

**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**LDF TASK & FINISH GROUP**

**Held on Tuesday, 22 September 2009 at 2.00 pm in  
Gallery Bar, Watton Sports Centre, Dereham Road, Watton**

**PRESENT**

Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris (Chairman)	Mr D.S. Myers
Mrs M.P. Chapman-Allen	Mr B. Rose
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr F.J. Sharpe (Vice-Chairman)
Mr A.P. Joel	Mr A.C. Stasiak
Mr K. Martin	Mrs L.S. Turner
Mr I.A.C. Monson	

**Also Present**

Mr W.P. Borrett	Mr K.S. Gilbert
Lady Fisher	Mr J.D. Rogers

**In Attendance**

Mark Broughton	- Member Development and Scrutiny Officer
Phil Daines	- Development Services Manager
Sam Hubbard	- Planning Policy Officer
Phil Mileham	- Senior Planning Policy Officer
Sarah Robertson	- Environmental Planning Officer
David Spencer	- Principal Planning Policy Officer
James Stone	- Senior Planning Policy Officer
Elaine Wilkes	- Senior Member Services Officer

**9/09 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**10/09 APOLOGIES**

None received.

**11/09 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**12/09 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chairman outlined the process to be followed for this stage of the Local Development Framework.

The Core Strategy and Development Plan Documents had now been examined in public and the Inspectors' decision on these was expected shortly.

The next stage in the process was the consultation on the Preferred Site Specific Policies and Proposals further to those as set out in the

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Issues and Options consultation document and as supplemented by the Additional Sites Consultation document which was issued earlier this year.

From this consultation process, recommendations would be made through the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to Cabinet on the draft Preferred Options document for submission for public consultation for a period of six weeks.

Cabinet would be asked to approve the final Submission Document for a further six week consultation period prior to its examination in public.

The Task and Finish Group was charged to review the document and to make recommendations from the consultations to date.

Ward Representatives and Town and Parish Council representatives were invited to address the meeting but the process did not allow for public speaking at these meetings for reasons of time and practicality.

**13/09 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

The following declarations were made:

- Mr. D. Myers – Ward Member for Watton, personal interest as Governor of Wayland High School which has an interest in site W1 adjoining the school.
- Mr. J.D. Rogers – County Councillor, personal interest as Governor of Wayland High School which has an interest in site W1 adjoining the school.

**14/09 NON-MEMBERS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE MEETING**

The following Members were in attendance for agenda item 5:

- Mr. W.P. Borrett, Executive Support Member for Planning & Regeneration
- Lady Fisher, Executive Member for Environmental Well-Being and Customer Contact and Ward Member for Harling & Heathlands.
- Mr. K.S. Gilbert, Ward Member for Watton
- Mr. J.D. Rogers, County Councillor for Watton and District Ward Member for Templar ward.
- Councillor Margaret Holmes, Mayor of Watton Town Council

31 members of the public were also present.

**15/09 BRECKLAND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: SITE SPECIFICS POLICIES AND PROPOSALS - PROPOSED PREFERRED SITES FOR WATTON AND EAST HARLING**

The Principal Planning Policy Officer presented the report and outlined the methodology used in the process for selecting Preferred Sites and Reasonable Alternatives.

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**Unreasonable Sites (Appendix A)**

Appendix A to the report set out those sites considered unreasonable for inclusion. These had been tested against the criteria set out in the Core Strategy or for other fundamental reasons, such as flood risk, safe highways access or other environmental considerations.

A member felt that a lot of the reasons given appeared to be subjective. The Principal Planning Policy Officer explained that the reasons for exclusion were based on detailed assessments and were informed by evidence documents such as the landscape character assessments, site visits and advice from stakeholders.

Questions were raised on the following specific sites in Appendix A and explanations were given:

- Site Ref. [104]008 – It was confirmed that the Highways Authority had looked at all sites and submitted their assessment of their suitability or otherwise. In this case, the Highways Authority considered that additional traffic gaining access on to the main road from this site was unacceptable.

A member felt the site offered good access to the town but it was explained that vehicular access to the site from the highway was not achievable and the site was not suitable for two-way traffic. The site had therefore been ruled out for those reasons.

Other suggested options to the north-east or west of the site were also explained to be unsuitable.

