

Objection by Burton Overy Parish Council to planning application reference number:

20/01572/FUL – Burton Overy Holiday Lodges, Carlton Lane.

This planning application (20/01572/FUL) was considered by Burton Overy Parish Council (BOPC), at a full council meeting held on 20th October 2020 via Zoom. The participants included the full parish council (5 councillors), the parish clerk, county councillor Feltham, district councillor Mahal and 20 members of the public. In total, BOPC received 27 objections from members of the community prior to the meeting. Informed by the concerns raised by councillors and members of the public both during the discussion and via the 27 objections, **BOPC strongly objects to this proposed development** for the reasons stated below.

In writing this report, BOPC has taken cognisance of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2019), the Harborough Local Plan 2011- 2031 (HLP), and the Burton Overy Neighbourhood Plan (NP) as made in November 2018.

The NPPF places a strong emphasis on **sustainable development** to ensure that the needs of this generation do not make lives worse for the next. Building on this theme, the HLP develops the concept of 'The Settlement Hierarchy'. In this scheme, rural villages and other settlements which do not meet the criteria for identification as 'Selected Rural Villages', are not considered sustainable locations for development and are at the bottom of the settlement hierarchy. Burton Overy, which is **a conservation area** (area CA9 in the HLP), sits in this lowest category which means it is not considered to be a sustainable development location. Full stop. There is no requirement for additional development unless, on balance, this fits other criteria such as tourism, or re-use of an agricultural site. This issue will be covered later in this report.

The NP recognises the **Special Character of Burton Overy**, a small village that, extraordinarily, retains its rural character, open countryside setting, uninterrupted and extensive views in all directions and largely intact medieval layout. The NP notes that 'the particular relationship of the village to the farmed landscape within and around it, are fundamental to Burton Overy's exceptional and precious character and attractiveness as a place to live'; a point exemplified by the fact that Burton Overy has farms at every entrance to the village, with Carlton Lane commented upon in the NP as providing such a setting. The blueprint for the future of Burton Overy expounded in the NP includes the protection of open spaces, ensuring that any development enhances the special character and identity of the village and its locality and the protection of the natural environment, including bio-diversity. In relation to the latter, the village undertook an extensive scoping exercise and scoring mechanism to fairly grade and assess its local surroundings. This process was consulted upon and agreed upon by the village residents. The result is a comprehensive asset inventory which is fully detailed in the NP.

Application 20/01572/FUL seeks planning consent for the building of a holiday complex comprising 5 separate lodges on the agricultural field designated as **Field 59** in the NP inventory. This field was known historically as 'Big Easom'.

Specifics relevant to Field 59

Field 59 is not within the Limits to Development specified in the NP. Any development outside of these limits must be considered as building in the countryside. It should be noted that field 59 sits in countryside designated as High Leicestershire. The HLP Policy S2 reflects the NPPF and states that building in the countryside must be 'carefully controlled to preserve the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'. The NP through its policy S2 reiterates this and attests that restricting building to within the Limits to Development will 'maintain the special landscape character of the

Parish and protect the countryside for its own sake as an attractive, accessible and non-renewable natural resource'.

Field 59 lies immediately adjacent to the boundary of the conservation area. This is immediately evident from the figure shown on page 51 of the NP. The adjacent field (field 58), which is wholly within the conservation area, is designated as an important open space in the NP (Fig. 8). Clearly any development in Field 59 will directly impact on an important open space within the conservation area. This is compounded by the higher topography of field 59 to the conservation area. In addition, there are listed buildings and private dwellings on Main Street with gardens backing on to Field 58. These properties have a direct line of sight to Field 59. The proposed development will also be readily visible from two well-used public footpaths (C2 and C16). The proposal argues that the new buildings, despite being over 8 metres in height, will be largely hidden from view by the existing hedge (supplemented by new planting). This argument leads to a conundrum. To fully mask the new buildings at all times of year the hedges will need to be thick, evergreen, and of considerable height. However, such hedges are not in keeping with the matrix of ancient hedgerows identified in the NP (see below). Such a hedge would necessarily obstruct the views east of the village currently enjoyed by residents and visitors. In any event the visibility of the car park, waste bins and storage shed from Carlton Lane will mar the landscape perspective for all passers-by, including the many, many walkers and cyclists who are attracted to Burton Overy. We are not in support of any development on this site but would comment that the specific design of the tall lodges is not sympathetic to, nor respecting of, the local character and history of the village.

