

Planning Committee says ‘NO’ unanimously to 76 houses and a medical centre

After 5+ years, Gressingham Parish Council is delighted that Lancaster City Planning Committee refused Story Homes’ Application for 76 houses and a medical centre in Hornby at a Planning committee meeting held at Morecambe town hall on Monday 30th January 2023.

Gressingham Parish Council gave a presentation to challenge the proposal citing the risk of the City Council failing to follow its own Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework which would result in irreparable damage to our heritage assets and protected landscape. We offered 9 material planning considerations to object to Story Homes’ scheme. We contended that this was the wrong scheme in the wrong place based on the wrong data.

In reply, Story Homes sought to emphasise that ‘exceptional circumstances in the public interest’ should apply as their scheme also proposed a medical centre even though they admitted that there was insufficient health data to support their case. Interestingly Story’s representative made no effort to refute our evidence of the adverse impact on views and the local landscape, AONB status, poor housing design, traffic and flooding risk nor our detailed analysis of their misleading and misrepresented health impact data.

Planning Officers recommended refusal on the following grounds:

The proposal fails to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist, and that the development would be in the public interest, to justify this major development within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, having specific regard to the need for the development, the economic impacts and the impacts on the landscape and the environment.

As a result of the open nature and character of the site, its separation from the built-up area of Hornby and the sensitivity of the landscape, the proposed development would fail to relate positively to the existing settlement and would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the designated landscape and the area in general. In addition, the proposal fails to make a positive contribution to the surrounding landscape and townscape and contribute positively to the identity and character of the area through good design.

The proposal fails to provide an acceptable safe and suitable access to serve the development, would have a detrimental impact on highway safety and would potentially impact on the operation of the bus service. In particular, the scheme fails to demonstrate that the access is of an appropriate width and provides adequate turning for all vehicles, that appropriate visibility splays can be provided, and includes a mini roundabout which would likely introduce collisions on the highway.

The submission fails to fully assess the flood risk at the site, show how these risks will be adequately mitigated or demonstrate how surface water would be effectively managed to ensure that the development does not present risks of flooding on-site or off-site. It also does not demonstrate that all the most vulnerable development has been located in areas at the lowest risk of flooding.

The proposal fails to provide an acceptable level of affordable housing and housing that reflects the identified housing needs within the District, fails to provide a scheme where all dwellings are of an appropriate standard, compliant with the national Described Space Standards, and fails to demonstrate that 20% will meet the M4(2) requirement of being accessible and adaptable dwellings.

Story Homes requested that the Planning Committee defer their decision to give them more time to work with NHS commissioners. Thankfully this argument was rejected as the Planning Officer noted that this application had been running since 2017/18 and Story Homes had not submitted any further information since 2020 and thereby had had ample opportunity to amend their scheme in response to comments from the public and statutory consultees.

Councillors noted that a petition had been submitted with 68 signatures objecting to the application so they were clear of our residents' concerns and it was noted that 71% of public consultees objected to Story's application.

Following invitation from the Chair of the Committee, no Councillor spoke in support of the application and indeed our local Ward Councillor, whilst recognising the need for more affordable homes in Hornby as it is a sustainable rural community, also opposed the application.

At the vote, the motion to refuse the application was passed unanimously; a great result for our Parish Council's protracted opposition to this scheme and testimony to the expert support given freely by Sally's sister, Jenny who provided our detailed Environmental Consultant report and ongoing advice throughout

our campaign.

However.....

Story Homes has a right of appeal against the Planning Committee's decision (5 points above) which must be lodged with the Government Planning Inspectorate within 6 months of receipt of the Council's decision letter. A government appointed Inspector would examine all the evidence presented and Story's Statement of Case and will come to a decision within 30-48 weeks (average timescale). If this is disputed, the Applicant can refer the case to the High Court.

If an appeal is registered, the Parish Council will be informed. And we begin again.....

But for now, the Parish Council is proud of the work undertaken on your behalf and humbled by your fantastic support and kind comments.

Sally Riley
Parish Councillor
30/1/23