



# WOODNEWTON PARISH COUNCIL

16<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Compliments, Comments & Complaints Team  
North Northamptonshire Council  
Sheerness House  
41 Meadow Road  
Kettering  
NN16 8TL

## **Re: Area Planning Committee 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023 Council Chambers Thrapston**

### **Planning Applications:**

- (a) NE/22/00816/FUL - Double storey rear extension at 3 Main Street, Woodnewton
- (b) NE/22/00867/FUL – Erection of House at 31 Main Street Woodnewton

Dear Sirs

I am writing on behalf of Woodnewton Parish Council to register an official complaint about the way in which Application NE/22/00867/FUL was handled by the Committee and about the poor quality of the Planning Department Case Officer's report.

I would like it noted that two Parish Councillors, the Clerk and a number of Woodnewton residents attended the meeting.

This is the first Area Planning Committee Meeting in several years that the Parish Council has attended, and the first for the Councillors and Clerk who attended this meeting. As a rule, we try to support planning applications and improvements whilst protecting our conservation area and Settlement Boundary, so we rarely object, but felt the need to attend this meeting as there was strong objection from the Parish Council and Woodnewton residents. The principal complaint being that the building breaches the Settlement Boundary by several metres and that this is unacceptable to the Parish Council. In fact, we have always attached a great deal of importance to the Building Line defined by the Settlement Boundary, because of concerns about opening the floodgates for backyard development along the whole of the south side of Main Street.

We were truly concerned by how poorly prepared Councillors debating the applications were and how little effort had been put into preparing for the meeting. The fact that some residents and the Parish Council representative had registered in advance to speak, suggested that the applications were contentious and therefore that some background research on the Councillors' part was required.

1. None of the Councillors were very local and Woodnewton doesn't have a local ward councillor to engage and express our views, so we would have expected more of an effort on the Councillors' part to understand the objections.

## 2. Only two Councillors bothered to visit the planning sites.

As the meeting progressed it was evident how Councillors focussed solely on the Case Officers' reports, which had been issued in advance of the meeting and for many, was the only preparation carried out prior to the meeting. One Councillor even praised one of the reports. Had they researched and compared the written objections with the Case Officers' reports, they would have noted that the report in the second case was factually incorrect, and at times misleading. This was further borne out when Councillors took little notice of the issues raised by the three-minute speakers and made little or no attempt to challenge the Case Officer over the issues raised.

The problem was further exacerbated when Councillors seized on misinformation and even incorrect information to make decisions. At this point the Case Officer sat there quietly, not correcting Councillors, when the debate appeared to be going in the Case Officer's favour

Examples of points discussed:

There were many objections raised by residents and the Parish Council relating to the proposed building clearly extending several metres beyond the settlement line. In fact, at the start of the meeting the Parish Council provided a picture of the site to the Councillors, with the proposed build superimposed on it and the settlement boundary clearly marked, showing how much of the building extended beyond the line. Official advice provided to Councillors in the planning report, stated the proposed building would be inside the settlement boundary, this was factually incorrect. In another statement it is said the garden area would fall outside the settlement boundary, implying it would only be the garden area, then it refers to being broadly in line with other properties that do breach the building line. Again, misleading as these properties legitimately breach the building line, because they have class Q permitted development rights as they were old agricultural buildings, this plot does not. The Case Officer chose not to point this fact out or clarify.

The size of the building was raised, and references are made to a "large" building in 6 places in the planning officers supporting report, however, we believe that because of the size considerations, it does not satisfy Criterion c) of Policy 2 in the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan.

When the ridge height of 9m, 2.5m higher than surrounding properties was mentioned the Case Officer tried to suggest that this would be mitigated by the slope of the land down to the brook but failed to mention that Stable Barn would be on land of a similar ground height and its ridge height was only 6.5m and less than half the mass size of the proposed building.

Only 2 listed buildings in the immediate vicinity were mentioned in the report when there are at least 4 listed buildings in the immediate vicinity. It is hard to see how these buildings could not be affected by the huge scale of this new building, each being substantially less than the proposed building size. Why did the Conservation Officer raise no objections?

There have been many comments raised in the planning objections about the access on to Main Street, how constricted it is at this point and highlighting the safety concerns. The Highways report says that certain criteria "must" be satisfied, but a simple viewing of the site easily reveals that many of these criteria cannot be satisfied, yet Highways raised no objections, why not? The Planning Officer's report relies on permitted use (7.5.5), but the "permitted use" seems to depend on hearsay with no concrete and specific statements about the exact planning status of the "existing agricultural style portal frame building currently that stands within the site which is understood to have formerly been used in connection with the business interests of the former occupier of number 31 Main Street." (para 3.3). Despite a question raised by a resident at the meeting seeking clarification of the exact planning status, none was forthcoming and none of the

Councillors raised the question during the debate. At the meeting the same resident representing several villagers said that [a named resident] had been resident in the village for 25yrs and had never seen the site used as a market garden and every resident I have spoken to has seen no commercial activity, at least, in the last 20 years. So where was the evidence for commercial use that was used to convince the councillors in the meeting that residential use would result in a reduction in vehicular traffic?

The Solicitor was consulted for advice on whether there could be an appeal if the application was rejected due to Highways access issues, he replied yes. This was based on the Case Officer's assertion that there was previous commercial activity on the site, never proven or checked out. This raises an important question about what the planning status of the site is, and what in law is, allowed? Decisions appeared to be based on assumed previous use, never factually proven or checked, and this say so was then allowed to take precedence over modern Highways safety requirements.

These are just several examples of many. The consensus is, that the Case Officer's report presented to the committee appeared to have been written to justify, rather than lead to the recommendation to grant permission. The Parish Council's submission was not properly taken into account or considered, and Councillors were ill prepared to question some of the facts and inconsistencies in the Case Officer's report, such, that decisions were made on factually incorrect statements and misleading assumptions. There appeared to be no controls in place to prevent this happening and the Chair Lady did not intervene to encourage discussion around issues raised by the 3-minute speakers. How will this be addressed and stopped going forward?

I look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely

Amy Miller  
Clerk to the Woodnewton Parish Council