

## **Wychwood Community Group – Closing Statement**

### **Planning Inquiry 03/02/17**

Madam Inspector,

On behalf of the Wychwood Community Group and its 1200 members it has been a privilege to attend the Inquiry this week and has certainly been an eye-opener. I thank you for your leniency at times and hope you respect the unpaid effort that has gone into this appeal from many, many members of the WCG.

The Community Group, representing 716 landowners on the Wychwood Development, other residents in our, and other local parishes, ex golfers from Gorsty Hill and numerous other parties has taken an active part in these sessions, and our resolve has been greatly enhanced by everything we have heard.

This is a planning appeal, but to my members is so much more than that. It is a defence of their legal rights, their choice of lifestyle, their quality of life and their fortitude.

Our case has been centred around the rights inherent in the existing Section 106 and covenants that we, and our 716 individual legal advisors, feel should be protected at all costs.

The planning arguments appear to be an open and shut case. The Local Plan is nearing completion and whatever the appellant may say about “beauty contests” and premeditation these have been robustly countered, not by our Group, but by planning Inspector Mr Stephen Pratt, and this must add substantial weight to the outcome of this Inquiry. Mr Katkowski will I am sure provide the compelling evidence to quash this appeal on those planning grounds, so I will defer to his superior knowledge in these matters. PS Don't let me down!!!

The Weston and Basford Neighbourhood Plan is also nearing completion and as that grows closer to completion holds more and more weight against this application. Gavin Barwell MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning stated that as recently as December 13<sup>th</sup> 2016. Add to that the thousands of objections to the development and the variation of the S106 over the course of

the past 4 years, submissions from Parish Councils in the area, adjoining affected villages, our Ward Councillor, Janet Clowes and last but not least our local MP, Mr Edward Timpson must surely hold some sway in the recommendation to the Secretary of State.

The numerous hamlets of the Wychwood development, were built as a design concept with some, but admittedly, limited local facilities, where travel off site was an expected and accepted part of the concept. The two golf courses, very different in nature were **the** integral part of the design and the housing developments were a necessity only to fund those courses and was not an end in itself.

The closure of the Gorstyhill golf course was a travesty and as referenced in the WCG evidence document, **PURCHASE & CLOSURE OF GORSTYHILL GOLF CLUB & COURSE**, which demonstrates the ongoing viability of the course and how it thrived until changes to the membership scheme began its sad demise.

Mr Mike Woodcock Head of Corporate Communications at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St Andrews, has stated the following about the viability of the course. For those not Golf orientated, this course is widely regarded as the worldwide home of golf. In an email exchange and conversations with Alison Tipping, a resident and professionally the ex Head of International Corporate Communications at Groupe Suez in Paris, I quote the following:-

Note that this email has been submitted as evidence direct to your office last night and copied to all interested parties.

"I gave Mr. Woodcock the membership figures for the Club at the time it was acquired by HPL (420) and shortly before closure when it had dropped to 327, and the subscription figures. At closure membership was reported to be only 80 as members had left en masse after notice of massive downgrade to Pay and Play was given.

I asked whether the Club would have been viable given those figures and the membership income. His response (verbal, telephone conversation but this is verbatim from the shorthand notes I made of our telecon), was,

"Given proper management it should have been a thriving golf club. Many don't have membership figures anything like as high as that; that's a big Club."

I asked whether the downgrade to Pay & Play which led to members leaving in droves really was a serious thing and was informed that it was, "the most serious detrimental change which could happen" as it meant Gorstyhill would not only no longer be a Club but would,

- a) be simply a municipal course,
- b) no longer have members (and therefore a guaranteed subscription revenue stream), as a consequence of which
- c) former members would no longer be able to have an official handicap which has to be issued by a bona fide Club,
- d) would no longer be able to play in official competitions at other Clubs, even as guests, as they would have no handicap certificates, and
- e) would not be able to host official competitions at Gorstyhill. This meant no league, individual or team competitions. These competitions are key elements of playing golf for people who are not even particularly serious golfers, let alone for those who are serious about the sport.

Without an official handicap golfers are frequently unable to play at Clubs both here and abroad as the handicap certificate has to be produced before they are permitted to play a course (to prove that they have some idea of what they are doing)."

### **Contrived closure? You decide?**

The designated open space that we are surrounded by is a core part of the site, and adds to the outstanding quality of life enjoyed by residents and land owners on the site. The disused golf course continues to be a recreational asset to the wider community and there has never been any attempt by the owners to limit or prevent access to the site, the Community Group has continually asked residents to keep off the course and there are many notices on the site to that effect, however you cannot stop the wider community from utilising what they see as a great place to walk dogs.

The existing site of Wychwood Village has been a building site from 2004 through to 2015, 11 years to build 315 houses, and the final sale completed in early 2016. An average of 28 dwellings per annum, far from the figures quoted by the landowner. We still strongly dispute the appellant delivery numbers, especially given the Housing Allocation discussion from yesterday afternoon. Fiction not fact would appear to be the case. The current site is as yet still not

wholly adopted and street lights remain unlit and there are no parking restrictions as yet either. Let's not make the same mistakes over again.

I won't quote the timeline and figures for the Shavington Triangle as these have been noted by the Inspector, but I will repeat the statement I made on the value of the discussion and the conclusions taken from it.

That debate simply highlighted that the implementation of planning permissions is not an exact science. The appellant's representatives have, understandably, highlighted any and all potential delays. Mr Fisher has highlighted that whilst delays do occur; these are often mitigated or may be avoided. He has highlighted where additional time has been allocated or where the appellants concerns are not necessarily valid.

In effect, in planning terms this is all "business as usual" and our understanding is that (as discussed and explained in depth by Mr Fisher, on Wednesday) that much flexibility has already been built into the standard methodology developed by CEC, acknowledged by the Local Plan Inspector, and which has been applied to the calculation of housing completion numbers and to the 5 year housing land supply.

