

2016/2909/OTS – Residential development of 17 dwellings with ancillary works on land west of Flowerstone, Station Road, Binegar BA3 4UQ

The Parish Council held an extraordinary meeting on 15 December 2016 to consider this application. Forty-three parishioners attended. The Council reached the following decision:

Binegar Parish Council strenuously recommends refusal of permission.

The proposed development is not sustainable. It increases the load and pressure on the public sewer system. Floods overwhelm Gurney Slade sewage plant and it overflows. The flood risk to the villages remains unmitigated and high. The proposed development will increase the severity and acute toxicity of the next flood with its attendant health risks.

The Council believes that to approve this application is to take a reckless gamble with the health, well-being and lives of residents of Binegar and Gurney Slade.

History

2014/0492/OTA sought permission to build an estate of 23 houses on this site. Among others, the Environment Agency and Wessex Water objected and the developer withdrew the application.

Parishioners' concerns ignored

The application claims to address “previous and current consultee comments.” There is no evidence of any consideration to the concerns raised by the public in the 2014 consultation. Equally, the application ignores the Parish response to Mendip’s 2015 consultation on its *Local Plan part II*.

One parishioner commented how the developer was rushing to get in before any planning constraints from *Local Plan part II*. Another noted that a December application seemed designed to stifle discussion and prevent consultation.

Such tactics do not instil trust in the application nor inspire confidence in its integrity or quality. It is difficult to see how the interests of the community play any part whatsoever in this application.

For example, there is a proposal for car parking spaces for the church. The application claims this is a “much needed facility”. It claims this without ever consulting the church, the parish priest, the parochial church council or anyone. Had it done so, it would have received a different answer on how the application might discharge its S106 duties.

Village development

In the 2015 *Local Plan* response, parishioners were clear that future development should follow a ribbon or linear pattern, filling in gaps between existing houses and only building houses that front and face lanes and roads. Above all, residents wished to avoid high-density, dead-end estates.

There are good reasons for this. Such estates are difficult to integrate into the community and the village infrastructure will not support them.

Lanes, parking, buses and infrastructure

Most lanes to the site are single track. The main access is along Binegar Lane, Station Road and Whitnell Lane (or vice versa). For considerable stretches, this lane is single track. A bus and a car cannot pass each other along much of its length. Whitnell Lane regularly floods. Only the lower end of Binegar Lane has a footpath. Binegar is a rural community; cars, lorries, trucks and buses share this lane with increasingly large tractors, trailers, horses, riders and pedestrians.

One narrow pinch point is along the north boundary of the proposed development.

The application claims, "it will be unlikely that parking issues within the village will deteriorate as a result of this development, rather they would improve". The application asserts this without evidence. The estate will have only the absolute minimum of parking spaces needed to get through planning. There is absolutely no doubt that the estate will attract vehicles to park on the lane outside the site. At present, this is rare, associated with church events and managed by use of off-street parking. The development will create unmanaged on-road parking.

If the passage of buses is regularly blocked, it will threaten the viability of the service, already reduced, through the village. This risk is unacceptable.

The fragile road infrastructure finds echoes with utilities. There is an acute shortage of telephone numbers and broadband connections. Water pressure is low. Local electricity supply is near capacity. Like issues arise with general practice, schools and other important elements of support that a large development like this will need.

Location

Binegar is a highly sensitive location in terms of development. It is very rural and thinly developed along narrow country lanes. A development of the sort proposed will adversely affect the green and open rural nature of the village. Protecting the setting of the landmark Holy Trinity Church is also an important consideration.

Flood

In response to 2014/0492, Wessex Water entered a holding objection. It stated:

“We are also aware that this catchment suffered from groundwater flooding over the last winter. Flooding incidents were so severe and prolonged that emergency measures were necessary to support residents and homes affected. Private drains and public sewer systems were overwhelmed during these periods with detriment to public health and the environment.”

Wessex Water made its position clear, in writing to the *Lead Local Flood Authority* (Somerset County Council) and Mendip District Council on occasions since 2013. It placed on record its objection to future permissions not covered by a ground water management strategy. It asked for a strategy to be jointly developed.

The Parish Council’s concern is that the catchment has no water management strategy.

Binegar and Gurney Slade lie in an area of high flood risk. Wessex Water describes the situation in 2013 when the villages suffered a severe and prolonged flood of foul, toxic water. This application places a significant additional load on the capacity of the Gurney Slade sewage works. Without a water management strategy, floods like those of 1995, 2000, 2002, 2012 and 2013 will recur in the next year of high rainfall.

Proposed housing estate surface water drainage

The application claims the development will have no effect on surface water drainage. This may be true though the trial holes were incomplete having hit bedrock and dug no further. The site is 20m higher in altitude than the flood area. Rock strata and drainage means there is no guarantee that the surges of water draining from the estate’s hard surfaces will not issue at lower levels and join the main flood.

Proposed housing estate foul water drainage

The application asserts that Wessex Water and the Environment Agency support the proposed drainage design. This is misleading and the evidence submitted does not support the claim.

The applicant only asked Wessex Water for a “capacity check” for 15 residences.

Responding to the previous application, Wessex Water made clear:

“Proposals will need to consider flows from the site and also the potential for existing properties to make connections. A first time sewerage scheme has not been previously promoted for this location however it appears that we would need to give proper consideration for unconnected properties.”

The applicant's own technical advisor stated that the applicant should "also consider the provision of foul connections for neighbouring properties; enabling existing septic tanks with overflows to ground to be abandoned – which will reduce groundwater contamination".

For some reason, this is not included in the *Access and Design Statement*.

The total extra foul water flow to public sewers is in fact from 30 or more houses. It is misleading to claim support based only a capacity check request for 15.

Binegar lies in a Groundwater Source Protection Zone. It is very sensitive and inconceivable that a new development could leave adjoining properties with septic tanks issuing on to the development site itself.

Conclusion

This proposal is unsustainable because it increases the severity of toxic floods in an area of high flood risk where there is no water management strategy.

This proposal is unsustainable because the infrastructure it will demand is not available.

This proposal is unsustainable because it will adversely affect the rural, open nature of the village and because it closes in on the setting of the landmark Church.

No fewer than 43 villagers joined the parish councillors at the special meeting the Council called. All fifty rejected this unwelcome and ill-considered proposal.