Houghton Parish Council wishes to express its deep concern about some aspects of the report by your planning officer in considering this application. It believes that it conflicts with the letter and the spirit of its Neighbourhood Plan (NP), and particularly the amendments made to that plan by the Examiner. This conflict potentially undermines much of the housing development policy contained in the NP.

The Parish Council has summarised a specific key point here, which presents a conflict between the Examiner’s modification of the Neighbourhood Plan, and the interpretation placed on it by your staff.

**Provision of Housing types:**

Section 6.30 of the report (see Attachment A) states:

‘It is considered that the proposal complies with the Village Design Statement (VDS). For example, there is a mix of styles (9 different house types), the dwellings do not exceed two storeys high, the development contains features and garages do not extend forward of houses. Though there is only one bungalow the VDS does not state a set requirement for the number of bungalows.’

This is at best a misunderstanding of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Submission version of the Houghton NP contained in Policy H1:-

‘All developments should include 25% bungalows and 75% houses unless evidence at the time demonstrates different proportions. The number of 4 and 5 bedroomed houses should not exceed 10-20%, the balance being an appropriate mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom houses.’

The Examiner deleted this, as he is entitled to do, replacing it at Point e) in his Recommendation 17 for Policy H1 with the words below:-
'Housing development within the Houghton Limits to Development, as delineated in Figure 4-3, will be supported provided that each proposal addresses the following criteria: 

.......e) the mix of dwellings proposed is informed by up to date evidence of housing need’

So, in response to the comment of the Planning Officer at para. 6.30 of her report to the Planning Committee, the number of bungalows was in the submission version of the NP but was taken out by the Examiner. However, there is no evidence that the Planning Officer gave due consideration to the post-examination wording and took steps to examine whether Hazelton Homes proposal did indeed adequately address point (e).

There is a wealth of evidence on the Parish Council website, collected during Neighbourhood Plan consultations, that Houghton requires bungalows and medium sized, not large, houses. There is no reference in the officer’s report of Hazelton Homes having obtained and presented evidence that there is a need in Houghton for 11 of its 16 dwellings (i.e. 69%) to have 4 or 5 bedrooms.

The Planning Officer mentioned in her report at 6.27 ‘The Parish Council advise that the excessive number of large homes is not compatible with the Village Design Statement, that the layout is cramped and that there is only one bungalow proposed’ but then failed to address the point, and instead put forward a recommendation for approval of a mix of houses completely at variance with the needs of Houghton, as derived from extensive community consultation, and at variance with HDC’s own planning guidance (see Attachment B), and hence ignoring the Neighbourhood Plan policy H1 as modified by the Independent examiner.

The key point here strikes at the heart of the Neighbourhood Planning process. The examiner removed specific statements of housing ratios from the Neighbourhood Plan and replaced them with a more generalised statement. The logic in this being to ‘future-proof’ the plan as requirements may change over a decade or so. The Planning Officer then used the lack of specific numbers to allow her to approve a housing ratio which breaks HDC’s own standards (see Attachment B), as well as that clearly documented by the background data behind the Neighbourhood Plan.

This lack of connection between the actions of the Independent Examiner, and that of the Planning Officer completely negates what the Parish Council understands to be the underlying principle of the Localism agenda, that locally derived needs are important in determining planning decisions. The Localism Act 2011 states ‘The Bill will devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities more control over housing and planning decisions.’
The Parish Council requests that you address this issue with urgency since other similar confusion in the implementation of Neighbourhood Plans would have severe implications for the whole process. We look forward to your response and will be prepared to meet with councillors and/or officers of HDC if any of the issues raised here need clarification. Houghton’s NP Referendum is scheduled for March 29th and the situation above throws considerable doubt on to the value of having a Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours sincerely

Steve Derry
Clerk to Houghton on the Hill Parish Council

Attachments

A: Extracts from the Planning Officer’s report Ref 14/01439/FUL
Attachment A: Extract from planning officer’s report

Planning Committee Report

Applicant: Hazelton Homes Ltd
Application Ref: 14/01439/FUL

Recommendation

Planning Permission is APPROVED, for the reasons and appended conditions set out in the report, subject to:
(i) The applicant entering into a legal agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or similar to provide for the obligations set out in the report; and
(ii) The proposed conditions set out in Appendix B.