- Site Ref. [104]025 – The assessment of this site to the rear of Hunters Oak as remote from the town was queried.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the initial Highways Authority advice indicated that access would be a problem. However, on further review, it was now felt the site could be recommended for inclusion as a Reasonable Alternative provided access could be obtained through the existing residential development. There were also other landscape issues affecting the site that would need to be resolved.

**Conclusion**

Subject to a review of site ref. [104]025 – Land to rear of Hunters Oak - for possible inclusion as a Reasonable Alternative, the list of Unreasonable Sites, as contained in Appendix A, is endorsed.

The Task and Finish Group then proceeded with an examination of the proposed allocations for preferred and reasonable alternative sites as follows (site references in brackets are those used in the Issues and Options and Additional Sites Consultation documents). Details of each site are as contained in the appendices to the report:

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**Preferred Allocations in Watton (Appendix B)**

**Site W.1 (104/100): Land to west of A1075 and adjacent Wayland High School**

Mr. Gilbert, Ward Member, felt this site could be supported provided it could provide vehicular access to the High School. This would benefit the area generally and would give a planning gain by relieving congestion on Merton Road serving the High School and would also help to meet future growth in the town. A pedestrian access on its own would not suffice. The provision of a vehicular access would additionally alleviate traffic problems along Merton Road and give an emergency access route to the Wick Farm Estate.

Mr. Rogers, County Councillor, proposed that site W1 should be substituted with the Reasonable Alternative site W6 (land to the south of the preferred site). The reason for this was that the landowner was willing to give seven acres to the School which would enable all traffic into the High School from the Thetford Road and relieve traffic on Merton Road. This would be a significant planning gain. This would also enable expansion of the school without the need to take land from the sports ground. This proposition was supported by the members of Watton Town Council, Norfolk County Council and local residents.

In relation to the area at Town Green Road, Mr. Rogers also suggested that if there was some development in that area, it would provide an opportunity to make provision for the necessary enlargement of the cemetery.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that site W1 was originally identified for 100 homes with access from the A1075, including cycleway provision. However, in the light of comments received, the officers would review this site and the alternative W6 and seek further advice from the Highways Authority for report back to a future meeting for further consideration with a view to these two sites being amalgamated.

So far as cemetery land provision was concerned, it was explained that where a Town Council had reported a need to identify land, this had been fed into the LDF process but the onus was on Town Councils to find suitable sites.

Mrs. Holmes for Watton Town Council advised that a site had been identified adjacent to the existing cemetery to extend the site. There was a urgent need for this and this had been included in their submission.

In relation to site W1, the Town Council was also concerned at the junction at Barn Ruche, bearing in mind the access issues along the Merton Road and the need for urgent improvements. The Planning Policy Officer explained that this had been taken into account and the access would be sited away from the A1075 junction.

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**Sites W2a, W2b and W3 – Land to south of Norwich Road (Former RAF Officers' Mess)**

It was confirmed that the eastern section of site W3 lay in the parish of Carbrooke and that the area of open space was equivalent to that of the former Radar Site.

Mr. Gilbert expressed support for the area allocated for open space as it would cater both to the town and Carbrooke.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that employment was catered for in an allocation of land near to site W2a and also on the RAF Watton technical site.

**Site W4 (104/026) – Land to north of Norwich Road and south of Watton Green**

It was confirmed that the trees on the site would not need special protection as they formed a natural boundary to the site.

**Site W5 (104/005) – Land adjacent to Swaffham Road**

The hedgerow along Swaffham Road and to the north-eastern area of the site would be protected as far as possible.

A footway to Swaffham Road and pedestrian access to Three Post Road would be created.

Mr. Gilbert was concerned to ensure that there should be no vehicular access across Three Post Road which was a designated bridleway.

**Conclusion**

- (a) To look at amalgamating sites W1 and W6 as a larger preferred option site for further consideration in the light of a report back by the officers to a future meeting.
- (b) Subject to (a) above, the preferred sites allocation for Watton are endorsed.

**Reasonable Alternative Options in Watton**

**Site W6 – Residential allocation of land to the south of the preferred site adjacent Wayland High School and the A1075**

This site forms a southerly extension to preferred site W1 and, as discussed above, it was proposed to review this site for possible amalgamation with site W1 as a larger preferred option site.

