering and exiting from the site is likely to be hazardous both to traffic because of vehicles converging at this point and also to pedestrians as the main footpath is on the opposite side of the road to the site. Lorries and other large vehicles often mount the pavement to avoid parked or passing cars. Recently a post which was part of a safety rail close to the entrance was knocked down by a vehicle which had mounted that small section of pavement. Parishioners are concerned that developing this site will inevitably mean an increase in traffic (private cars and deliveries to homes) and thus intensify the existing hazards.

Although there is one footpath that runs through the village (rather narrow in places and on the opposite side of the road to the site) which provides a walking route to the primary school, it is necessary to cross the road at a particularly dangerous bend to get to the school. There is concern that an increase in traffic from parents who drop their children off on the way to work will make this junction even more hazardous. As the primary school is currently only at half capacity an increase in pupil numbers may exacerbate the dangers.

The Parish Council is also concerned about problems that would be caused both to the immediate vicinity and the GP surgery and its users during any development phase arising from construction lorries and workers' vehicles entering and leaving the site. The nearby farm track which might form an alternative accessway during such a phase is close to a bend in the road and its opening is a shared drive with a private dwelling.

Along the boundary of the site (behind the houses and GP surgery) is an extensive wildlife 'run'. The hedgerow, wildflowers and vegetation that grow quite densely along this boundary provide a safe haven for a variety of animals- including hedgehogs, deer, foxes, and birds. The tree and hedge line along much of this boundary also provide a good screen to hide the houses when the area is viewed from the much-used walks further back.

Parishioners who live at or around this stretch of the village have raised concerns that the existing drainage system is strained and would not cope with further demand. In very heavy downpours, which we know will be a much more common occurrence in future, The Street floods in places as the drains cannot cope with the run-off water.

For these reasons, the Parish Council does not support the allocation of site SN2064REV as suitable for development.

## SUMMARY

Being at the heart of the village and on the one busy single road through the village, the high volumes of different sorts of traffic converging at the entrance point to the site pose a danger to pedestrians and drivers. The site boundary vegetation provides a safe haven for wildlife to pass without being exposed in the fields. The drains and sewage system are stretched. Building into back land destroys the simple character of the village and takes out arable Grade 2 agricultural land.

### **Do you agree with the extent of the Settlement Limit and any changes proposed?**

Site SN2064 REV is outside the revised settlement limit which now includes The Orchids housing development - completed two years ago. Of significant concern to parishioners and the Parish Council is that if the site is granted planning permission it may set a precedent for yet further 'back' development on agricultural land and that bit-by-bit Rockland's rural charm as a smaller village is lost for ever.

The Parish Council signed the Council for the Protection of Rural England's pledge which stated that brownfield sites should be developed *first* before greenfield sites are used. If the site *were* to be developed however, parishioners have suggested that a mix of small retirement homes (for older people who would like to downsize but remain in the village) and small/affordable starter homes would be more relevant to the village. Parishioners are very much against large 'commuter-type' executive housing.

The Parish Council accepts the Rockland Settlement Limit on the basis that The Orchids development is now part of the village but wishes to state emphatically that this is not a precedent to accept further linear or back development. Parishioners feel strongly that Rockland St Mary has had its fair share of growth in Eel Catcher Close and the completion of The Orchids as part of Bee Orchid Way. The Parish Council does not accept any further revision to adopt site SN2064REV.

**Do you think that any of the rejected sites should be allocated instead of, or in addition to, the preferred site?** The Parish Council does not think that any of the rejected sites should be allocated instead of or in addition to the preferred sites for the same reasons put forward by the Parish Council in the original consultation and for the reasons that the sites were rejected by the South Norfolk Planning team.

## **Rockland St Mary with Hellington Parish Council response to Site SN2007/SN0531 (next to Eel Catcher Close)**

**36 parishioners sent in written responses to the Parish Council; a further 26 met with councillors in either 5 consultation sessions or 2 parish council meetings to offer their opinions on the sites with the combination representing 57 different households.**

**Question: Do you support or object to the allocation of the preferred sites SN2007/SN0531 ?**

**Rockland St Mary with Hellington Parish Council does not support the allocation of the preferred sites SN2007/SN0531 for the following reasons:**

The site is over 1km from the GP and shop/post office facilities and over 1.5km from the primary school, so most people who live at this end of the village access these by car. More residents would simply add to the use of cars to access facilities. The issue of parents dropping children off by car is a constant problem as the school is in a cul de sac with no parking. If the school roll increases to capacity this issue will be exacerbated. Walking to school is via the existing footpath (much of which does not conform to current safe path widths alongside a busy road) on the opposite side of the road and involves crossing 3 hazardous roads/junctions (New Inn Hill, Surlingham Lane corner and the junction with School Lane). The suggestion of creating a new footpath between the Old Hall and the proposed development would do nothing to tackle these particular hazardous parts of the walk to school. There is

also no pavement option left or right at this exit so pedestrians would still have to cross the road at a blind bend to access the pavement on the other side of the road.

