

WEMBDON PARISH COUNCIL

Local Development Framework Core Strategy

September 2010

Response to Sedgemoor District Council

by

Wembdon Parish Council

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2010 Sedgemoor District Council published their final proposals for the Local Development Framework (LDF), Core Strategy.
- 1.2 The published LDF included forward planning guidelines for all areas within Sedgemoor and whilst the community in Wembdon may have views on all aspects of the draft LDF, as Wembdon Parish Council, we will limit our comments to those aspects of the draft LDF which have a direct bearing on Wembdon Parish.
- 1.3 The principle immediate impact of the proposals within the LDF on Wembdon will be from the development of a large housing estate on land known as Cokerhurst Farm, although a far greater impact in the longer term will be the inclusion of Wembdon within the town of Bridgwater for the purposes of housing allocation.
- 1.4 Presentations of the proposed LDF have been made to meetings of the Parish Council and also to open meetings of the community. On each occasion concerns have been raised over the scale of proposed housing developments and the impacts that this would have on the character of Wembdon village.
- 1.5 Members of the Parish Council have also attended consultation events hosted by SDC and again expressed concerns over large scale development within the village.
- 1.6 The Parish Council's response to the proposed LDF takes into account information gained through the various meetings and documents outlined above and the verbal and written comments made by residents of the Parish both at the Parish Council meetings and sent to the Parish Clerk. In addition, as a part of the work carried out in preparing the Wembdon Parish Plan, published in August 2008, every household in Wembdon was invited to respond to a survey of their opinions on their "Vision for Wembdon". Responses were received from over 70% of the households in Wembdon and these too have been used by the council in preparing this response to SDC.

2.0 Impacts of proposals within the LDF on Wembdon village

- 2.1 Wembdon is an ancient village, initial settlement dating from at least Roman times . Until the 19th century the population was small with much of the area laid to orchards when developments started first along Wembdon Rise. The area is well known for the red sandstone, which was quarried from the 12th Century until very recent times and many of the older houses, farm buildings and walls as well as the church are built from this. *This red sandstone provides a basis for the character of Wembdon as a village and hence as a separate settlement to Bridgwater with a separate identity. It has a different character and feel to it when compared to Bridgwater, in part created by red stone boundary walling and the use of natural red sandstone in the older buildings and in part by the rural nature of the roads through it together with its own focal point of the church and parish hall. It has always had its own boundary separate to Bridgwater.*(1). The construction of the NDR has further reinforced the physical separation between Wembdon and Bridgwater. All these factors justify treating Wembdon village as a separate settlement with its own character and this has been recently recognised in the latest proposals for ward boundaries, creating separate wards for "Wembdon Parish" , comprising primarily the long established Wembdon village and "Bridgwater North" , comprising the new housing estates south of the BNDR, still within the Wembdon civic parish.
- 2.2 The development of Wembdon had been very slow and piecemeal until the mass construction of the recent BNDR estates. This has resulted in a wide variety of housing, with construction materials and styles differing depending upon the time of construction. These variations in size and style of housing very much provide the character to Wembdon and this was recognised in the Vision for Wembdon document as a significant feature of the village, important to over 80% of the Wembdon community.
- 2.3 The Wembdon civic parish is now a key rural settlement of some 1320 households, having recently doubled in size with the developments along the new Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road (BNDR). Despite its close proximity to Bridgwater, the residents of Wembdon greatly value its separate village status with over 85% of respondents supporting this position when surveyed for the preparation of the Parish Plan. The village has a parish church, church centre, primary school, post office/shop, garage, public house and playing field. Relative to neighbouring areas of Bridgwater, the village has a low incidence of crime and anti social behaviour.

(1) *extracted from SDC response to planning inspector 2002*

- 2.4 The influx of another large housing estate into Wembdon is completely contrary to the expressed wishes of over 95% of the Wembdon community. There is a recognition that further housing may need to be developed in Wembdon, but the very clear statement from the community was that this should be in the form of a series of small groupings of 10 houses or less.