Field 59 is recognised in the NP as being environmentally significant. Field 59 attracts specific mention in section 5D of the NP devoted to the Natural and Historic Environment (eg. Fig. 5a and Fig.5b). It is an environmentally significant asset within the wider swathe of adjacent fields that form a unique landscape when travelling from the centre of Burton Overy along Carlton Lane towards Carlton Curlieu. This setting has not changed for centuries and is covered in much ridge and furrow, with all fields continually grazed by local farms. Policy ENV 2 states that such sites should whenever possible be protected.

Field 59 is identified within the NP as a non-heritage asset. The NP states that ancient local fields, particularly those showing evidence of ridge and furrow practices, are important and locally valued as non-designated heritage assets (NP, Policy ENV 5). Field 59 displays a significant amount of ridge and furrow, which according to the NP is 'very well preserved'. In the context of a landscape with a rich ridge and furrow tapestry, the NP is clear that 'any loss would be significantly detrimental to both local and national heritage'. To be acceptable, any development in such a setting must protect and enhance this heritage. Whilst the proposal argues that the ridge and furrow can be preserved by raising the lodges on stilts, the development will clearly necessitate considerable groundworks in order to supply essential services to each of the lodges. This together with providing associated outbuildings and hardstanding for the paths and carpark will surely destroy much of this ancient field. Such destruction is unacceptable if we are to maintain the vision of preserving the character and assets of the village now and for future generations.

Field 59 is subject to the NP policy ENV 4. Policy ENV 4 relates to biodiversity, woodland, trees and hedges. Field 59 has an identified ancient hedgerow running along its northern boundary (NP, Fig. 7) and an established hedgerow formed from native species around its whole perimeter. It is very hard to fathom how the building of five lodges, a shed, hardstanding and 12 parking places, together with a greatly increased human presence, can be proposed as an ecological improvement for the site. The development cannot be supported as it would directly impact the bio-diversity which the NP identifies as a resource which 'should be protected'.

Field 59 is in the sight line from two of the eight “Valued and Important View Points” identified in and around Burton Overy. The two protected views are identified in the NP as view 3 and view 6. View 3 is adjacent to the site and crosses field 58, within the conservation area, from where there are valued views across to the East and South. The development will be directly visible from here due to the raised topography. View 6 is from further east towards Carlton Curlieu. This view includes a sighting of the church spire and is ancient, being unspoiled for centuries. The view of the tops of the lodges will in no way enhance this setting. The proposed development is clearly not compliant with NP Policy ENV 6 (Protection of Valued and Important Views) because it ‘introduces an incongruous element’ i.e., a ‘commercial development’ into an otherwise rural landscape.

HDC Heritage Assets

As previously stated, Burton Overy is a conservation village and a designated heritage asset within the HLP. The BOPC would like to point out that there are also two other nearby heritage assets east of the proposed development site towards Carlton Curlieu, namely SM57 and LL3. Carlton Curlieu is in the same census output area as Burton Overy and shares church services and community initiatives. Taken together, the value of the heritage setting of the area from Burton Overy across to Carlton Curlieu is very special and must be preserved.

Tourism

The NP does not identify any need for tourism in the parish. The only mention of tourism in the NP is in Policy E1 - change of use of agricultural building, which is aimed at diversification for farmers. BOPC continues to support this policy. For example, two local farms have reused outbuildings to provide tourist accommodation and there are two purpose-built properties focussed on the leisure industry located adjacent to a farm to the south of the village. Arguably, given its size, Burton Overy already has plenty of accommodation for visitors and does not need any more. There has also been additional growth of the leisure industry in very nearby Great Glen with the Pennbury Farm diversification project.

HLP Policy GD3 seeks “to strike a suitable balance between encouraging a thriving rural economy, maintaining and, where possible, improving the sustainability of smaller rural settlements, and conserving the character of the District’s much valued countryside”. The HLP recognises that tourism can help diversify the rural economy by including the provision of tourist accommodation. However, the development must be of a scale that is proportionate to the identified tourism need, subject to Policy RT4. Burton Overy, not being a tourist centre, has no identified need for additional tourist accommodation and does not fit the criteria specified in GD3. It is not well connected to other tourist attractions within the region, given that there is absolutely no public transport (RT4 1.b). Also, it is not one of the areas identified in the HLP as potentially benefitting from new tourist accommodation (RT4.2). Exceptions are possible where the proposal “involves the diversification of agricultural uses or otherwise benefits rural businesses and communities; and it’s scale and appearance respects the character of the countryside, the local landscape and the surrounding environment; and it does not adversely affect the local transport infrastructure”. In the view of the BOPC, the proposed development fails to meet any of these criteria. This proposal is not a farmer seeking to diversify, indeed it may impact existing farmers adversely. Our local farmers are unable to develop their land as farmers can in non-conservation villages. They accept this and act as custodians of the land. We will support our farming community through diversification where this is a viable option as outlined within the NP. We cannot support wider diversification of agricultural land where it was purchased as such and seeks to be developed for personal gain and which has very limited benefits to the community, does not enhance the environment and which is wholly against the principles and policies of the NP, and obvious community wishes.