Nothing raised in the debate suggests that the appellant and associated builders can either START quicker or COMPLETE quicker than anyone else. If anything the debate has highlighted that bigger schemes are more problematic in terms of starting delivery and indeed completing to anywhere near a schedule. What makes anyone think that this development can deliver at the accelerated rate that is quoted? Pure fiction as far as I can tell.

The appellant cannot deliver any of the medical and school facilities that they quote as they are simply unable to, they just cannot make those decisions, so why promise it? The facilities quoted to deliver have never been requested by residents, actually I lie, of all the submissions made against this development over the past few years the grand total of 1 has said a shop would be a good idea, so at least someone is on your side!!!!

There are many local facilities, both on the site and in Weston Village, they serve a significant and substantial purpose to the Community and deliver what the residents bought into as a design concept and continue to enjoy.

Wychwood Village already experiences traffic issues, with congestion and parking problems and clearly to any reasonable man (or woman) the addition of up to 900 houses, retail etc can only add to the congestion at the single entry and exit point. There have already been a number of accidents at the Wychwood's roundabout on the A531, and the fact that it is still governed by a 60mph speed limit, only exacerbates the dangers. Intensifying the level of road traffic using this single junction to the level proposed by the Appellant is completely irresponsible and clearly will deliver the core ingredients for a major accident, even if the Highways computer programme dictates there is some capacity existing with the junction. It would certainly be interesting to establish what sensitivity testing was undertaken by Highways in the analysis. For example, should some of the sustainability package not come forward? The decision by highways to not object is pure madness and quite frankly a severe threat to safety. The A531 and local routes through Weston will become even more gridlocked than now at peak times and the "evidence" of Google Maps as a reliable source of travel times is quite frankly laughable. Get real, listen to the locals and understand what this Community is, what it does and how it will suffer if this development is ever approved. The proposal is clearly not sustainable. Houses will be built well before the subsidised bus route comes into plan and patterns of movement will be set, for schools, shopping etc. These patterns will be very hard to break. What happens when the bus subsidy stops? Local routes are already being ceased and this could easily be the next one, then where is the sustainability? Footpaths and cycle paths are great, but unless the local off site areas are improved to compliment them, ahead of any development, then the much quoted "isolated bubble" would actually be perpetuated by this plan.

Haddon are trying to force sustainability on a Community that clearly does not want it. The local parishes are already deluged with approved developments, which are commonly accepted, but enough is enough, the addition of this site would be totally disproportionate for the local area, and the Inspector has accepted this by making this an Omission site.

The Wychwood Village site is fast becoming a true haven for wildlife, flora and fauna and the evidence produced by the Community Group, whilst at odds with CE, goes into greater depth and detail than anyone else has ever done for this site. Perhaps the phrase "you can lead an expert to a Barn Owl but you

cannot make then see it” should be coined? The TPO’s have to be properly adhered to and the wildlife properly cared for, you cannot instruct a barn owl to change its habits just because a developer thinks it should. Read the evidence in the WCG Ecological and Environmental Objection. The Wychwood Community cares and cares passionately about what it has and wants to protect it.

The Country Park itself is a fantastic facility and despite the lack of adequate maintenance from Haddon, unmaintained footpaths, unmanaged hedgerows and a general lack of care and attention, which has been the subject of numerous complaints from the WCG and is currently with the CE Enforcement Team, is used extensively for numerous recreational activities. In the opinion of our members it does though highlight the problems that expecting Haddon to keep to any agreement may give you. Madame Inspector I hope you are able to take note of these maintenance issues on your site visit.

The Community Group has never supported this development and has campaigned tirelessly, initially to return the site to a Golf Course, introducing potential buyers to the appellant, to no avail. The Community Group lodged a “Community Right to Bid” Application, which despite being overturned on appeal showed that the Community wanted to deliver a serious and sustainable business plan to turn into an overgrown mess into a valuable community asset. The full details of this “without a hearing decision” are already provided as evidence, and the comments of Judge Lane make interesting reading.

So what would a Wychwood Village of the future look like if the “**extension**” goes ahead? Currently I can open my front door, turn right and be onto a Country Park in 2 minutes and have unobstructed views across the open countryside. My dog runs free and she too reaps the benefit of the open space. In the future I would have 10 – 15 – 20 years of building work, followed by the view of a housing estate, a Country Park cut in two by a loop road, and the thought of a drive, that would probably take longer to get off the estate than it does to get to work. Note that the bus journey to my work place already would take over an hour!! The car journey 15 minutes, you do the maths and explain sustainable?? I could use the local shop, which given a decent shop I would probably drive to anyway!! Unless I get the bus of course I hear the retort.

The planned development has no depth and no substance, there are no real facts and figures behind it, no accurate timelines of delivery, no integrated plans to link up supply to demand, sustainable travel to retail delivery. Only one person benefits from this, that is the greedy landowner who saw a get rich quick scheme, but failed to do proper due diligence, and the Community Group and latterly Cheshire East have worked to expose that and prove that this is not a sustainable development and is not in keeping with the character of the area of indeed the wishes of Cheshire East as a whole.

Do the right thing Madam Inspector; from a planning perspective, both Local and Neighbourhood; from an ethical perspective; from a moral perspective and prove that “an Englishman’s Home is indeed his castle” and that the deeds and titles and the attachments that go with it DO mean something, and DO amount to the protection that 716 landowners, supported by 716 separate legal opinions believed it would. Don’t let forced sustainability ruin everything that the Wychwood Community Group and its 1200 members stand for.

Trevor Sandry  
Chairman, Wychwood Community Group  
3<sup>rd</sup> February 2016