

# **WEMBDON PARISH COUNCIL**

**Outline Planning Application – 51/10/00022**

**“Cokerhurst Farm”**

**December 2010**

**Response to Sedgemoor District Council**

**by**

**Wembdon Parish Council**

**January 2011**

## INTRODUCTION

The planning process requires that certain deadlines be met to ensure that developers are treated fairly by the authorities and that applications are not unreasonably delayed. However, to be presented with a 2,000 page submission on the eve of Christmas, with a response required by early January, demonstrates the level of cynicism incorporated within the content of the application.

Wembdon Parish Council promotes and encourages open and public discussion on all proposals which could have a significant impact on the residents of the Parish and the construction of yet another new housing estate is such a proposal.

A survey of all of the residents of Wembdon Civil Parish was undertaken two years ago and the results were published in the Parish Plan – the community's Vision for Wembdon. The responses to the survey clearly showed that over 85% of residents want Wembdon to remain a separate village because of the community spirit and ethos that this engenders and over 95% responded that they did not want another large housing estate in Wembdon. The respondents felt that Wembdon had already contributed more than its fair share to the housing needs of Bridgwater by absorbing 570 new houses along the Bridgwater Northern Distributor Road (NDR). A further development of 215 new homes on the Gerber land has just been accepted, many of which will fall within Wembdon Parish and we now receive this proposal for yet another 450 homes.

Whilst many villagers recognize the problems that Bridgwater has in meeting its projected housing needs, continuing housing development without the provision of the necessary infrastructure degrades the quality of life for all of the people in Wembdon. Travelling becomes ever more difficult and this has a knock on effect for the outlying communities in the Quantock cluster and beyond which are also reliant upon the overstretched infrastructure.

Wembdon Parish Council has continually highlighted the negative impact that an additional housing estate at Cokerhurst Farm would have on the village, mainly because of the increased traffic but also because of the loss of the character of the village. The Council has also had discussions with the potential developers and there have been public meetings where these concerns were expressed to the relevant planning officers.

It seems that the proposals in the Outline Planning Application have ignored our input and our concerns and we object to the proposals on the following grounds:

## LOSS OF VILLAGE IDENTITY

Wembdon is an ancient village, the name being derived from “The Hill of the Hunter”, initial settlement dating from at least Roman times . Until the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> Century until very recent times and many of the older houses, farm buildings and walls as well as the church are built from this.

Wembdon is now a village of some 1320 households, having recently doubled in size with the developments along the new NDR. Despite its close proximity to Bridgwater, the residents of Wembdon greatly value its separate village status with over 85% of respondents in a recent survey supporting this position. The village has a parish church, church centre, primary school, post office/shop, garage, public house and playing field. It also has access to many green spaces and is pleasantly tranquil. Relative to neighbouring areas of Bridgwater, the village has a low incidence of crime and anti social behaviour.

Wembdon has a mixed community comprising of the very young to the elderly with many villagers living in the area for long periods of time. The existing villagers know and care for each other.

Wembdon is also a local village of aspiration as many trade and professional people move into the village as it is both close to Bridgwater and a highly desirable place to live. The addition of another 450 houses on the outskirts of our small village will pose a great threat to the village ethos which we value. The recent developments have not yet fully integrated into the village and a further new development on top of this would geographically and materially change the character of Wembdon from a village community to a suburb of Bridgwater.

The proposed development uses approximately half of the land at Cokerhurst farm. If it is approved it would be hard to oppose a future application to develop the other half at some time in the future – and any such development would exacerbate the loss of the village’s character.

## TRAFFIC

The development would exacerbate the already increasing levels of traffic on the Quantock Road/A39 so that the roundabout at the NDR/A39 junction will become increasingly and regularly congested. The addition of a further set of traffic lights at the cemetery/planned estate access on the A39 will also increase delays. As a result of this regular congestion, traffic will divert from the A39 at Sandford corner and ‘rat-run’ through Wembdon to access the NDR at the Wembdon Rise junction, thereby avoiding one set of traffic lights and the roundabout. The Parish

Plan survey highlighted widespread concern at both the volume and the excessive speed of existing traffic through Wembdon, which has narrow roads and very substandard pavements, many sections of the road having pavements on one side only. We are also particularly concerned about the proposal to provide road access from the development onto Inwood Road as we feel that this would significantly increase traffic through the Inwood estate and onto Wembdon Rise and thereby exacerbate congestion at the Wembdon Rise/NDR junction.

In addition the application makes no recognition of the impacts of the housing development at the Gerber site nor of the Hinkley Point developments or the relocated Haygrove School, all of which will create significant additional traffic on the A39 and especially at the NDR/A39 roundabout.

The Traffic Assessment included within the Planning Application (section 6.6.7 table 6.3) estimates the impact from this housing development alone would be an increase of 54% in traffic delay at the NDR/A39 roundabout by 2016 and a similar increase of 23% at the Wembdon Rise/NDR junction. These are totally unacceptable situations and the actual impact on the Wembdon Rise/NDR junction will be far greater because of the huge impact of 'rat-run' traffic through Wembdon. It is difficult to envisage how any mitigation would be possible without major new road construction.

## DEMAND

The developers Planning Application challenges the District Council position that there is an adequate supply of housing land for an immediate five year period but seems to rely upon outdated figures. This needs to be investigated and a consistent set of data used before any application is considered.

We would support the draft District Council position that development should be prioritised to be within existing settlements and it should fully exploit brown field sites first including the refurbishment and regeneration of existing buildings.

We believe that as a greenfield site Cokerhurst Farm fails to be appropriate for large scale development for many reasons both now and in the future.

## DESIGN

The application makes reference to providing mainly 2 storey properties, yet a considerable proportion of the proposed development is for 2½ - 3 storey dwellings. There needs to be greater definition of the actual proposals of how many houses of what heights and their locations.

The application makes reference to the “Wembdon style of properties” as outlined in the Parish Plan and the proposal to follow this style but there are no details of how this development proposes to blend in or to adopt this local vernacular. There is a statement that the houses would be of brick and render construction which does not reflect the red sandstone buildings which are at the heart of Wembdon’s character. We are concerned that this development would be like other recent developments in Wembdon where inevitable financial pressures on the developer result in a far less appealing monobloc housing estate.

Whatever the scale and type of any Wembdon development, we believe that three important principles apply:

- new buildings should follow in the traditions of their setting, reflecting the important characteristics that make our locality special and different from other places;
- standard designs, which could belong in any suburb or urban estate, are NOT appropriate in our village;
- new buildings should positively contribute to the village.