

2018/0255/OTS - Residential development of 15 dwellings with ancillary works on Land West of Flowerstone, Station Road, Binegar, Wells, Somerset.

Comment Date: Wed 7 Mar 18

The Parish Council considered this application at its meeting on Tue 6 Mar 18. 29 parishioners attended specifically for this agenda item. This proposed development affects the whole village not just the immediate residents. The Council reached the following decision:

Binegar Parish Council strenuously recommends refusal of permission.

This site was considered in our response to the consultation over Mendip's Local Plan Part II and was deemed as unsuitable. A view clearly supported in the 'pre-submission' version of the Part II Plan:

11.3.2 Binegar is a sensitive location which is rural in nature. It is sparsely developed over a series of narrow country lanes. Development of any scale here would significantly alter the open rural nature of the village. The setting of the church is also an important characteristic of the village which should be protected. Sites in Binegar have the potential to impact on the Mells Valley SAC. Binegar does not have public surface water mains drainage.

11.3.7 None of the available sites are suitable locations for development - they could not be developed without a significant impact on local landscape and infrastructure. Given the constraints, an allocation would be preferable to additional windfall development. A scale development (up to 11 dwellings) could be accommodated at the junction of Station Road/A37 (GS001).

The 'pre-submission' version of the Part II Plan is fully supported by the Parish Council.

The arguments against this development have been regularly rehearsed before and nothing has materially changed since the Parish Council's last consideration of this matter. The proposed development is not supportable.

The Parish Council's wishes its previous correspondence to be taken into consideration, specifically its responses to:

- Planning application 2014/0492/OTA, May 2014
- Planning application 2016/2909/OTS, Dec 2016
- Mendip District Council, Local Plan II consultation, Dec 2016

Road Safety

Roads into the site/village, the main ones being Binegar Lane, Station Road and Whitnell Lane (or vice versa) already struggle to cope with the number and size of vehicles; this development could generate some 90 additional vehicle movements per working day.

Binegar is a rural community; cars, lorries, trucks and buses share these lanes with increasingly large tractors, trailers, horses, riders and pedestrians. For considerable stretches these approaches are single track where vehicles are unable to pass each other. Additionally Whitnell Lane regularly floods.

Only the lower end of Binegar Lane has a footpath and along the majority of the approaches the roads are edge with walls, thick hedges, or both exposing pedestrians and other road users to increased risk. It is a shame 'Highways' only consider the immediate vicinity to developments when considering their comments.

Employment and Infrastructure

The fragile road infrastructure finds echoes with utilities. There is an acute shortage of telephone numbers and broadband connections. Water pressure is low and local electricity supply is near capacity. Like issues arise with the capacities of local GP surgeries, schools and other important elements of support that a large development like this will need.

There are few local employment opportunities meaning the development will be a 'dormitory' area. Poor Broadband and mobile phone connectivity make working from home difficult.

Flooding

In response to 2014/0492, Wessex Water entered a holding objection. It stated: "We are also aware that this catchment suffered from groundwater flooding over the last winter. Flooding incidents were so severe and prolonged that emergency measures were necessary to support residents and homes affected. Private drains and public sewer systems were overwhelmed during these periods with detriment to public health and the environment."

Wessex Water made its position clear, in writing to the Lead Local Flood Authority (Somerset County Council) and Mendip District Council on occasions since 2013. It placed on record its objection to future permissions not covered by a ground water management strategy. It asked for a strategy to be jointly developed.

The Parish Council's concern is that the catchment has no water management strategy.

Binegar and Gurney Slade lie in an area of high flood risk. Wessex Water describes the situation in 2013 when the villages suffered a severe and prolonged flood of foul, toxic water. This application places a significant additional load on the capacity of the Gurney Slade sewage works. Without a water management strategy, floods like those of 1995, 2000, 2002, 2012 and 2013 will recur in the next year of high rainfall.

Since these statements further infill development has occurred along the surface water flood route.

The proposed development site is 20m higher in altitude than the flood area. Rock strata and drainage means there is no guarantee that the surges of water draining from the estate's hard surfaces will not cause issue at lower levels and join the main flood.

Foul water drainage

Responding to the previous application, Wessex Water made clear:

"Proposals will need to consider flows from the site and also the potential for existing properties to make connections. A first time sewerage scheme has not been previously promoted for this location however it appears that we would need to give proper consideration for unconnected properties."

The total extra foul water flow to public sewers is in fact from 30 or more houses. It is misleading to claim support based only a capacity check request for 15.

It is understood that Gurney Slade Sewage Works is already at, or near, capacity.

Binegar lies in a Groundwater Source Protection Zone. It is very sensitive and inconceivable that a new development could leave adjoining properties with septic tanks issuing on to the development site itself.

Effect on Listed Buildings

The proposed development site is adjacent to 2 listed buildings: Holy Trinity Church and the Old Rectory. Mendip is clear that its setting must be protected. The PC awaits a diocesan faculty to fell completely the damaged Churchyard conifer that lies between the church and the proposed development site; the view to and from the Church is opening up. The suggested 'cones of view' will not protect the Church from the development.

This will further open the setting making the proposed development even more unacceptable.

Light Pollution

The development of this site will increase the light pollution to the residents of the current dwellings. Recent comments in the press have noted that this can be detrimental to health.

Conclusion

A year-long, thorough and public examination of the housing potential of the villages concluded that Binegar might support 11 new dwellings. It is misleading of the applicant to quote the previous Local Plan.

It is clear that the infrastructure of the village will not support such development as proposed. It is unsustainable.

The applicant's site is judged unsuitable for housing development.

Hard landscapes drained to soakaways will increase the peak flows of ground water immediately above the area of highest flood risk. These peak flows caused toxic flooding in 2013.

The heritage 'setting assessment' is flawed. The setting of the Church is opening up due to necessary tree felling and yew maintenance in the churchyard. This invalidates the claim that the housing will cause 'no harm' to the setting.