

## BLEADON PARISH COUNCIL

### STATEMENT TO PLANNING APPEAL INQUIRY – APP/D0121/W/18/3211789

Having the statutory right to be consulted regarding planning applications in the parish, Bleadon Parish Council **OPPOSES** the development for housing on the fields between Bleadon Road and the A370 (in accord with the planning application that is the subject of this Inquiry) for the following reasons.

1. Over development of the site with an increase of approximately 40% of housing in the parish, grafting 200 houses onto an historic village, and destroying an area rich in wildlife is totally incompatible with North Somerset Council's (NSC) vision of retaining and enhancing countryside character where the quality of the natural environment is a prime objective.

Infill villages, identified by NSC, and of which Bleadon is one, are subjected to significant control. NSC Core Strategy (CS13) suggests that in these areas growth will be 'small' and 'appropriate' in scale. The proposed development is neither.

2. Residential development history of Bleadon (33 houses in 1658, 338 houses in 1958) is a gradual one with an increase over the last 300 years of only 100 properties every 100 years. A development of 200 houses in a short time period is inappropriate (see image 1).
3. The largest group development was at the end of the last century consisting of 31 houses on a brownfield site to the side of the village (Bleadon Mill). Note that the construction of social housing in 1946 (30 properties, The Veale) was specifically for agricultural workers returning from World War II. From 1946 to 1996 development was gradual and consisted of individual properties and very small developments, and all of the dwellings have been built within the settlement boundary.
4. NSC's Core Strategy relates housing growth to employment growth and, with at best only minimal employment prospects in the parish, the proposed development fails to meet this Core Strategy criterion. The vast majority of current residents of working age commute out of the village travelling by private vehicle – essential, given the very limited range of public transport. There may be a promise from the Appellant that there is an apparent willingness to extend bus service 20 but this cannot be a guarantee.
5. The proposed development is outside of the parish settlement boundary and plainly conflicts with NSC's Development Plan which does not seek to focus growth in infill villages beyond what is 'small scale'. Image 8 demonstrates the nuclear village tucked in below the Mendips, extending along the natural boundary between the Moors (Purn, Bleadon, Hellenge and South hills) and the Levels.
6. The proposed development is opposed by the majority of Bleadon residents. A survey of every house in the parish in preparation for a parish Neighbourhood Plan undertaken in January 2019 showed that only 8.9% of respondents favoured any new homes being built outside of the parish settlement boundary. The vast majority of respondents indicated a maximum development of 15 properties. A copy of the survey is available for inspection and the raw data may also be examined. The responses equate to 56% of households in the parish.
7. The proposed development is contrary to the nature of Bleadon as a "tucked in" village (see image 2). Bleadon lies within a "Heritage Landscape" with the Mendip Hills AONB in close proximity. Visually, the proposed development area is part of the Bleadon

Levels when viewed from the AONB and the West Mendip Way national long-distance path. The eye is carried across green fields excluding nearly all of the village housing. These views are an important part of the heritage landscape and must be retained.

The preservation of the current rural character of Bleadon, with its pleasant mixture of many 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century historic properties and mature dwellings, is important. There are open vistas for residents and visitors, and any large development will remove this amenity as well as having an adverse environmental and biodiversity impact. The proposed development site is open countryside and would appear as a separate addition to the village, impacting on visual amenity (see Image 7).

8. Bleadon is a relatively small, poorly served village and a sudden addition of 200+ homes is unsustainable. The parish has a limited range of facilities insofar as the day-to-day needs of the residents are concerned; there is a post office, small shop and café, and a small play area for under-twelves. There is also a current and acknowledged lack of facilities in respect of schooling (schools in neighbouring settlements are already over-subscribed), health provision, public transport and recreational activity (especially for the young). There is a possibility that the status of Weston General Hospital will be reduced to that of a “cottage hospital” as its A&E department is already closed overnight.

Facilities for entertainment, meetings, organisations and social gatherings in the parish (Coronation Hall, Jubilee Room and Youth Club) are already used to maximum capacity (the largest hall has a capacity of 120) and could not absorb the additional population generated by 200 properties.

There seems to be little benefit in grafting a large development onto Bleadon which requires the residents to travel elsewhere, chiefly by private vehicle, to access services and facilities.

9. Given the paucity of the public transport system, the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the current road infrastructure, leading to a substantial increase in traffic thus causing difficulties on the narrow and non-paved roads in the parish (eg. Celtic Way, Shiplate Road) that are already used to the maximum of their potential. These, the prime roads in the parish, are narrow and hedge-lined (see Images 3 and 4); both are winding and on hills with only a few unmarked passing places. Where Celtic Way and Shiplate Road meet in the centre of the village (see Image 5) there is a blind right-angle bend around which many commercial vehicles have to reverse in order to complete a turn. Shiplate Road is already used as a cut-through to the A38. Even a small increase in the number of vehicles will add to an already dangerous situation and no assurance could ever be given that all residents of the proposed development would use only the A370.

There is a 7.5T weight restriction throughout the village and the quarry delivery vehicles are further restricted regarding their access to and from the site, being required only to turn right into Bridge Road from the A370 and right into the quarry. It is already problematic; this road has no pavement past the quarry on either side of the road and damage to the verges has occurred. Even a minimal increase in traffic in Bridge Road, which borders the east of the proposed development site, could only add to an existing problem (see Image 6).