Highways Issues

The lack of public transport means that the great majority of lodge visitors will need to use their cars to get to Burton Overy, and then for shopping and to access other key services. Similarly, for the majority of the visitors, car transport will be essential in order to reach recognised tourist destinations in the county and beyond. The location of the proposed development is singularly unsuitable to cope with the implied additional traffic pressure. Travelling westwards from the development site, down Carlton Lane to the centre of the village, the road reduces from the status of a minor country road to a narrow lane (of width just over 5m), within 50 metres of the sharp left turn at the Bell Inn. This is a dangerous corner given there is also a local road leading off to the right. In winter, water drains down here and freezes, as evidenced by the necessity of a grit bin in situ. Travelling eastward up Carlton Lane towards Carlton Curlieu, and beyond, the roads are no better able to support an increased traffic volume. These concerns should be seen in the context of the already heavy usage of Carlton Lane by large unwieldy farm vehicles. The future increase in traffic through the village due to the new housing development in Great Glen on Oaks Road is already a concern to residents. The proposed development clearly compounds this issue at a time we should surely be aiming to reduce car use not encouraging it.

As noted above the bottom of Carlton Lane is very narrow, with no footpath and a single street light. There is a significant road safety issue with site guests, particularly families with young children, having explored the village on foot, walking back to their lodges via a busy Carlton Lane. This concern is amplified for site guests returning to their lodges in the dark having visited the Bell Inn. The NP outlines the wish of residents not to have any more street lighting in the village, at policy DBE 1. Currently, the village only keeps on essential lights through the night (so as to protect bio-diversity and to see the night sky!). Any additional lighting is not welcomed. DBE1 applies to all lighting and expressly includes 'security lighting' of the type offered up in the proposal as being a suitable option to reduce light pollution. It is not a suitable option. Instead it will be a nuisance to residents on Carlton Lane and Main street in addition to impacting on bio-diversity.

It should be noted that farming is already impacted by increased traffic volumes through the village. The welcome sight of sheep being herded through the village along Washbrook Lane no longer occurs due to the traffic risks.

Noise Pollution and Other Issues

The proposal seeks to build 5 new lodges with a total of 11 bedrooms. At full capacity the accommodation will provide for a minimum of 22 people. Although the proposal describes the facility as a tranquil retreat, it is at heart a holiday complex and one can reasonably expect many guests to be holiday minded. The potential for noise and disturbance arising from guest activities (e.g. partying of various sorts throughout the year) is significant. Residents of Carlton Lane and the central section of Main Street are likely to take the brunt of this including from late-night revellers walking back up Carlton Lane from the Bell Inn. The development site is up a hill which amplifies noise towards the village. HDC will see from their historical records that Burton Overy is affected by noise when the cattle grids on Carlton Lane are damaged because it resounds on Main Street. In summary the proposed development will significantly impact on the quality of life of many village residents and on this basis alone should be rejected.

In addition, local farms may be impacted negatively. Sheep will continue to graze on the fields of environmental significance on three sides of Field 59. Accompanying dogs are a danger to livestock and this should also be considered.

Summary

Overall, this development fails to comply with national, regional and local planning guidelines and should be refused.

If allowed, the impact of the proposed development on the conservation village of Burton Overy would be profoundly detrimental for both residents and visitors alike. Local objections to this plan arise from its potential impact on the special conservation character of the village and its local landscape, the loss of an ancient field of current-day environmental worth and also on practical grounds relating to traffic through the village and noise and light disturbance. At risk in the long term is the unique character of a village fully immersed in and at ease with its natural environment. If the proposed site, namely grazing land outside the Limits of Development but immediately adjacent to the boundary of the Conservation Area, is deemed a suitable location for a commercial holiday complex, then what hope is there for any community seeking to resist inappropriate development in its locality. With the growth in tourism as a valid means to raise personal income, permitting this development will set a precedent County wide.

Burton Overy Parish Council

26th October 2020.