

Stathern Parish Council Objection to Tofts Hill Planning application

This application has generated considerable concern in the village and many (29) residents attended our PC meeting to voice those concerns. We very strongly concur with these objections.

Tofts Hill is a defining and much loved part of the village and this proposal, would profoundly affect the area and its use having a damaging effect on both character and setting of the settlement and its built environment. It is well used for peaceful recreation purposes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders as well as access to the cemetery. A village survey in 2016 put this area as the least favoured area for development by a large margin. This is supported by the independent assessment contained in the Melton Local Plan. (see below)

It is counter to the Melton Local Plan's criteria for development in both letter and spirit. It would also appear to be outside the definition of a windfall site, being of a size more appropriate for allocations. It would surely have failed to gain approval in that process as it is counter to several Policies and the general guidance on development in Stathern.

Appendix 1 (Site allocations and policies) states on page 56 of Stathern "The village lies at the foot of the escarpment which forms the Vale of Belvoir. **The existing pattern of development spreads up the lower parts of this slope; however it would be inappropriate in landscape and development pattern terms to continue this pattern of development**".

Policy SS3 (Sustainable development) states that development must "**Meet a proven local need**". Stathern has two allocated sites which fully meet the requirements of the plan. One is already under construction and the second is expected to come forward imminently. In addition there is a reserve site for which planning permission has not been granted. Other windfall sites have come forward and been approved recently with several built. Many of these are still for sale. Stathern is likely to achieve the target set in the plan within 3-5 years of the plans adoption. Melton as a whole has a very significant supply of houses with planning permissions and active allocations (7-10 years). **There is no need for these houses**

Policy EN1 – Landscape. This requires that development "does not have an unacceptable adverse effect on important landscape features including – distinctive topography and **important views, approaches and settings**". It also prohibits development which has an adverse effect "**upon an area's sense of place and local distinctiveness**" or "**upon areas of tranquillity**". A previous application for two dwellings, adjacent to the proposed site (16/00223/FUL) was refused in mid-2016 and went to Appeal. In upholding the refusal, the inspector's decision letter states that "The main issue in this case is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Policy EN6 – Settlement Character. This states that 'Development proposals will be supported where they DO NOT harm open areas which:

1. Contribute positively to the individual character of a settlement
2. Contribute to the setting of historic built form and features
3. Contribute to the key characteristics and feature of conservation areas
4. Form a key entrance and/or gateway to a settlement.

In this case all four tests are failed as harm will be done on all points. This development would adversely affect and do significant harm to surrounding areas which include parts of the conservation area, the cemetery and open areas.

In addition to the general points above, which apply to any development of this site, there are significant faults with the particular proposal.

It constitutes an inappropriate density of dwellings for an edge of village (most would call it outside of village) site. The size and height of dwellings would be overwhelming for the neighbouring properties and affect the views of and from the village very badly.

It is only made practical by terracing and retaining walls which would irrevocably change the character of the site and be particularly out of place.

The highways report is self serving and inadequate, referring only to whether residents can safely exit the site and with no assessment on impacts as they leave. Vehicles cannot leave the site without using a road with either no, or inadequate footpaths and cross areas used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders (including children going to school. It, somewhat ridiculously posits that car use will be limited by the availability of public transport and cycle usage. Unlikely.

Parking spaces count includes garage space.

Proposed access points are both across areas with no footpath and onto narrow and/or congested roads. The Tofts Hill access removes a mature (historic?) hedge and utilises what is described as a wide verge. As can clearly be seen from their own photo this verge has no grass as it is regularly used for parking by residents and visitors (both for leisure and to visit the cemetery). This parking space would be removed.

The drainage report only covers removal of surface water from what falls on the site itself and has no comment on any water coming down from higher up the hill.

Much more detail could be added on many of these points.

Overall, we are convinced that this egregious proposal should and will be rejected as not fulfilling several key tests of the Melton Local Plan.