10. There is an acknowledged need for agricultural land and the site for the proposed development is prime agricultural land under cultivation. Brownfield sites need to be sought first.
11. The proposed development is on a flood plain. With the potential in the future for an increase in sea levels, building on an established flood plain could cause future problems. Even if the proposed 200 properties were to be constructed with higher foundations, there would be an adverse effect on the surrounding properties.

NSC Core Strategy seeks to direct residential development to higher-order settlements, ensuring that it is better related to employment, services and public transport access. There are potential and current planning permissions for up to 50 dwellings within the settlement boundary. As Bleadon has been identified by North Somerset Council as an infill village, so the proposed large development outside the boundary is contrary to the area's overall plan. Whilst Bleadon Parish Council accepts (and has approved) the need for infill development, the Parish Council and residents wish to keep Bleadon as an independent community. The proposed development will, in essence, become a dormitory annexe to the village.

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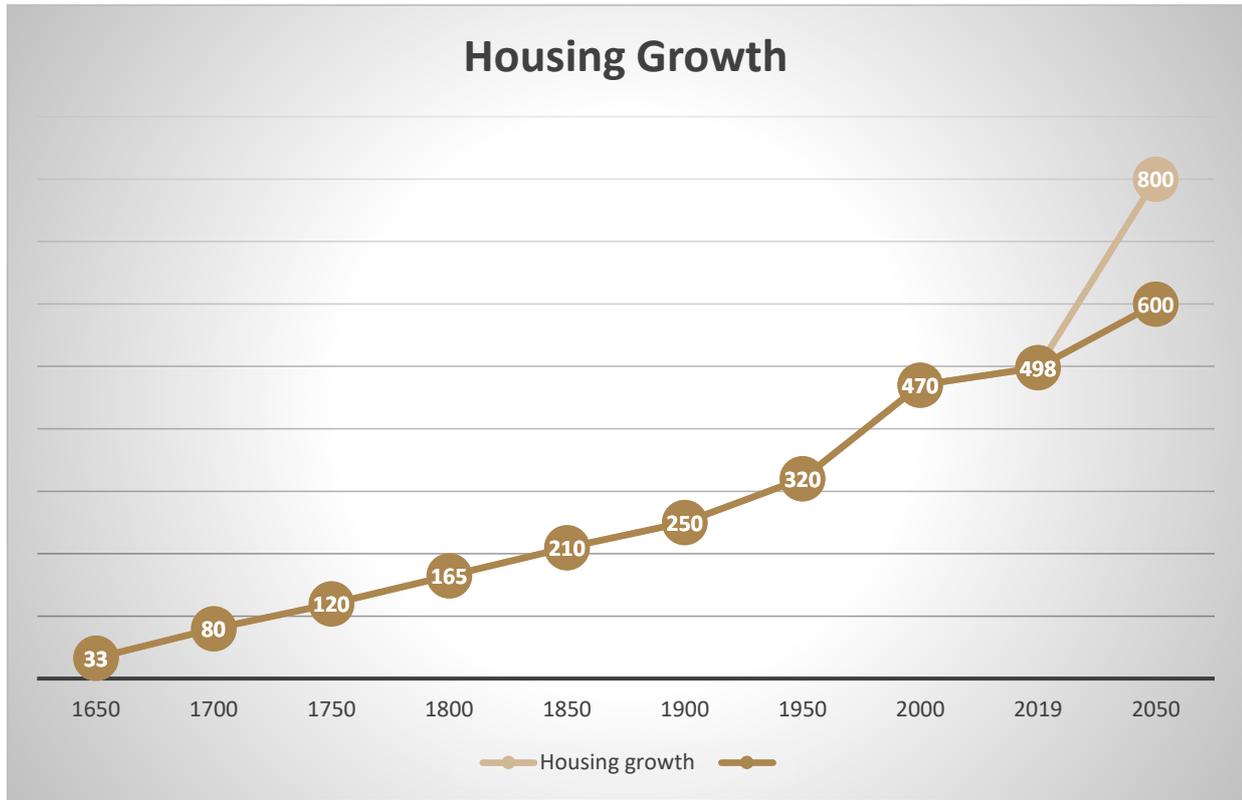
*Appendix A = Images 1 to 8*

*Appendix B = objection to the original application*

*Appendix C = Bleadon Neighbourhood Plan First Survey Results*

**APPENDIX A – Images 1 to 8**

*Image 1: Graph of housing growth in Bleadon 1650 to date, showing growth of c100 homes to 2050 (bold, deemed an appropriate rate of growth) and the challenged 200+ homes (pale line).*



*Image 2: Showing the slope of the land up to the Mendip ridge, under which the village is 'tucked in'. Note that the brownfield quarry site (bottom left) has outline consent for 42 homes.*



*Image 3: Celtic Way entrance to the village – a steep road with narrow single-track sections.*



*Image 4: The Shiplate Road entrance to the village – single track and winding road*



*Image 5: Blind corner, Celtic Way junction with Shiplate Road.*



*Image 6: Lorry turning left from Bridge Road into Bleadon Road*



*Image 7: Aerial view showing tucked in village and connection to Bleadon Levels.*



*Image 8: (attached) Aerial view showing tucked-in settlement and separation from Weston-super-Mare.*