

Objection by BURTON OVERY PARISH COUNCIL to the Planning Application for the Erection of Five Holiday Lodges off Carlton Lane, Burton Overy (Ref: 21/01671/FUL)

This planning application (21/01671/FUL) was considered by Burton Overy Parish Council (BOPC) at a full council meeting held on 14th October 2021 in the Village Hall. The participants included 4 councillors, the parish clerk and 26 members of the public. Informed by the concerns raised by members of the public during the discussion **BOPC strongly objects to this proposed development** for the reasons stated below.

1. Background

This planning application is the resubmission of an earlier proposal (20/01572/FUL) which was withdrawn by the applicant only after over 60 objections had been received by Harborough District Council (HDC) from local residents and groups. (We note that this a very substantial number of objections given that there are only 135, or so, households in the parish.) At the time the BOPC also articulated its many concerns with the proposal. Prior to the withdraw of the application, the HDC Conservation Officer had noted in his report that "Altogether I consider that the impact of the proposal would be to diminish the rural setting of the conservation area to the detriment of its character and that this would cause harm to the setting of the conservation area, which is a designated heritage asset."

Given the above it is reasonable to consider what has changed in the new application that might mitigate these earlier concerns. Two significant changes are evident, namely the design of the lodges and a more extensive landscaping of the site. The proposed lodges are now single storey prefabricated wooden structures with flat roofs carrying sedum plantings. The extra landscaping entails more greenery within the site as well as new planting to fill gaps in the ancient hedges which define the site boundary. The BOPC contends that these changes do not fundamentally alter the scheme or assuage the concerns of the local community. Here we reiterate those arguments detailed in our earlier report which, in our view, remain valid.

In writing this report, BOPC has taken cognisance of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021), the Harborough Local Plan (HLP, 2019), and the Burton Overy Neighbourhood Plan (NP) as made in January 2019.

2. Burton Overy Conservation Area and its Surroundings

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 a 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. 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 and was fully endorsed by the NP Examiner at the time the

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NP was made. The result is a comprehensive asset inventory which is fully detailed in the NP.

3. Considerations relevant to the site of the proposed lodges

Application 21/011671/FUL seeks planning consent for the building of a holiday complex comprising 5 lodges on the agricultural field designated as **Field 59** in the NP inventory. This field was known historically as 'Big Easom'.

3.1 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. 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 single-storey lodges will be largely hidden from view by the existing hedges, when 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 comprised of native deciduous species. 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 note that the applicant has attempted to mitigate the visual appearance of the site through landscaping and building design but we do not accept that this will adequately mask the presence of a commercial holiday complex. We are not in support of any development on this site but would comment that a development consisting of a set of modern-looking prefabricated wooden lodges (of any height!) and of minimal architectural appeal is not sympathetic to, nor respecting of, the local character and history of the village.

3.2 Field 59 is not within the Limits to Development specified in the NP. The NP Policy S2 states that 'Land outside the defined Limits to Development will be treated as open countryside, where development will be carefully controlled' in line with guidance in both the HLP and NPPF. The NP through its policy S2 further 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'. As noted above, the construction of a group of lodges on this field will cause significant harm to the rural setting of the village of Burton Overy, a circumstance which the NP specifically seeks to avoid.

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- 3.3 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 is a very important point. Field 59 is a single component but nevertheless integral to the whole visual perspective when travelling out of the village along Carlton Lane. This is a setting of grazed fields has not changed for centuries. NP Policy ENV 2 states that such sites should whenever possible be protected.
- 3.4 Field 59 is identified within the NP as a non-designated 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 micro-screw piles, 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. Arguably, the proposed landscaping and screening will further serve to mask the ridge and farrow heritage of the site. 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.
- 3.5 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 storage shed, 12 parking places and waste storage area, together with the greatly increased human presence, notwithstanding some additional landscaping within the site and new planting in the hedge boundary, can be described as an ecological gain.
- 3.6 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 6 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. View 3 is from further east towards Carlton Curlieu. This view includes a sighting of the church spire and is ancient, being unspoiled for centuries. We accept that the new design single-storey lodges with flat roofs will not now be readily visible **above** the surrounding hedgerows. It is, however, a moot point as to whether these hedgerows will be maintained to such a standard that the holidays lodges are entirely hidden from sight. In any event this masking of the facility must

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surely fail in the winter months when the largely deciduous hedges lose their leaves. 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 modern commercial development into an otherwise rural landscape.

In short, the BOPC cannot support the change of use of valued agricultural land contrary to the principles and policies of its own NP and against the strongly expressed wishes of its community.

Footnote: At the Council Meeting held on 14th October two members of the public pointed out that the applicant did not own the entire hedge boundary of field 59. It was asserted that the hedge along the western perimeter is the property of a resident whose land runs adjacent to field 59 and similarly that the hedge along the eastern side belongs to a local farmer whose animals graze the adjacent field. The argument here hinges on the position of the associated ditch relative to the hedgerow. Clearly if the applicant does not own these elements of the boundary hedge, then no assurances can be given as to the degree to which these hedges will mask the presence of the holiday complex. A solution for the applicant might be to plant a second interior hedge along these two sections, albeit with yet further disruption to this historical setting.

4. Sustainable Development and Tourism

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. The Burton Overy 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. In this context the HLP clearly states that 'New tourist accommodation, attractions and other tourism-related development will be directed to Market Harborough town centre, Key Centres and Rural Centres in accordance with the settlement hierarchy...' (HLP Policy RT4).

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. The Burton Overy NP does not identify any specific need for additional tourist accommodation within the parish. The only mention of tourism in the NP is in Policy E1 - change of use of an agricultural building, which is aimed at diversification for farmers. The parish council continues to support this policy. For example, two local farms have reused outbuildings to

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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. However, this application is not from a farmer seeking to diversify but rather a speculative bid to build on a green field site.

Returning to the issue of scale and balance. The proposed development comprises 5 lodges each with 3 bedrooms. At full capacity the site will provide accommodation for 30 people, a significant number given the population of the village as a whole is only of the order 300. The injection of such a large number of visitors into the heart of a semi-rural community is clearly not a balanced solution to any perceived need for tourist facilities in the wider area. On this point alone this application should be refused.

Burton Overy is not well connected to other tourist attractions within the region and does not benefit from any form of public transport. Its only amenities are a public house (The Bell) and a dairy. Notwithstanding the questionable assertions in the proposal about the use of local footpaths and/or bicycles, the great majority of lodge visitors will need to use their cars to get to Burton Overy, and will then opt to use their cars 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. This is clearly at odds with all notions of sustainability and also the green agenda involving the reduction of carbon emissions promoted at all levels of government.

In the view of the BOPC, the proposal fails to meet any of the requisite criteria that relate to sustainable development as laid out in the NPPF and the HLP. The BOPC also maintains that the benefits to the local community in relation to employment opportunities and the support of local amenities (namely the public house) are marginal at best, certainly so when balanced against the extensive downsides of the project.

5. Traffic and Highways Issues

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 sharply 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

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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.

6. Noise Pollution and Other Issues

As noted above, at full capacity the site will provide accommodation for up to 30 people. Although the proposal describes the facility as a tranquil retreat governed by a suitable management plan, it is, nevertheless, 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 along Carlton Lane from the Bell Inn. The development site is up a hill which amplifies noise towards the village. Undoubtedly the (inappropriate) location of the proposed development, will negatively impact on the quality of life of many village residents. On this basis alone the proposal should be rejected.

7. 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 small community seeking to resist inappropriate development in its locality.

Burton Overy Parish Council
27th October 2021