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Writtle Parish Council's (incorporating Writtle Neighbourhood Plan Group) comments on the Master Plan for the development at Warren Farm, Writtle SGS2 LPA ref: 18/00001/MAS

Writtle Parish Council is of the view that the Master Plan has not been sufficiently improved since the previous one presented by the applicants and many of the previous objections raised by Writtle Parish Council (WPC) and indeed residents of Writtle and elsewhere remain unaddressed. There has been insufficient regard for the Writtle Neighbourhood Plan (WNP), that although not made, Chelmsford City Council (CCC) has had a sight of the first draft of the WNP. Whilst it is accepted that the allocation of the site has now been approved within the Local Plan 2020, the master planning of the site is not yet considered to be within the definition of either good planning nor sustainable development.

Many of the aspects observed as being lacking overlap, but for ease of consideration the areas of objections have been divided as follows:-

1. Number of dwellings

This is still set at 'around 800 homes' where we have been advised that this might differ by as much as 10% in either direction, which is a considerable number variation of units. At this stage, we have now been further advised that the number of units will actually be 880 which is a considerable increase in terms of traffic generation and

demand for schools/nurseries, that we are advised will be commenced in a later stage, and further demands on the existing village's community and other services .

2. Traffic and highways

This aspect is the key area of concern to WPC and the community. It is considered, despite encouraging the use of cycles and walking for residents of the 880 homes, which is beneficial for the community, and some reduction of car journeys, generally residents prefer to use cars, particularly in inclement weather. Households may have more than one vehicle. As proven, the current capacity of the A1060 is unable to cope with additional traffic at peak times, as verified by the independent traffic surveys and report prepared for WPC and other PC's. The Master Plan has focused on this road with two roundabouts and a pelican crossing to enable access between Warren Farm and Lawford Lane, the village and Hylands School, but the location of the roundabout and the crossing are in close proximity to the petrol station/shop, the access to Old Chelmsfordians, and the busy car wash with its new vehicle rental business. Additional traffic through Writtle, both during the construction period and after completion is inevitable, but no measures to mitigate traffic or actively discourage traffic through the village to link with the A12 trunk road can be found in the Master Plan. Furthermore, the Plan does not indicate any improvements to Lordship Road which was discussed at the earlier meeting with the applicant's highways consultant. It is understood that the Council is supportive of such improvements, which is welcomed, although more detail is required to ensure that this satisfactorily addresses the harm. The proximity of Warren Farm to the A12, where the most direct routes are through Writtle Village and Margaretting Road, to join this trunk road at Margaretting will cause major traffic congestion in the village and the surrounding roads. The village has experienced this already but this will be exacerbated.

In addition, there are a number of uses within the Warren Farm site that will generate traffic to the site; for example, the recreation area, parks and food store which is likely to be a reasonable sized supermarket together with the independent nursery. This will add to the congestion that is currently occurring at the junction of Lordship Road and on A1060 generally.

Furthermore, one of the ways suggested to alleviate this congestion was to have a good and frequent bus service to the railway station which involved the much discussed busgate. However, the busgate, which is understood that the Council through the Local Plan process is supportive of, in the revised Master Plan seems to

form part of Phase 2 of the development, likely to be constructed in 3-4 years' time, well after the commencement and occupation of the development. The Parish fully support the principle of this bus link to ensure that there is a sustainable link direct to the Chignal Estate area for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians. If this is not provided, then it is considered essential that buses and other traffic which would otherwise use this already approved route do not have the ability to access and egress the Warren Farm development from the A1060 Roxwell Road which will considerably worsen the traffic congestion, which this development will inevitably bring to an area whose existing traffic infrastructure is already inadequate. Nevertheless, it is considered that there needs to be greater emphasis on alternatives to the use of the private car in the Plan, throughout the site with more safe cycle and pedestrian routes. There does not appear to be any pedestrian or cycle crossing points incorporated within the proposed roundabout junction with Lordship Road. Provision is important if they really do want to facilitate walking and cycling, to allow a range of transport choices for all people of all ages and abilities. Equally, crossing points at the second roundabout, although existing, are quite limited, and it is not clear how these link into the existing walking and cycling network.

In summary, there is insufficient regard for the management of the traffic likely to be generated by nearer 900 homes when there is already congestion in the vicinity of the site, and lacking in detail as to how the alternative methods of travel would be viable.