3.0 Impacts on Roads and Transport

- 3.1 Bridgwater has major problems with traffic access on the two principle routes into and out-of the town, the Bristol Road and the Taunton Road. Currently the Quantock Road (A39) and BNDR are congested at key times of the day but are generally free flowing outside of the summer holiday season, however, with the developments of the new Haygrove school and the potential new power station at Hinkley Point, the traffic on the A39 will increase significantly. This has been recognised by the various authorities responsible for traffic on this route and a working group drawn from the local parish cluster is meeting to address some of the issues, particularly the extensive chaos created when accidents occur, which now happens with increasing frequency.
- 3.2 With its close proximity to Bridgwater, almost all residents travel daily out of Wembdon for employment, school, college and shopping. All traffic from Wembdon must use the route comprising the BNDR/A39. On the regular occasions when this route is congested, especially when there are road-works along the route or in the event of road accidents, Wembdon residents are completely trapped and cannot access the road transport network. Any development which increases traffic within Wembdon or on the A39/BNDR will have a major and detrimental effect on the residents of Wembdon.
- 3.3 Any traffic congestion on the A39/Quantock Road/BNDR encourages traffic to route though Wembdon village rather than along the A39/Quantock Road. This rat-run through Wembdon has a very negative effect, increasing the risk of road accidents, especially for young children on route to and from school, increasing the problems of traffic pollution and making it far more dangerous for anyone walking along the narrow pavements or cycling within the village.
- 3.4 Any development of Cokerhurst Farm would increase traffic onto the Quantock Road/A39. Any plan to access the development via the existing roads through the Inwood Estate and onto Wembdon Rise would create even greater problems with congestion on the these roads and would significantly increase traffic at the Wembdon Rise/BNDR junction before access the congested BNDR/A39.
- 3.5 The BNDR was designed primarily as a distributor road to service the needs of the 1000 new homes feeding onto it. The existing junctions at Wylds Road , Chilton Street and Bristol Road are inadequate to meet any increases in traffic and the road is always congested at busy times of the day.

Summary

We conclude that we are totally opposed to any large scale development of housing at Cokerhurst Farm. We say this for the following reasons:

Wembdon is a village with its own character and not an extension of North Bridgwater. It should be treated differently to Bridgwater when new developments in Sedgemoor are considered.

Part of the separation between Bridgwater and Wembdon is a "Green Wedge" of recreational and undeveloped fields. Any development of the Cokerhurst Farm site would have an unacceptable effect on this area of boundary land and an undesirable effect on the entrance to Bridgwater and its setting.

Any development of Cokerhurst Farm will result in a significant intrusion into open countryside and will adversely effect the rural character of Wembdon.

Any development would constitute a significant and unacceptable expansion of the village of Wembdon, contrary to the stated policy for expansion within key rural settlements (6.80 – 6.84)

The Wembdon community have clearly set out their own Vision for Wembdon and published this as their Parish Plan. When responding to a written survey, over 95% of the community are against another large scale housing estate in Wembdon.

The development of the Quantock Road/A39 provided a by-pass for Wembdon in the 1930s. This was a necessary development, even at that time, as the road through Wembdon is narrow and sections of the road have pavements on one side only.

The increased traffic on the Quantock Road/A39 is now pushing traffic off of this "Wembdon by-pass" and back through Wembdon. This creates a dangerous situation for anyone walking or cycling through Wembdon and makes crossing Wembdon Rise very difficult for children attending St George's school.

Development of the new Haygrove School and the new Hinkley Point power station will further increase congestion on the Quantock Road. Any housing developments at Cokerhurst Farm will simply add to this problem.

Bridgwater has a major problem with traffic congestion on the A38, Taunton Road and Bristol Road and this gives the town a very poor reputation. One consequence of this is the complete hollowing out of the town centre, increasing the traffic travelling to Bristol and Taunton.

Developing Cokerhurst Farm will increase traffic on the A39 and will lead to further congestion in Bridgwater and to severe knock-on effects for all of the West Somerset communities reliant upon the A39 for access to Bridgwater and beyond.

