

Proposed Residential Development at land east of School Road, Weasenham St Peter

Submission of Representations relating to Breckland District Council's Local Plan – Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18)

LPA site reference: WEAS 1 (227)

on behalf of Uphouse Farm Limited

Introduction

1. The following comments are submitted in support of the proposed allocation of land at School Road, Weasenham St Peter, for the delivery of circa. 10 dwellings (Local Planning Authority reference WEAS 1).

The site and surroundings

2. The site comprises of an irregularly shaped field, located to the southern edge of the main built form of Weasenham St Peter. The site is laid to grass, with a mature tree belt to the south-eastern boundary and more sporadic hedge and tree planting to the northern and western boundaries. Vehicular access currently is by way of a field access from School Road to the west. A footway is present to the north of the site, along the southern edge of Massingham Road.

3. The site is part of a wider triangle of land which is encapsulated by roads to all sides: Massingham Road to the north, the A1065 to the south-east, and School Road to the west. Residential development is present to each corner of the parcel, including a recent development of five dwellings to the north-west corner on land which was formerly part of the site.

4. The main built form of Weasenham St Peter is located immediately to the north of the site, which largely comprises of ribbon development along Massingham Road together with dwellings along Lambert's Lane and Lambert's Close. Weasenham St Peter is identified as one of the 'Villages with Boundaries' within the adopted Local Plan, recognising the community facilities available.



Figure 1. Site location plan (extract)

Proposed allocation

5. The site is identified within the draft Local Plan as a preferred residential development allocation, providing for circa. 10 dwellings. Draft Policy WEAS 1 (227) School Road states:

Proposals for the allocation as identified on the Policies Map, should provide for approximately 10 dwellings.

Development will be subject to compliance with other policies in this Local Plan including on-site provision of the required proportion of affordable housing and appropriate contributions towards education, provision and monitoring of public open space and play areas, as well as other infrastructure, services and other community needs as agreed with the Local Planning Authority. Development proposals must:

- a) Adhere to affordable housing and public open space requirements to be provided in accordance with agreed Council standards*
- b) Demonstrate a high-quality design reflecting the Breckland Design Guide.*
- c) Demonstrate a safe and acceptable vehicle, pedestrian and cycle access onto School Road including adequate visibility splays.*
- d) Incorporate any necessary off-site highway improvements to improve a pedestrian and cycle access to key local services and facilities*
- e) Demonstrate provision of the required level of Biodiversity Net Gain.*
- f) Include a landscaping scheme which is sympathetic to the surrounding area.*
- g) Include a drainage strategy which accords with the most recent Lead Local Flood authority guidance.*
- h) Deliver a minimum of 25% affordable housing with an 90/10 split between rented affordable housing and low-cost affordable home ownership products.*
- i) 25% homes built to the M4(2) accessible and adaptable standards and 5% in accordance with the Building Regulations M4(3) standard.*
- j) Provide an area of public open space of a quantum appropriate to the size of the development in accordance with Policy ENV 12 of this Plan.*

6. A 'Proving Layout' has been produced (see Figure 2 below), illustrating how the site could be developed to include the necessary road and pedestrian connections, appropriate drainage provision, and suitable housing mix, alongside open space and landscaping.



Figure 2. Proving Layout (extract)

- 7.** The draft policy states that any development should deliver approximately 10 dwellings, while meeting other policy requires around access, drainage, the provision of open space, and protecting the character and appearance of the settlement.
- 8.** Policies within the current and emerging local plan do not specify minimum or maximum densities, rather requiring development density to be appropriate to the area in terms of the scale and arrangement of dwellings and spaces between them.
- 9.** It is considered that the delivery of 10 dwelling across the identified site would not represent an effective and efficient use of the space available, and would therefore conflict with the requirements of the NPPF. Furthermore, were the size of the site reduced to better accommodate 10 dwellings, it could negate the need to deliver affordable dwellings.

10. As such, it is proposed that a scheme of up to 16 dwellings would be more appropriate for the site, providing a spacious and attractive development which responds to the character of the village and wider rural context.

Benefits/ impact of proposed allocation

Access to local services and facilities

11. Weasenham St Peter is classified in the adopted Local Plan (2023) as a Village with a Boundary. It benefits from a small range of community facilities, including community centre, recreation ground, mobile Post Office, Church, Manor Farm Business Park, and weekly bus service providing connections to Dereham and Fakenham.

12. These facilities would be readily accessible from the proposed development, including via existing footways on Massingham Road. Given their proximity, existing village services would derive support from the development due to increased patronage and the addition to the local economy of the spending power of new residents. New residents would also contribute to the vitality of the community.

13. The Local Service Centre village of Litcham is circa. 7.2 kilometres (4.5 miles) to the south-east, which provides a range of higher order services including primary and secondary schools, shop, post office, butcher, chip shop, public house and community hall as well as a small number of businesses. These would garner support through the introduction of additional residents.

14. The village of Great Massingham is also located circa. 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) to the north-west, which provides a range of facilities including primary school, village hall, public house, doctors surgery, and tearoom. Great Massingham CE Primary School serves Weasenham St Peter, alongside a number of other rural settlements. Available intake data illustrates that the school has been under capacity for some time, with only 53 children enrolled in the 2024/25 year. The development would help to support the vitality and viability of the school.

15. This would be consistent with the guidance set out in the NPPF which indicates that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that, due to the rural nature of the location, future residents would be largely dependent on travel by private car to access higher order retail and leisure facilities, and employment.

16. The NPPF acknowledges that the opportunities to maximise sustainable transport do, of course, vary from urban to rural areas. It also recognises that in order to meet business and community

needs in rural areas, there may be a need to find sites outside settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport.