**Site W7 (104/004) – Residential allocation of land to the north of Merton Road and adjacent to Watton Medical Centre**

Mr. Gilbert felt that this development of this site would necessitate a widening of Merton Road but he felt it was a preferred option for open space provision.

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It was confirmed the preferred option was for open space use of this site but delivery was the key issue.

The Development Services Manager pointed out that if provision was to be made for such open space sites, Members would need to consider how the Council could deliver them if they were not offered by the landowner.

A Member suggested part of this site could offer a useful and needed car parking area for the town. The Chairman advised that the Parking Task and Finish Group were looking at the issue of parking in the District.

It was noted by another Member that this site was in multiple ownership, which could be problematical if the site was to be taken forward. It was explained that this was one of the reasons why this site had not been identified as a preferred option. The site's inclusion as a Reasonable Alternative was due to its location.

Mrs. Holmes highlighted that access would be onto Merton Road which suffered from congestion and that there was little parking provision in the area. However, she felt a mixed development providing valuable open space for the town could be a good investment for the town.

*Site W8 (104/103) – Residential allocation of land to the north of Norwich Road*

Mr. Gilbert suggested that this site could offer an alternative area for development of lesser density so as to provide for demand for larger houses. Such an option would not require as large a vehicular access as for a high density development.

It was replied that site W4 at Watton Green provided for lower density development and the Core Strategy policies provided for mixed developments, so that there were provisions for larger houses in the area.

*Site W9 (104/024 and 030) – Residential allocation of land to the east of the A1075*

It was confirmed that development would not be permitted on the identified flood zone areas forming part of this site and there would need to be some mitigation measures. A Member commented that the Environment Agency might redraw the flood zone area in the light of the flooding that occurred in the town earlier this year.

A question was raised as to why this site was included and not the adjacent site, which had been excluded on drainage grounds, since both sites shared the same drainage ditch.

It was also asked why access could not be obtained to the west of the site rather than the south. It was explained that the Highways Authority view was that it would put the access too close to a bend.

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In concluding the discussion on this site, the view was taken that this site had too many constraints to make it a viable reasonable alternative and that it should be withdrawn.

**Site W10 (104/001, 006 & 023) – Residential allocation of land between Hunters Oak and Blenheim Way**

In answer to a question about the quality of the trees on this site, it was explained that the advice of the Council's Tree Officer had been taken as to their value, although the photographs did not show them in detail. However, more detailed information on them would be submitted at the Development Control level when considering any planning application.

A Member thought the inclusion of the site would help to straighten out the settlement boundary and that two viable accesses seemed possible to the site.

One possible issue raised was that of the drainage route.

**Conclusion**

Subject to the withdrawal of site W9 (land to the east of the A1075), the sites identified as Reasonable Alternative Options for Watton are endorsed.

**Preferred Allocations in Harling (Appendix C)**

**Site H1 (042/012) – Land to the north of Kenninghall Road, adjacent East Harling Primary School**

It was proposed to extend the area of H1 to incorporate the existing mature hedgerow as the boundary to the site.

Concerns about this site raised by Members included:

- The over-concentration of development in a single location of the village
- The need to allow room for the primary school to expand over time
- The highway was a fast road and would need traffic calming measures
- Was there sufficient drainage capacity
- A preference to see development spread more evenly across the village
- Too high a density

It was explained that the density of development would be higher along the highway, falling to a lower density behind this, with landscaping to the northern boundary to soften the area.

The views of the Education Authority were awaited.

If the development was reduced to 20 units as being suggested this would have the effect of losing on-site play provision, reducing the amount and type of affordable housing that could be provided, along

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with other infrastructure and support that development of the site would offer in the way of wider benefits to Harling.

Additionally, if the school did need to expand, there was an option to move the site further to the north and east to allow for that.

A Member reiterated his concern about the impact of large blocks of development in the villages on the character and integrity of the village and preferred to see a policy supporting smaller development lots in the villages.

A question was raised as to whether there were different planning mechanisms for a developer with a large single site or several smaller plots for the same benefits to be obtained.

The Development Services Manager explained that it depended on the planning application. All applications were considered individually. Development of a single large site could take place in stages, dependent on the housing market. Members had to take account of policy and what the release of the land would deliver to the community compared to smaller parcels.

A member commented that if the number of units was spread across smaller parcels, affordable housing units would be lost. She also asked whether any views had been received from the Parish Council and the reply was no.

