

PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 September 2015

PRESENT – Councillor Carson (in the Chair); Councillors Donoghue, Grundy KE Kelly, Lyonette, MR Nicholson and Wright. (7)

APOLOGIES – Councillors Baldwin, Cossins, L Hughes and York. (4)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillors Coultas and H Scott. (2)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – John Anderson, Assistant Director - Economic Initiative, Bryan Huntley, Planning Policy Officer, Andrew Casey, Head of Highway Network Management and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

P15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interests reported at the meeting.

P16. LOCAL PLAN: MAKING AND GROWING PLACES CONSULTATION RESPONSES TO PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AT BLACKWELL – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) on the outcome of public consultation on the Local Plan: Making and Growing Places (MGP) Draft Revised Housing Site Proposals also on display (illustrations 1 and 2) which detailed the Sites and options.

The submitted report stated that consultations were undertaken from 17 July to 28 August 2015 on Draft Revised Housing Proposals for Blackwell from which 175 written responses were received and approximately 100 comments were made at the drop-in event at Blackwell Grange Hotel on 22 July. Responses covering a variety of planning and non-planning issues were also received from local interest groups, the public and statutory consultees (also previously circulated).

Details were supplied of the responses received which included concerns on the potential impact on the setting of Blackwell Grange Hotel, increased local traffic, access difficulties, impact on the local amenity of adjoining properties, impact on wildlife levels, concerns regarding flooding and surface water drainage issues, loss of recreational open space and views and impact on property values. Members were informed that the majority of objections were to the proposed luxury apartments along part of Blackwell Lane. Concerns were also raised regarding the use of greenfield sites for housing whilst brownfield sites remained vacant.

Particular reference was made to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan by the Blackwell Neighbourhood Forum which contains providing accommodation for the elderly, community facilities and higher density building than the Council proposals. Residents have raised concerns on the content of the Neighbourhood Plan and expressed a preference for the Council's proposals for low density executive housing.

The effect of additional housing on schools, GP Surgeries, local shops and hospitals was also a concern of many residents.

There was extensive support for the proposals to restore and enhance the parkland and create new wildlife habitats.

Scrutiny Committee was advised that prior to the consultation period, an application was submitted to Historic England to have the land around the Hotel added to the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England; however, Historic England decided not to add the grounds of Blackwell Grange to the Register. Historic England has also been consulted on the revised proposals and responded with a qualified agreement in principle to the allocations, subject to the design, massing, density, and mitigation, which could be determined later, and also subject to the restoration/enhancement of the remaining parkland and sufficient public benefits.

The submitted report outlined the comments and concerns of residents relating to each individual site and detailed issues in relation to parkland restoration, the local road network, historic parkland, protected trees, nature and wildlife, homes/views and amenity and drainage.

Members heard the views of Mr S Donnellan, representing Blackwell Residents West, who opposed the high density of He4 detailed in Illustration 1 but supported He4 in Illustration 2, raised concerns that there was to be no increase in services and questioned the need for apartments when there was 400 uninhabited apartments in the Borough.

Ms T Matthews, a resident of Blackwell Grove, addressed the meeting and raised concerns on Site He4 relating to increased traffic and pollution which could impact on the safety of the elderly and young children, local schools already being over-subscribed, GP Surgeries and Dental Practices struggling to cope with increased numbers and the character of Blackwell changing.

Mr B Paton spoke on behalf of Blackwell Parkland Association specifically in relation to He1a, He2 and He3. Concerns were raised in respect of the changing landscape of the parklands due to the amount of proposed housing, existence of a petition containing 1248 signatures, apartment blocks not being suitable for the area, car parking provision, overstretched local services and residents' concerns not being listened to.

Ms H Rowley, on behalf of Blackwell Parkland Association, raised concerns relating to development of Sites He1, He1a and He3 (part) as those areas fell within the curtilage of Blackwell Grange, a II* Listed Building. Particular references were made to the strength of residents' opposition to development of these areas, the importance of Blackwell Grange Parkland as a major heritage asset for Darlington, a Statement of Significance of Blackwell Grange produced in 2012 on the advice of English Heritage, full site assessment of the parkland undertaken by Historic England and lack of sound evidence to demonstrate that development was the only way to secure future of heritage assets.

Ms K Sharp, on behalf of Blackwell Parklands Association, made reference to flooding risks on Site He3 behind Grangeside, existence of 19th Century underground drains and Mill Lane, a pedestrian walkway and development in He3 damaging the character of Blackwell.

Mr D Phillips representing Friends of the Earth raised concerns over the loss of green spaces when there were sufficient brownfield site areas.

Mr F Peacock, a resident of Blackwell Lane raised concerns of Site He1a regarding the proximity of the proposed development to current premises, the loss of views if the development went ahead, lack of bus services in Blackwell Lane, Learner Drivers and Bikeability using the area, availability of alternative brownfield sites for development and the high density of the proposals.

The Assistant Director – Economic Initiative, the Planning Policy Officer and the Head of Highway Network Management responded to the concerns put to the Committee.

Discussion ensued on potential parking issues when the Darlington Football Club returns to Darlington, volume of traffic, need to respect Darlington's heritage, density of proposals, consultations held with Historic England regarding development of the sites and the building of bungalows as opposed to apartments.

RESOLVED – (a) That the consultation comments received and related Officer responses be noted.

(b) That the following recommendations of Place Scrutiny Committee be forwarded to Cabinet when agreement will be sought to the site allocations, dwelling types for the Blackwell area and restoration and enhancement of the remaining parkland.

- i. That, in relation to Site He1, Place Scrutiny Committee endorses the allocation of top-end executive housing in the Making and Growing Places Development Plan Document, subject to Historic England's agreement to a detailed scheme;
- ii. That, in relation to Site He1a, Place Scrutiny Committee requests that further research be undertaken to ascertain the market requirements on the type of development for this site, subject to Historic England's agreement to a detailed scheme ;
- iii. That, in relation to Site He2, Place Scrutiny Committee accepted the principle of older persons' apartments, subject to a satisfactory solution to the displaced Blackwell Grange Hotel car parking.
- iv. That, in relation to Site He3, Place Scrutiny Committee endorses a mix of top-end executive housing and quality housing but requests that Officers give further consideration to the locations of allocated dwellings; and
- v. That, in relation to Site He4, Place Scrutiny Committee endorses a density of between 30 and 55 high-end and executive housing.

(c) That Place Scrutiny Committee welcomes the restoration and enhancement of the Parkland for increased public access and creation of new wildlife habitats for newts and bats.

(d) That Place Scrutiny Committee notes that a Transport Assessment is to be undertaken to determine impact on the local road network but accepts that all sites are capable of being accessed to required standards.