3. Public Footpaths

The primary footpath is the Centenary Circle, which the Master Plan shows. Whilst this is partly plotted on the Master Plan, it is not totally accurate, shown truncated as it runs northwards adjacent to the site, with insufficient space around it in the heart of the development, without any meaningful landscaping to provide sufficient protection of character or views for walkers. These are assessed as an important aspect of this part of the Parish and indeed adjoining ones. Whilst it is appreciated that more landscaping results in higher housing density to have the central band of green that does not relate to any particular topography is not as welcome as providing meaningful landscaping to the existing well used footpaths in the area.

The very brief part of the proposal with regard to density, shows the area of highest density adjacent to the Centenary Circle and other footpaths in the northern part of the site that are highly visible from Brickbarns Farm in the north looking towards our Parish.

A more detailed landscaping plan that respects the natural features of the immediate areas of all of these footpaths should be provided not in detail, for all areas with examples provided.

4. Design and Construction techniques

This Master Plan does provide slightly greater detail than the previous one, but there still does not appear to be any better substance to design codes or styles, materials nor most importantly, scale and massing of the dwellings/building. There appears, therefore, to be little regard for the characteristics of the area nor the recently adopted Planning Document, the Writtle Design Guide March 2020, which was circulated to all parties. Informing design by referring to Beaulieu Park, an area unrelated to Writtle in every aspect, ignores the advice and the context of the Parish in which the development will be undertaken. The built environment needs to reflect the attributes of the Parish. The principles of the Design Guide are reflected in Policy WNP D3 Warren Farm Growth Area of the draft Neighbourhood Plan, which it is suggested should be followed in the design of the new development. It is not sufficient to say that details will follow in subsequent planning applications or reserved matters.

The development, we have been advised, will be undertaken in two phases, the first over 5 years, but ultimately there might be more phases where the lack of clarity is concerning. In this period, much will change including materials and construction methods to reduce energy use, during construction and through the buildings' lifetime. Modern methods of construction should be built into the plan such as off-site manufacturing, where homes can be partially pre-fabricated therefore reducing time taken, and on-site costs, as well as reducing construction traffic. There is limited information in the Plan on low-energy materials that are sustainable and renewable which can be employed but still produce a traditional design, which the City Council supports, rather than examples of industrial modernist dwellings in the Plan that would be unwelcome in this attractive area close to our village and the Green Belt.

The present Masterplan reflects a basic, generic and formulaic concept which has been portrayed for at least the last 5 years for this site and as such does little to reduce its carbon footprint and shows no imagination in either design or planning so as to enable sustainability or future proofing. Bearing in mind that it will be at least a further 5 years before any phase is complete and that the pandemic has shown that there is likely to be a fundamental change in how technological and societal change will

accelerate, to proceed with such a design and concept will lose the opportunity produce a class leading project. In the next few years, for example there will be wholesale changes in how people work, travel, shop, are educated, are entertained and how health services will operate. The scheme as now envisaged is backward looking in all these aspects. There would appear to be only lip service paid to decarbonisation and no forward thinking in respect of district heating schemes for instance or use of climate change friendly energy sources.

On the matter of density, whilst this is illustrated as broad density levels, there is no illustration of how this will be achieved either through intensity or height, which will alter massing and appearance depending on how this is constructed. Some example illustrations of what development at different densities may look like to respond to the location within the settlement and the topography relationship with footways etc would assist the Parish in understanding the concept. It would help as it would demonstrate that higher density does not necessarily equate to high rise. If not for inclusion in the masterplan document, then further information for sharing with the Parish would assist in planning the appropriate density model for each area of Warren Farm.

5. Landscape and ecology

In the Master Plan, it states that the new development that is 'landscape led' but it is considered that there needs to be greater understanding of the current landscape character, much of which is set out in the Writtle Design Guide 2020. It is not appropriate to look, in isolation, just at the site which covers a significant area. For example, it is stated that views in and out of the site are suggested to be limited, with currently a high level of screening, but this area where there is some screening at present, will be removed for the creation of the new roundabout. The location of the proposed development is on higher land than Roxwell Road and as the development is for 2-3-4 storey buildings, where these will be visible from surrounding areas. The area of higher land also seems to be planned for the greater density and massing, which might be through increased height or just greater intensity, but it would assist in understanding the development and indeed of high importance to have a little more detail on the areas and how they will be developed to appreciate the impact. As a result, landscaping is especially important. There are few areas of natural woodland and trees currently and more detail on the location of new woodland /tree planting in the Plan needs to be provided. The ponds in and around Writtle are natural features

that have been identified as forming an important part of its character that could be replicated in the master plan area (and used as part of the network of SUDs).

