South Cambridgeshire District Council  
South Cambridgeshire Hall  
Cambourne Business Park  
Cambourne  
Cambridge CB23 6EA

Attn.  Ms Lydia Pravin  
Ms Alison Twyford

Your ref: S/3591/17/FL; S/3566/17/FL; S/3567/17/FL  
Our ref: RUS1-001/AC  
Email: [REDACTED]

9 November 2017

Dear Sirs

Thriplow Farms – interlinked development

We are instructed to write to you by residents of Thriplow regarding the three planning applications arising out of the development at the Thriplow Farms site on Lodge Road, Thriplow.

We understand from speaking to Ms Pravin that South Cambridgeshire District Council (“the Council”) intends to consider each application on its own merits and therefore representations should be directed towards each individual application. We have endeavoured to do so in this letter, however, we ask that copies of this letter be placed on each of the three files.

We also note that notwithstanding the Council’s individual consideration of the applications, the applicant has described the applications as ‘interlinked’ and that “The nature of the proposals means that without permission for all three applications, none of those which receive consent can be implemented.”

EIA Screening

In the pre-application advice letter regarding the residential application dated 26 July 2017, Ms Pravin refers to the potential for the development to be deemed EIA development and suggests that the applicant ‘submit a screening opinion’ (presumably make a request for a screening opinion) in order for the Council to determine whether it falls within the EIA Regulations.

However, from having reviewed the planning files, it does not appear that any of the proposals have been subject to a screening exercise for EIA development. This is surprising given that the residential and the grain store applications are described as ‘major development’ individually and taken as a whole the three must be considered
to be so. All three of the proposals amount to incursion into the Green Belt, with accompanying visual and biodiversity impact.

It is notable that Schedule 2, paragraph 1(a) of the EIA Regulations 2017 indicates that “projects for the use of uncultivated land or semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes” which have an area of over .5 ha should be screened to determine whether they are likely to have significant environmental effects. The new grain store and acoustic bund is said to occupy a site measuring 1.8 ha, which clearly exceeds the threshold. The noise report produced by the applicant’s consultant indicates there may be significant environmental effects arising from the operation of the grain store, as do the photos indicating the visual impact on the landscape.

When all three applications are considered together, the cumulative impact is also indicative of significant environmental effects, for example from traffic from the new housing development plus traffic to and from the grain store. The projects should be screened to determine whether they are EIA development, and if so (as we would suggest is the case) an environmental statement detailing the likely significant effects, including the cumulative impact, should be produced.

Turning now to the individual proposals, we make the following comments:

S/3591/17/FL – demolition of existing agricultural buildings & construction of 36 dwellings and associated access

This application has received the most attention from residents, given the impact on local amenity. Thriplow is a very small village with few services and to add 36 dwellings is a significant increase in population. Whilst it is understood that there is a need to provide a greater supply of housing throughout the country, this should not be at the expense of preserving sustainable places for existing residents.

The applicant dwells at length on the lack of a 5 year housing supply on the part of the Council. At 5.29 of the Design and Access Statement relating to the residential scheme, it is stated that –

"... as the Local Plan examination is still underway, it is considered that limited weight should be given to emerging policies, particularly those regarding housing provision as the Council’s Annual Monitoring Report identifies that they [sic] authority are unlikely to have a 5 year supply for at least a further 2 years."

This statement is incorrect. In fact, para 2.8 of the Annual Monitoring Report (December 2016) states:

"It is now anticipated that the examination hearings will be completed in 2017 and that following modifications consultation, the Local Plan will be adopted in late 2017 / early 2018." [emphasis added]

This being the case, and particularly in light of the fact as far as we are aware no proposal has been made to delete these sites from the Green Belt, it would be entirely premature to accept any development that would have an impact on the integrity of the Green Belt. This is in light of para 83 of the NPPF, which states: "Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period."
More generally, given the extremely advanced state at which the emerging Local Plan finds itself - with two consultations on proposed modifications already have been completed - it is entirely appropriate to assign significant weight to its policies. This being the case, it is important to note that the plan includes just one reference to Thriplow, within Policy S/10 (Group Villages). The policy states that, for all Group Villages -

"Residential development and redevelopment up to an indicative maximum scheme size of 8 dwellings will be permitted within the development frameworks of Group Villages, as defined on the Policies Map. Development may exceptionally consist of up to about 15 dwellings where this would make the best use of a single brownfield site."

This emerging policy is identical to current adopted ST/6 (Group Villages), as set out within the South Cambridgeshire Core Strategy (2007). This being the case, the inappropriateness of a 36 homes scheme outside the development framework of Thriplow is immediately apparent, even before account is taken of impact arising from replacement agricultural building and a car repair workshop in the Green Belt.

Whilst the lack of a 5 year housing land supply in the short term does have a bearing on ‘the planning balance’ applied when considering planning applications, it quite clearly does not tip the balance in favour of approving a contentious scheme of this nature. The adverse impact of the development on the Green Belt and Thriplow certainly outweighs the relatively minor benefit of 36 new houses for the supply of housing.