There are key safety issues regarding the existing access to the site. The site access is near the brow of New Inn Hill, very near a blind bend, and very close to Green Lane (a somewhat hidden access track that leads to the village playground and Ted Ellis nature reserve). Data (published weekly on the parish council website over the past 3 years) downloaded from the parish council's Speed Awareness Monitor consistently demonstrates that around 33% of cars passing through the village at this point from either direction drive at speeds above the 30mph limit. The site is opposite a year-round grazing field whose access is at the top of the hill. The designated footpath is much used by walkers and rambles- many of whom visit this countryside vicinity for recreation. New Inn Hill is also part of a heavily used popular Route 1 National Cycleway and part of the Wherryman's Way national trail.

Although the site is close to physical infrastructure, parishioners who live nearby have expressed concerns that drainage and sewage capacity are already stretched to their limit. There have been several instances of sewage spillage in very recent years near the site (including a second one in 10 months reported at the New Inn Hill allotments July 23rd 2021), on New Inn Hill property, and at Lower Road. Surface run-off water into drains down the hill is another concern; during periods of extremely heavy rain (an increasingly regular occurrence) the existing drains do not cope and fast -running water degrades the road surface towards the bottom of the road and outside the New Inn public house.

Diagonally opposite the site are holiday cottages run as a very successful business. Development of the site would have a seriously detrimental if not ruinous effect on the business as the cottages are popular with holidaymakers who rent them for their desirability in a setting which is known for its peace, tranquillity and relative remoteness. The noise arising during any construction phase would mean the cottages would be unlettable for that period and thereafter they could not be advertised as being in a remote, tranquil setting.

The site is less than 350 metres from Hellington Nature Reserve and Rockland Broad. Rockland Broad is part of the Broads National Park and has internationally recognised environmental designations: Broadland Ramsar Sites, Broadland Special Protection Area and the Broads Special Area of Conservation. The site is within a 3km "buffer distance" to these. Rockland Broad is also a designated SSSI and is part of the Yare Broads and Marshes SSSI. Site SN0531 is even closer to an area that the site's owner has self-designated as a wildlife conservation area! Of particular importance is that the site acts as a green buffer corridor between the denser housing of the main village and the much more loosely spread, small pockets of housing on the outskirts of the village. The area is popular with local and visiting birdwatchers and naturalists due to its wide variety of flora and fauna. Skylarks- a bird on the red list of globally threatened species- have nested here for the first time. There has been a significant increase in visitors/tourists to this end of the village (since the Covid pandemic) which has not diminished. Any housing development (both during construction and after) would place further pressures on, and so displace, wildlife by depleting their food sources and from the negative impact of building and human intrusion on their habitats. Currently, the green space helps maintain the sense of an open, rural and tranquil landscape for both people and wildlife.

Part of the site is immediately adjacent to three attractive Grade 2 listed buildings which can be seen from the footpaths to the side and from a distance. These fine buildings would no longer be visible if the site were to be developed. Their heritage significance, both architectural and historic, is inextricably linked to their rural and agricultural setting and would therefore be adversely affected if surrounded by a housing development. Being at the very top of a hill - "fairly prominent on a ridge", any development of the site would be seen for miles around and be hugely detrimental to the existing landscape and open skylines in an area known for its natural, unspoilt beauty.

For these reasons, the Parish Council does not support the allocation of the preferred site.

## **SUMMARY**

Eel Catcher Close was (is) an exception site and a public assurance was given of no further development here. There are multiple traffic safety issues related to the site. The site is extremely close to very many sensitive environmental designations and quite clearly within an area of rural tranquillity, natural beauty and importance to the preservation

of wildlife. Development would effectively destroy a holiday business, obscure listed buildings and being high on a ridge be seen for miles around. There are significant ongoing issues with the sewage system at this end of the village. Being at the outer end of the village the use of cars to access key facilities would increase.

**Do you agree with the extent of the Settlement Limit?**

The revised settlement limit now includes The Orchids housing development which was completed within the last two years. The site SN2007/SNP0531 is outside the settlement limit. Eel Catcher Close was developed strictly under the terms of a Rural Exception Site for social housing only. When planning permission was granted under these terms, the Parish Council and its parishioners were given assurance at a public meeting that this would not set a precedent for further development of adjoining land. Given that an application for a single dwelling directly opposite the site was refused (for a second time) in 2017 on the grounds that it had an adverse effect on the character and landscape of the rural area and was outside the development area, it is not logical that a site immediately opposite for up to 25 dwellings can be assessed as suitable for development.

Parishioners feel very strongly that Rockland St Mary has had its fair share of development growth via Eel Catcher Close and the recent completion of The Orchids to Bee Orchid Way.

Whilst the Parish Council agrees with the current settlement limit it does *not* accept that site SN2007/0531 be developed and added to the settlement limit.

**Do you think that any of the rejected sites should be allocated instead of, or in addition to, the preferred site?** The Parish Council does not think that any of the rejected sites should be allocated instead of or in addition to the preferred sites for the same reasons put forward by the Parish Council in the original consultation and for the reasons that the sites were rejected by the South Norfolk Planning team.

Kate Bevington (Chair)

On behalf of Rockland St Mary with Hellington Parish Council