A member asked about the impact on the affordable housing provision from a decision made at the previous day's Development Control Committee if the application went to appeal and won. The Development Services Manager replied that it depended on the timing of any appeal decision and the submission of the Preferred Options documents.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that in regard to affordable housing provision policy in the Core Strategy (i.e. sites of five or more units at 40% affordable housing provision), the Inspector's decision was awaited.

When looking at small scale developments, the type and scope of affordable homes becomes more limited. There was more scope to negotiate for a range and mix of house types on larger sites.

Another member was concerned that the school could become landlocked and also commented that he would prefer to see the housing spread over a number of smaller sites through the village.

It was pointed out that if the number of dwellings on the site was reduced, the development would not be viable enough to fund the necessary highway improvements.

Further options either to reduce the number of dwellings on the site and/or to move the site to accommodate land for the school to expand were put forward by Members.

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A proposal was put for consideration of this single preferred site allocation be deferred pending a report back in the light of the response from the Education Authority as to future needs of the primary school.

If the report back on site H1 concluded that it was unacceptable, it was proposed that consideration should then be given to replacing it with a reasonable alternative option site.

**Reasonable Alternative Options for Harling**

**Site H2 (042/015) – Residential allocation of land at junction of Garboldisham Road and Lopham Road**

Lady Fisher, Ward Member, advised that there was little Parish Council support for this site.

A Member added that he considered this site would extend the village in an unacceptable way.

**Site H3 (042/016-010) – Residential allocation of land adjacent to Lopham Road, on the eastern boundary of Harling**

In answer to a question, it was noted that the neighbouring business park would comprise mixed uses, which would have minimal impact on residential development.

**Site H4 (042/003) – Residential allocation of land west of the Glebe**

Lady Fisher advised that not all of the site was boggy land and if properly managed the site could be developed and would not impact on the loss of agricultural land. She felt the top corner of the site would be suitable for a modest development.

A member asked for details of the landowner to be included in the site assessment on page 36 (Appendix D).

**Site H5 (042/004) – Residential allocation of land west of the Glebe**

Lady Fisher felt this site could be suitable for modest development and that it related well to the village.

A member questioned the proximity of the site to infrastructure and access.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer replied that this was an issue affecting all developments in Harling. The recommended view was that a single larger site offered the opportunity to overcome such constraints.

A Member put the view that, bearing in mind the Parish supported this site, he felt it could proceed in conjunction with another.

A question was raised about the relationship of the proposed sites to employment areas. The main employment area was to the north of the village at Roudham but all the proposed development sites were to the south.

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It was noted that no applications had been submitted for sites to the north of the village.

On a general note, a member felt the presentation of site details was not sufficiently objective and failed to show how each site was measured against another.

The Development Services Manager replied that the team could look further at the way the information was being presented, in consultation with the Chairman, and what further evidence could be presented. The Chairman added that it had to be borne in mind that these were not detailed planning applications but this was the process to look at where development sites could potentially be allocated. There was also a large background volume of evidence supporting these sites.

Lady Fisher summarised the Parish Council's views as follows:

- Site H1 – Limited support for this site; high density development opposed.
- Site H3 – Too far from the centre of the village.
- Site H2 – Unsupported.
- Sites H4 & H5 – Supported as they are near to the village centre and density of developments are compatible with existing.

In the light of the concerns regarding site H1 and the support in preference for sites H4 and H5, a proposal was agreed to sites H4 and H5 replacing site H1 as the preferred site, with site H1 being reclassified as a reasonable alternative option.

**Conclusion**

- (a) Sites H4 and H5 be reclassified to replace site H1 as the preferred option site.
- (b) Site H1 to be reclassified as a reasonable alternative option site.

**16/09 FUTURE MEETING DATES**

The following future meeting dates were noted and agreed:

- 14 October 2009 - Venue Swaffham (To consider sites for Swaffham and Narborough)
- 3 November 2009 – Venue Dereham (To consider sites for Shipdham and Swanton Morley)
- 25 November 2009 – Venue Dereham (To consider Rural Settlement Boundaries)

Further meetings would be scheduled in December 2009, and mid- and late- January 2010 for continued consideration of the Rural Settlement Boundaries.

The meeting closed at 4.20 pm

CHAIRMAN