

East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum response to Church Commissioners consultation on proposed development of up to 255 home next to Boker Lane

Introduction

The Forum held an open member's meeting on Monday 13th July at the Scout Hut in East Boldon to consider the Church Commissioners proposal for the Boker Lane site.

It was confirmed that the Forum had objected to the development of the green field, agricultural site at all of the various stages of the local plan consultation. At the local plan inquiry, the Forum had asked the Inspector to ensure that the Northern third of the site be excluded from development and used for compensatory improvements, should the site be allocated.

The meeting was informed that the examiner had subsequently 'found' that the local plan was 'sound' and the whole of the Boker Lane site was included as a site 'suitable for development'. The plan would be considered by full council at the end of the month and if approved, the Boker Lane site would be subject to an outline planning application by the Church Commissioners, who are now consulting with regard to their proposal.

It was noted by the meeting that the proposal was vague or silent regarding many important issues that would affect the village, including serious concerns over the increase in volume of traffic and its impact on the residents, especially those living along the A184 (Front Street) where noise, congestion and air quality was already problematic. It was feared much of the Victorian road infrastructure could not cope, but that Boker Lane/Front Street Junction with North Road would be significantly impacted by traffic associated with the site resulting in queuing and worsening air quality.

The meeting noted that there was a great risk that many of the ideas contained within the outline planning application scheme would be lost when the site was sold off to a developer and an application for full planning permission was made.

The meeting expressed the view that the Church Commissioners should do everything in its powers to ensure that the ideas suggested or supported by the Forum would be carried into a final proposal by a developer.

1.0 General Issues

1.1 Compensatory Measures to the wider Green Belt:

The Church Commissioners have agreed in their Statement of Common Ground with the Council to the Local Plan Examinations to the principle of providing compensatory measures being required as a result of the site being removed from the Green Belt. It states that the Church Commissioners wider holdings could be used, eg Boldon Flats. This is confirmed in the Local Plan Inspector's Final Report where he states this is required within Policy SP7 within which the site is allocated. The Council's document on compensatory improvements to the Local Plan Examination [AP14] sets out various projects in the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan which could be

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implemented. The Forum wants to see the Church Commissioners work with the Council to achieve these.

In this context, and in addition to the points concerning Boker Lane, the Forum also wishes to comment on the impact of the housing site for up to 285 dwellings at Cleadon (site GA3 in the local plan), also being consulted upon by the Church Commissioners. Although site GA3 – land at Moor Lane, a site owned by the Church Commissioners, is not within the Neighbourhood Plan Area, there will be considerable pedestrian, vehicular and cycle traffic from the site to East Boldon, its shops and Metro station should the proposal proceed. This is especially the case now that a site entrance is proposed opening onto Moor Lane. There is no footpath along this stretch of Moor Lane, which passes alongside Boldon Flats an important wildlife site also owned by the Church Commissioners. The absence of street lighting, because of habitat and wildlife implications, curtails what can be achieved to make the road safe for pedestrians. However, the land ownership situation does open the way for a ‘rural type’ footpath of some type to be considered.

Within the constraints of protecting wildlife and habitat etc., the Forum requests the Church Commissioners provide improvements to highway and/or adjacent land to ensure a safe route is created to East Boldon for pedestrians, and the use of cars is thereby diminished.

1.2 On site mitigation, ‘Green’ SUDS and landscaping:

1.2.1 In our representation to the local plan examination, we proposed the idea that the whole area to the North of the right of way which bisects the site should be used for compensatory measures should the site be allocated. The Forum still believe this is necessary in order to achieve a meaningful degree of mitigation. We believe it should be achieved by a pro rata reduction in the number of houses and not at the detriment of the public open space and landscaping to the remaining part of the developed site.

1.2.2 To ensure mitigation that will enhance habitat and make the best use of the natural features of the site, The Forum requests the Church Commissioners prescribe that the SUDS proposal be changed from a ‘dry basin’ as indicated on the layout drawing, to a vegetated, green SUDS retention pond, creating a wetland area that can work in conjunction with Tiledshed Burn.

1.3 Housing mix:

1.3.1 The Neighbourhood plan sets out needs of the Forum Area in respect to this. Accommodation for older people is identified as being much needed. The need is also reflected in the local plan. The Forum request that the Church Commissioners proposal be amended to show an area of the site allocated for this purpose. The area adjacent and to the East of the public open space would be ideally suited for such a purpose.

2.0 Design issues

2.1 Tree lined streets.

2.1.1 The Neighbourhood plan calls for tree lined streets. The concept is supported by the local plan and planning guidance/NPPF. Climate change and wildlife connectivity are just two

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of the many areas where trees can have major benefits. However, if tree lined streets are not planned for from the outset, then it is unlikely they will be realised in a final proposal. We would ask the Church Commissioners to amend the layout drawing to reflect this requirement.

2.2 Footpaths and cycleways.

2.2.1 The Forum supports the proposal to have cycle/footpaths within the site. We request the footpath which runs parallel to Boker Lane to be upgraded to a cycling and walking route similar the routes to the North and South of the site. Also, there are further connections made between the site and the bridleway.

2.2.2 The connection of the site GA2, Boker Lane to the cycle and pathway which runs alongside the Metro Railway Line would provide direct access to the Metro Station and shops at East Boldon. Currently the relatively short footpath between the Northeast corner of the site and the Tiledsheds Crossing, where the cycleway passes, is narrow and unsuitable for both cyclists and pedestrians. The footpath runs along one side only of the busy Tiledshed Lane. The Forum requests that the Church Commissioners highlight the need to upgrade this to a suitable cycle and footpath as a requirement to develop the site.

2.3 Public open space, landscaping and play.

2.3.1 The Forum supports the central area of open space and the landscape areas parallel to Boker Lane and the bridleway.

The landscaping of the SUDS area and the right of way/footpath which crosses the site West to East if carried through into the final scheme will make a significant contribution. This part of the site lies in close proximity to the wildlife corridor that runs through the area, and is adjacent to Tiledsheds burn which in turn connects to the river Don. This area offers meaningful potential to mitigate the loss of the remaining site. It provides an opportunity to deal with the flooding associated with the site and at the same time provide new habitat and a place for the health and well-being for those living nearby.

2.3.2 The layout drawing seems to indicate two small play areas. The Forum supports this provision and requests that these are given more prominence by further notes on the layout drawing.

2.4 General layout/local distinctiveness.

2.4.1 The Neighbourhood Plan recognises the need to have regard to the incremental development of the village and respect local distinctiveness. It seeks to avoid large uninteresting development which uses similar house types and materials. The central open space would allow some separation between two halves of a new settlement. This would provide an opportunity for some variation in design and materials and help give further identity to the new neighbourhood.

2.4.2 The design of the layout where houses front the bridlepath, and the separation of (some) houses from Boker Lane with landscaping is welcomed

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2.4.3The Forum supports the location of the proposed site entrances but notes that the design of these important gateways into the site will require careful consideration.

Conclusion

The Forum sincerely hopes that the Church Commissioners will help to deliver a housing scheme which reflects the needs of the community and goes some way to address the loss of this green field site. To do this, many of the suggestions outlined above will require some degree of prescription etc., by the Church Commissioners.