17. It is therefore considered that development in this location, of this scale, would support the social and economic dimensions of sustainability as defined in the NPPF.

Highway access

18. Vehicular access to the site is presently taken from School Road to the west, by way of a small field access. There is ample space available within the site frontage to upgrade the access in accordance with relevant highways standards, though it may be necessary to remove some scrub and undergrowth. Suitable visibility could be achieved in either direction along the road to ensure safe vehicular egress.

19. There is no footway present along School Road, and the opportunities for providing one are limited by the trees present along the eastern edge of the road. However, there is a footway present to the northern site boundary, along Massingham Road, which provides access to the bus stop and terminates close to the recreation ground. Footway/ cycleways would be provided to either side of the main spine road through the development, and a connection provided through the site to the footway along Massingham Road. Appropriate contributions to any requisite offsite improvements could be delivered.

20. The draft policy requires vehicular access to be taken from School Road, however it is noted that during the course of the application for the adjacent development, the Highways Authority indicated that their preference would be for access from Massingham Road. The indicative layout provided illustrates vehicular access in line with the draft policy requirements, however the scheme could be delivered with primary access from Massingham Road if required.

Heritage assets

21. There are no designated or non-designated heritage assets within the site. The Grade II listed Weasenham War memorial is located a short distance to the west, to the western edge of School Road at its junction with Massingham Road. The Grade II* listed Church of St Peter is located a short distance to the north, though it is separated from the site by Swaffham Road.

22. The site is located outside the Weasenham Conservation Area, which lies to the north and east. The Conservation Area encompasses the historic core of the village centred around The Green, together with the grounds of The Old Vicarage and an adjacent housing estate. The significance of the Conservation Area is derived from the historic buildings contained within it and the visual relationship these between buildings and surrounding open spaces.

23. Those assets are already experienced in the context of surrounding residential development. The indicative layout illustrates how a high quality and spacious development could be delivered at the site, in keeping with the character and appearance of development in the conservation area and wider village. Existing boundary treatments would largely be retained, and new planting

introduced which would help to screen and soften the appearance of the development, whilst the use of local vernacular materials help it to assimilate its surroundings.

24. Consequently, it is considered that development in this location would not result in significant adverse impacts upon the setting or significance of designated heritage assets.

Landscape/Local Character

25. The site is located immediately adjacent the main built form of Weasenham St Peter, with residential dwellings to the north, east, south and west. Beyond that the landscape generally consists of large open arable fields defined by matures hedging and trees. Development of the site for residential purposes would alter the character and appearance of the site, however it would not extend residential development further than is existing in any direction.

26. Trees and hedging present to the site boundaries would be retained as far as possible, and a comprehensive mixed native species landscaping scheme introduced. Open space would be provided in accordance with local standards, including multi-functional drainage features. A green buffer could be provided to the south-eastern edge of the site, providing a soft rural edge to the development, and separation from the adjacent Swaffham Road. Consequently, the development would not appear as an encroachment into the open countryside, nor would it result in significant adverse impacts upon the character and appearance of the village.

Utilities Infrastructure

27. It is not considered that there is any fundamental impediment to the delivery of the site through any constraints relating to utilities infrastructure. However, it is noted that Anglian Water have indicated that there may not be available capacity within their infrastructure to accommodate the development. It is understood that the Council are working with other local authorities to address this matter.

Flooding

28. The site is identified as falling entirely within Flood Risk Zone 1, and therefore at low risk from fluvial flooding. Some small areas of the site are identified as being at low to high risk of flooding from surface water, primarily to the northern and eastern boundaries. Appropriate measures would be incorporated within the scheme to ensure that surface water is dealt with on site and the development would not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere.

Ecology

29. The site is generally considered to be of low ecological value, due to its use as a managed field, and there are no statutorily designated sites within the immediate environs. Appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures would be introduced as part of the development, including the provision of bird and bat boxes, and comprehensive mixed native species planting. The legislative

biodiversity net gain requirements would be address either by way of on-site measures, or offsite delivery on land within the landowner's control or the purchase of credits.

Delivery of development

30. No significant infrastructure constraints, beyond the Anglian Water capacity restrictions which affect many settlements in the district, have been identified to date which would be likely to delay or impede the development of the site for housing. The site is in a single ownership and no further land is needed to enable the land to be brought forward for development. The land is currently available for development and so, subject to approval being given, could deliver housing in the short term.

31. The proposed development would make a positive contribution to the supply of high-quality housing in the area and would incorporate a varied housing mix, with a range of tenures and sizes of affordable and accessible housing, in line with local policy requirements. The proposals will also provide public open space and contributions to meet the Council's requirements, alongside comprehensive landscaping proposals to help the development assimilate with its surroundings.

32. It is considered that the proposed development would add to the range of housing sites available in the locality, providing flexibility and a wider choice of development opportunities to the market, and thus strengthening the local supply of housing land. By providing sufficient land of the right type in the right place to support growth, the development would address the economic dimension of sustainable development, as defined in the NPPF.

Conclusion

33. Development in this location would make a positive contribution to the supply of housing in the area and add to the choice and mix of housing in the village, contributing to the vitality of the rural community and supporting local service provision in the surrounding area.

34. Suitable access to the public highway could be secured, alongside pedestrian links through the site to Massingham Road. The site is not at risk of flooding and can provide the required surface water drainage features, public open space and affordable housing to meet the Council's policy requirements. The indicative layout illustrates how the site could be delivered with a spacious and verdant appearance in keeping with the conservation area, character of the village, and wider rural setting.

35. There are no legal restrictions on the land, and it is available for development in the short term. The development of the site as proposed will deliver a sustainable and viable scheme.