

# **EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION: STAGE 2 HEARINGS**

## **MATTER 7:**

### **PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES, DESIGN, NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE**

**ON BEHALF OF: WITCHFORD PARISH COUNCIL (1059584)**

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## **CONTENTS:**

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 1.2 Matter 7, Issue 1: Whether the Local Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to its approach towards promoting healthy communities, requiring good design, and enhancing and conserving the natural environment?**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1.1 This hearing statement has been prepared on behalf of Witchford Parish Council (WPC) to address the matters and issues raised in the Stage 2 Hearings Programme. Separate Hearing Statements are submitted for Matters 7, 14 and 15.

### **1.2 Matter 7, Issue 1: Whether the Local Plan is justified, effective and consistent with national policy in relation to its approach towards promoting healthy communities, requiring good design, and enhancing and conserving the natural environment?**

1.2.1 This issue is divided into subsequent questions. WPC is concerned with the designation of Local Green Spaces, addressed under question 24, and the Green Wedges, addressed under question 25:

**1.2.2 24. Is the designation of Local Green Spaces, as set out below, justified by evidence, effective and consistent with national policy? The designation of an area of land as a Local Green Space confers significant protection. Is the Council satisfied in each case below that the proposed allocation can be justified? Please set out in detail, why this is considered to be the case and draw on any relevant representations.**

1.2.3 WPC's representation on this matter was submitted in our letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 2017 along with response form (H) to the Regulation 19 consultation. WPC supports the protection of all the local green spaces in its Parish, allocated in the Local Plan as WFD.LGS1-7.

1.2.4 WPC is especially concerned that site WLD.LGS7 (Horse Meadow, Main Street) should remain allocated as green space, where it would receive protection from inappropriate development. As stated in our original representation, this particular greenspace, known as the "horse field" or "horse meadow", is highly valued locally, being centrally located along Main Street. It has a wide frontage to Main Street, which allows good views rather than just glimpses, through to the open countryside to the south (including the allocation and beyond).

1.2.5 Since the previously dismissed appeal which we referred to in our original representation, and since the submission of those representations, the Council

refused an outline planning application for the development of the WLD.LGS7 site (application reference 17/02217/OUM). This proposed 31 dwellings,

1.2.6 In addition to reasons relating to the site being outside the settlement boundary and providing insufficient affordable housing, the refusal reasons relating to the value of the site as a proposed designated Local Green Space were set out as follows:

1.2.7 *2. The application site is located on undeveloped land at the southern edge of the village of Witchford, which currently makes a positive contribution to the setting of the village. Due to the existing landscape features and topography, the site will be clearly visible from a number of receptors. This boundary forms part of a transitional zone between the main built up part of the settlement to the countryside beyond. The proposed development of this land would result in a significant adverse effect on the setting of the village, a Grade II\* building and Grade II listed buildings and to the character and appearance of the countryside, contrary to Policy ENV1 of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015. It would also be contrary to Policy LP28 of the Submitted Local Plan 2017 and the guidance contained within paragraphs 14 and 17 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.*

1.2.8 *3. The application site is located on undeveloped land at the southern edge of the village which has been allocated as a Local Green Space by residents in the Submitted Local Plan 2017 and is therefore protected from development. The proposal will not enhance the local Green Space and is not supported by the local community. It would also be contrary to the guidance contained within paragraphs 14, 77 and 109 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy LP29 of the Submitted Local Plan 2017 which states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.*

1.2.9 As anticipated in our original representation, the access through the part of the site that has road frontage to Main Street would change the character of the site to an engineered estate road, and the views through to the countryside beyond would be significantly narrowed by the provision of dwellings in the rear part of the site. Development of the site would compromise the rural nature of the well-used footpath routes that run through the site.

- 1.2.10 Since the submission of our original representation, the revised NPPF has been issued. This reinforces at paragraph 171 that Local Plans should “take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of... green infrastructure,” and that allocations for development should of “the least environmental or amenity value.”
- 1.2.11 Meanwhile, Planning Practice Guidance states that “plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs and the Local Green Space designation should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making.” (Open space para 007). The Submission Local Plan has carefully allocated land for built development, along with the allocations for Local Green Space, and retention of the local green Spaces will not therefore conflict with the need to allocate land for housing.
- 1.2.12 It is therefore appropriate that all the Local Green Spaces designated in Witchford remain as proposed.
- 1.2.13 **25. Is the designation of land as a Green Wedge, and the related Policy Witchford6: Green Wedges, justified, and consistent with national policy? What is the difference between a Green Wedge and Local Green Space?**
- 1.2.14 Whilst Green Wedges and Local Green Spaces have similar benefits in terms of local enjoyment, their functions can be distinguished. A Local Green Space is directly valued by local residents for the way it maintains a valuable resource in its own right: the Planning Practice Guidance described them as “demonstrably special to the local community” (open space para 009). It has protection consistent with that in respect of Green Belt. The thrust of a Green Wedge is slightly different in that it performs a strategic function as a buffer between areas of development, in order to prevent coalescence, and is therefore valued for that purpose, albeit that it may also offer an amenity function. Its protection is not equivalent to that of a Green belt, since some development is considered acceptable provided it maintains its function of preventing coalescence.
- 1.2.15 WPC is keen that the Green Wedges for the village are maintained in the Plan, and has also made representations in relation to Matter 14 (main settlements) in relation to the Lancaster Way Business Park, where a significant landscape buffer is by Policy Ely7.e.