The Buffer zone beside the Roxwell Road has been the subject of much discussion. Tree Planting as set out in the plan is welcomed, particularly within the now larger buffer zone between the Roxwell Road and the southern edge of the development. The 30 m or thereabouts depth of the zone as an average is acceptable but it needs to reflect the local requirement so perhaps more depth is required behind the commercial car wash area for example. The Design Guide mentions areas of green space at the entrances to the residential development which are not shown, they are currently indicated as a hard edge. Whilst more green space might lead to greater density of development elsewhere, alternatively there is a large green swathe proposed running through the center of the site which could be reduced (and still be a large space) with some of that re-provided along the buffer. The Parish Council is not sure of the rationale of such a large green space running through the center of the site as it creates two very separate development areas within the total Plan area unrelated to any feature, nor does it link areas. In urban design terms a series of smaller, more intimate spaces might be more successful, and the larger green areas used to the east and along the footpath, corridors and the Buffer zone.

More specifically on the matter of this buffer, perhaps a greater parcel of land needs to be allocated for this purpose at the roundabouts given that these are the key entrances to Warren Farm and the roundabout/splays occupy a large amount of land, both in prominent positions. As stated there could have been much more mention of tree planting etc. through the site and not just on the edges. The intention seems to be to link smaller neighborhoods within the site by green infrastructure but it is difficult to see, with the fairly vague plans, what these will consist of. The lack of green areas around the site close to the public footpaths that provide views into the site of which there are quite a few, does not assist in assimilating the new development into this very rural landscape, where it has already been noted that the greatest density of dwellings is closest to the northern section, where there are several footpaths and important views from them. This also would provide an opportunity to make more new footways than shown on the Master Plan, given the scale of the development of 880 units.

In terms of ecology, the Ecological Park which will, as well as balance some of the losses on the site due to development, provide for the informal recreation needs of

the residents of Warren Farm, which is welcomed. This will provide opportunities to increase biodiversity and new habitats for wildlife for the Parish. However, more details of the management of the Park should be provided at this stage, as well as when this facility will be provided in the overall phasing of the development.

6. Play Areas

Whilst the Parish Council is pleased to see a large number of play areas, some of these are marked as just 'possible' on the maps which does not provide confidence that they will actually be constructed. It is important that such areas are within sites that can be in the view of the neighborhood they serve, where some appear to be dotted about in areas that will not be safe or provide security for children to use. More information about their phasing, design, content and future management is essential early on in the planning system to ensure the necessary play provision for children.

7. Sports facilities

The revised Master Plan indicates that there will be a 3.6 ha recreation ground with sports pitches in the form of two senior football pitches, a cricket pitch with an all-weather wicket, and a junior football pitch, which is less than the previous plan. It is not clear as to how this requirement has been arrived at, nor the justification for the mix of sports shown. A pavilion with changing facilities, play facilities, and parking is listed although the details are not shown on the plan which at this stage should have greater specifics as to user groups and management. It is felt unlikely that such a provision will be a viable proposition for serious recreational use by organised clubs given the tentative layout shown and the overlap in seasons for the two sports at present envisaged. This provision will be yet another external traffic generator into Warren Farm.

8. Travelling Show People (TSP)

It is appreciated that the Local Plan did identify a need for the site for this number of these plots, although not how this need has been assessed. It has been brought to our attention that it might not have been fairly evaluated and we await a review into the demand and requirement for such a provision. The location of the TSP site is still considered to be fairly unrespectful of the topography and character of the site at the western entrance. It is wholly inappropriate to locate this use adjacent to the recreation area. This is also close to residences to the south including The Manor

House, and to the area of rural land adjacent to the River Can. Whilst the site might be screened from the west, from the east and the important entrance to Warren Farm, it will be prominent and more so from the adjacent green space, where there are no barriers nor provision to retain the use within its presently designated site.