b) Material Planning Considerations

- Houghton on the Hill Neighbourhood Plan and Village Design Statement (VDS)
  - 5.9 Relevant policies are,
  - D2: Sustaining the character of Houghton outside the Conservation Area
  - H1: General Housing Provision
  - H2: Specialist Housing for people in later life
  - S2: Infrastructure
  - S3: Provision of high-speed broadband
  - Appendix 1 – Village Design Statement

5.10 The Neighbourhood Plan and VDS has passed examination and therefore now holds substantial weight.

6. Assessment

6.12 The Parish Council have raised concerns that there are an excessive number of large homes and this is not compatible with the Village Design Statement. They also stated that the site layout was unsatisfactory and cramped. However, the layout of the site including the size of the dwellings and their plot size is unchanged from the scheme that was approved (subject to a S106 agreement) in April 2015 (except for the small relocation mentioned in paragraph 6.10 above). This scheme proposes one less dwelling so if anything should appear less cramped than that previously approved at Committee.
Overall it is considered that the form, siting, scale and design of the proposed development will respect and enhance the character of the village and relate to the existing built form. It is considered that the proposal will not have a significant impact on the surrounding countryside and that the proposed boundary treatment will be appropriate. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with Policies CS11 and CS17 c) of the Harborough District Core Strategy.

6. Neighbourhood Plan & VDS

6.26 The Houghton on the Hill Neighbourhood Plan and Village Design Statement has passed examination and therefore holds substantial weight. Figure 4-3 of the Neighbourhood Plan shows the site as being a consented housing site. The site is included in the 135 dwellings that have been approved in the village and the plan states that there are 17 dwellings yet to be provided (further to these consented sites).

6.27 The Parish Council advise that the excessive number of large homes is not compatible with the Village Design Statement, that the layout is cramped and that there is only one bungalow proposed.

6.28 Policy H1 of the Neighbourhood Plan states that developments should be physically and visually connected to the settlement, contain a mix of dwellings and provide affordable housing. It is considered that the development complies with this policy.

In fact, there are no affordable houses. The affordable housing obligation is made by off-site provision negotiated with HDC.

Policy S3 outlines that every dwelling within new residential developments of 10 units or more, or on sites in excess of 0.5 Ha, should have access to high-speed broadband services (of speeds of 30 Mbps or greater). This provision lies outside of the scope of this application as the provision of such services lies with the control of the Applicant. In this case, such services are provided by a third party, e.g. British Telecom.

The above is the wording from the Submission version of the report. Policy S3 as approved by the examiner does not have this wording instead it states “…Development proposals should incorporate a bespoke duct network designed and implemented in cooperation with a recognised network provider, and where viable, a fibre to the premises (FTTP) solution.” This provision has been taken up enthusiastically by another developer (Davis’s) as a perfectly reasonable and commercially advantageous one.
It is considered that the proposal complies with the Village Design Statement. For example, there is a mix of styles (9 different house types), the dwellings do not exceed two storeys high, the development contains features and garages do not extend forward of houses. **Though there is only one bungalow the VDS does not state a set requirement for the number of bungalows.**
Mix of Housing

5.9 Harborough District has an above average number of larger type dwellings (5-7 bedrooms) and a smaller number of 2-3 bedroom house types. Smaller dwellings are underrepresented in the range and mix of house types. It is evident that the number of smaller households is increasing. In the light of this, the majority of our house type requirements will be based on smaller house types to meet demand.

5.10 Development proposals should therefore always seek to provide a mix of size and type of dwellings (both open market and affordable dwellings). In particular, housing for smaller households will be supported in order to meet District wide identified need.

5.11 The benchmark housing mix profile we will aim to seek on housing development sites, as referenced in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2014 at District level, is set out in Table 1 as follows:

Table 1 - Housing Mix sought in new development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-bed</th>
<th>2-bed</th>
<th>3-bed</th>
<th>4+ bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All dwellings</td>
<td>15-20%</td>
<td>30-35%</td>
<td>35-40%</td>
<td>10-15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.12 This is an indicative housing mix for planning purposes within the District. The Council’s Housing Enabling and Community Infrastructure Officer will be able to discuss and seek to agree site/ locality specific requirements. There is strong demand for single level development for older people and we encourage apartment and bungalow type development to meet this need.

Hazelton Home’s consented mix bears no relationship to guidance at all i.e.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazelton Homes</th>
<th>1-bed</th>
<th>2-bed</th>
<th>3-bed</th>
<th>4+ bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of dwellings</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of dwellings</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>