We note that the applicants have not been actively pursuing allocation within the Local Plan, with the only consideration of the scheme having been at the time of preparing the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. ‘Thriplow’ was not mentioned in either the Local Plan ‘Issues and Options’ consultation document (2012) or the Issues and Options 2’ consultation document (2013), and, as discussed, is only mentioned within Policy S/10 (Group Villages) of the plan as published (2013) and submitted (2014). The Consultation Statement submitted alongside the plan includes no mention of Thriplow or Beacon Planning (the consultants acting on behalf of the applicants); and, as far as we are aware, the site has not been promoted as an ‘omission site’ through the Examination process. This is despite the Inspector’s having been open to hearing arguments for omission sites, and several small omission sites at Group Villages having been proposed for allocation through the March 2016 Proposed Modifications consultation. It would appear that this application is very much an opportunistic one by the applicant, and is not congruent with the long term strategic plan for South Cambridgeshire.

It is notable that an application for 25-35 houses on the site in 2005 (S/0713/05/OUT) was recommended for refusal on the basis that it would cause harm to the village character of Thriplow, it was an inappropriate incursion into the Green Belt and by displacing the car repair business, would be detrimental to small business interests in the village. Although now phrased differently in policy terms, all of these objections remain relevant today.

Open Space

Another issue that arises is that of the impact of the development on available public open space in the village. The Design & Access statement refers to the cricket pitch and pavilion to the east of the site as identified on the South Cambridgeshire District
Council Proposals Map as "Protected Open Space". As other residents have raised in
their objections, this seems to be misunderstood as the cricket pitch and pavilion
are within private ownership and therefore access to the public is not assured.
Without the cricket pitch and pavilion, it is not clear that the open space requirement
for Thriplow as a whole will be met. Whilst the residential development may provide
sufficient open space for its own residents, it cannot reasonably be contemplated that
other residents of Thriplow will go on to the estate to use the open space behind the
houses. The open space provision for the village as a whole must therefore be
reconsidered carefully, particularly in light of the increase in population resulting from
this development.

Travel

The site's residents will almost certainly rely on cars for daily transport – each
dwelling has an average of two car parking spaces. Although the applicant refers to
Fowlmere being a 5 minute cycle from Thriplow and Foxton a 15 minute cycle, it is
highly unlikely that a significant number of residents would choose to cycle rather
than drive. This is because the routes to Fowlmere and Foxton are along rural roads
with no lighting or designated space for cyclists. The village only has extremely
limited bus services (a maximum of 4 per day) to Cambridge. The development is
therefore contrary to policy DP/1 of the adopted Development Control Policies DPD,
which states that development should 'minimise the need for travel and reduce car
dependency'.

S/3566/17/FL – relocation of existing grain store from Lodge Road to Fowlmere Road and construction of acoustic bund

We have read the objections to this application dated 4 November 2017 submitted by
Foxton Parish Council and support them. The extent and impact of the development
on the openness of the Green Belt and landscape is not apparent from the materials
contained on the planning register, not the least because the Design & Access
statement uploaded there is devoid of text or drawings. Please could a replacement
copy be sent to us and uploaded on the planning register as soon as possible.

S/3567/17/FL – demolition of existing barn and relocation of car repair workshop

This development is for the construction of a car repair workshop, on a site
measuring 0.2 ha in the Green Belt. It is difficult to assess the application as the
Design and Access statement found on the Council's website appears to be an early
draft or is formatted incorrectly as it has no text or drawings. Please could a
replacement copy be sent to us and uploaded on the Council's planning register as
soon as possible.

However, as set out in the pre-application advice letter from Ms Pravin dated 26 July
2017, this would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, contrary to policy
GB/1 of the LDF 2007, paragraph 89 of the NPPF 2012 and policy S/4 of the
emerging Local Plan. Such development can only be justified in 'very special
circumstances', as per paragraph 87 NPPF. The officer further noted that evidence
should be submitted justifying the choice of a site outside for Thriplow, given the loss
of employment potential and business from the village as a result of the relocation,
which is contrary to policy ET/6 of the adopted Development Control Policies. It does
not appear that the applicant has provided any evidence of this sort.
Consultation

Incidentally, we trust that although the Council will be considering each application on its own merits, any representations made by residents or consultees will be considered as appropriate, regardless of which project they are formally attributed to, i.e. if a resident writes a letter that objects to more than one project, that letter will be taken into consideration in relation to both of those projects. Obviously residents of Thriplow and Foxton are likely to consider all three applications together, particularly as that is how it has been presented by the applicant.

Conclusion

Having reviewed these applications, it is apparent that the adverse impact of the residential proposal and the relocation of the car repair workshop demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF and local development policy framework as a whole, including the Green Belt policies. A recommendation should therefore be made to refuse permission. The status of the grain store relocation is less clear cut, but it is difficult to assess given the lack of information available on the Council’s planning register.

However, as the applicant has made plain, none of these proposals can proceed unless permission is obtained for all three. Therefore even if the new grain store can be deemed to be beneficial in planning terms, it will be a moot point as development will not commence.

Yours faithfully

Richard Buxton Environmental & Public Law