The access to the site is shown to be an independent one from the A1060 which does not have a speed limit at this point, and vehicles that are large and slow will be entering and leaving the A1060. It is preferable that no new access is made and that the TSP site is accessed from the track that leads to New Barns that is shown as a spur off the Warren Farm stem road, thus avoiding a 5-arm roundabout.

9. Heath Centre/Neighbourhood Centre

A health centre was identified as being essential in the first Master Plan, given the scale of the development and the representations made by the current doctor's surgery about the impact of the new residential area on the medical requirements currently of the Parish. In this Plan, there is just mention of a 'possible' health centre, without any information about the physical scale or the services it would provide, despite reasons which have been supplied. The Parish is unhappy to be left with uncertainty as to health provision given an increase of around a third in its population. This also leads to issues for the local chemist provision for dispensing prescriptions. Given the stage the Plan is at, greater certainty is essential for the proper planning of the Parish's and the adjacent parishes health service. The phasing is important, otherwise the development at Warren Farm would have a significant impact on current provision. At the very least the building identified for health use should be of a flexible / multi-functional design to allow for use by a range of community facilities over time but it is suggested that this will be needed early on in the phasing. That aside, in that location, at the heart of Warren Farm, there could ultimately be an impact on traffic levels and congestion. There is insufficient detail to assess what comprises the Neighbourhood Centre, so it is important at the outset that we are provided with the details, or consulted on what the Parish would like to see to augment the provision in the rest of the Parish.

10. Education/Neighbourhood Centre

The Master Plan indicates that there will be a school and stand-alone nursery, although it is now understood as with much of the Neighbourhood Centre facilities,

that this will not be completed in the first phases and left for the market to decide on its final make up . The delay in providing the school will have an impact on the present village schools and nursery provision. The latter, once built, will contribute to the traffic generation around the site, as this is one venue that will not be accessed by cycle/walking or bus, but by car. It is felt that more work is required to plan this facility to meet both the short, medium and long-term needs of the Parish and beyond. It is also considered that greater emphasis is required in the phasing of the Neighbourhood Centre to avoid the residential development proceeding without this being in active use that would result in potential environmental and social harm as well as economic implications for the village's current facilities and in turn the local highways.

11. Community Engagement

The Plan, we are advised, has been informed by the applicant undertaking regular engagement with Writtle Parish Council, the Village's Neighbourhood Plan Group, and other local representatives and community groups, which did indeed successfully occur earlier in the process. At this crucial juncture in the plan's progress, such consultation has been sadly lacking. As both the City Council and the developer are aware from frequent representation from the Parish Council/WNP, it is felt that they have not had sufficient input into the details of the Plan. Whilst the recent meeting has been helpful in clarifying a number of issues and enabled the Parish and the Neighbourhood Plan Group to voice concerns about details, it feels that it would be beneficial for further meetings to be arranged at appropriate junctures, so that the planning of the site reflects the WNP, the Design Guide and the VDS and community's aspirations as far as is feasible.

12. Timing

There has been some indication as to the timing of some of the development. In view of the impact that Warren Farm will have on the Parish, the City and in particular the highways, it is essential that the phasing is appropriate and set out at the earliest possible stage to ensure that the implications can be fully understood. It is also essential that the majority of the infrastructure is constructed ahead of the commencement of the construction of the dwellings. The work suggested for the Lordship Road junction and the other new roundabout on the A1060 needs to be completed at the beginning of the development. More accurate indication of the timing of all aspects of the Plan needs to be clarified.

Summary

In conclusion, although there has been some improvement to the level of detail, overall, as identified, this is deficient to a degree that Parish and many residents cannot envisage how the development will look or fit in/accord with/respect the natural and built environment. It is strongly felt that the development as shown is broadly generic and does not have sufficient regard to the unique settlement of Writtle itself which it closely adjoins. It is also felt that a great opportunity will have been missed to provide a forward looking and future proofed development to satisfy accelerating modern trends of which the City of Chelmsford can be proud, if the Master Plan is allowed to proceed in this form. If this Plan is approved without further agreed detail, it will not inform sufficiently the next stages, being the full planning applications and the phasing of the project. The Master Plan as it currently stands does not safeguard the comprehensive planning of the site and its assimilation into either the built or the surrounding natural environments.