

Town Council comments on planning application for Land South of Spirketts Lane

Background information

The Town Council has drawn up comments relating to this planning application. These are available on the Town Council website and also in print at Harleston Information Centre and the Library. Residents are encouraged to email the Town Council if they have any further comments they wish to make. These will be added to the Council comments as an Appendix, before they are submitted to the South Norfolk District Council planning website.

Below is some information which seeks to explain what part the Town Council's comments will play when South Norfolk District Council (SNDC) decide on planning applications.

The Town Council's part in the planning system: advice received from a planning consultant

The Town Council is invited to make comments on local planning applications submitted to SNDC. It is one of many statutory consultees, such as Norfolk County Council (NCC) Highway Authority, the Flood Authority, Environment Agency, the police, healthcare providers, and many more. Each consultee is only expected to comment on the areas they have expertise in. Town Council comments would be expected to relate to the Redenhall with Harleston Neighbourhood Plan policies, and to make SNC aware of any local concerns or knowledge. The Town Council is not expected to comment on other fields and should not try to be highway, medical, commercial, drainage or environmental experts – that information will come from the relevant statutory consultee.

The Town Council is not responsible for deciding whether the application should be approved or refused. That decision is taken by SNDC, after taking account of all the comments made by consultees/technical advisors, and after checking whether the application complies with all planning policies, both national and local.

Advice received from key stakeholders from South Norfolk District Council and Norfolk County Council

The Town Council Planning Committee has engaged in a Q&A session with key stakeholders to raise questions on the impact of the application for South of Spirketts Lane. It was confirmed:

- The development proposed at South of Spirketts Lane consists entirely of affordable housing. The need for such dwellings, and the proportion of rented and shared ownership properties required, is based on the needs of the whole of the South Norfolk area, as established by South Norfolk Council.
- A decision on whether the development will be required to pay Community Infrastructure Levy will be taken only once the application has been determined.
- There are two attenuation basins planned on the site, which will retain water during rainfall. Whether these will be classed as Open Space depends on the depth of the basins.

A presentation was received from the NCC Highways Major and Estate Development Team Manager, Points made were:

The Highways Development Team, acting on behalf of Norfolk County Council, are responsible for providing the highway and transportation recommendation on behalf of the highway authority for all major planning applications to ensure that development is safe and sustainable and in accordance with national and local policy. Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impact of the development would be severe.

When assessing the transport implications of a major development (over 100 dwellings), the cumulative impact is judged to be severe based on

- Queue lengths and blocking back to other junctions

- Increase in delay (albeit in a locational context)
- Junction capacity is exceeded (again in a locational context)
- Junctions cannot be improved to mitigate impact
- Development does not maximise the opportunity to travel by sustainable modes

If a Transport Assessment identifies that mitigation measures are needed, these would form the basis of negotiations between the Highways authority and the developer, and can include:

- New junctions and existing junction improvements
- Additional footways/cycleways and crossing facilities
- Improved bus services or bus infrastructure
- Travel Plan

But the mitigations must be:

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms
- Directly related to the development
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development

Town Council: representations made regarding the Land North of Spirketts Lane

An application to build 89 houses on the land North of Spirketts Lane was approved by SNDC Planning Committee on 19th February. The Town Council had made comments to express local concerns, which were discussed at the meeting. The meeting was attended by the Chair of the Town Council and two members of the Planning Committee, who raised two issues of particular concern to local residents. Below is a summary of the concerns expressed and the responses received. These responses were taken into account when preparing the Town Council's comments on the application, for Land South of Spirketts Lane.

Traffic/Highways

The Town Council Chair reiterated the point previously made by the Council on several occasions, that Briar Farm, Lidl, and the site north of Spirketts Lane are all located close to each other and will all generate traffic using Spirketts Lane and Mendham Lane and the junctions of Spirketts Lane/Mendham Lane and Spirketts Lane/Shotford Road. Each development site had prepared its own Transport Assessment without considering the impact of the other sites. The Chair asked for NCC Highways to evaluate the cumulative effect of all the developments on nearby roads, and to take measures to mitigate potential impacts upon of increased traffic on highway and pedestrian safety, as required by the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chair also emphasised that there will be a lot more traffic along Spirketts Lane due to people travelling to Lidl. There should be provision of a footpath along the length of Spirketts Lane, to make it possible for residents in the proposed new development to walk to Lidl safely rather than driving there. If no footpath is provided, people wishing to walk to Lidl rather than drive may walk on the road. This does happen at the moment, but with the increase in traffic this will be even more dangerous.

SNC stated that although developers put in individual Traffic Assessments, NCC Highways look at the whole picture. They have several departments who review the traffic assessment, having regard to what's there already and the allocated sites cumulatively, to determine whether the development is acceptable in this wider context.

Healthcare

The Town Council has made the point in previous consultee comments that the impact of developments on local healthcare provision is of great concern to local residents, and asked that high priority be given to ensure additional healthcare provision is made in the town to accommodate the growth from new developments.

A member of the Town Council Planning Committee emphasised this point again at the SNDC Planning meeting. SNDC explained that NHS expansion is instigated principally through NHS funding, not through developer contributions. It is a requirement for the NHS to address capacity issues.

SNDC engage with the medical practices and the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) and various NHS partners when they allocate land for development so they understand the sites that are being allocated, what growth is coming in what area, and can work together to understand what are the capacity requirements.

Work has been under way to understand the potential health projects across Norfolk and Waveney for 2024-25. The ICB had originally requested contributions from developers to expand capacity at the Harleston Medical Practice, but the practice has not requested to increase space at their practice at this time, therefore the request was withdrawn. However, future requests to increase capacity are still possible with population growth in the area. SNC are having wider conversations with Harleston Medical Practice to understand what they want to do in the future to safeguard their position. It is not necessary at this stage of development to deliver mitigation in terms of healthcare.