

Wells Neighbourhood Plan Working Party

Minutes of the meeting with Holkham Estates

Tuesday 6th December 2022 11am Zoom meeting

Present:

Roger Arguile (RA-Chair), Cheryl Curtis (CC), Lindsay Dew (LD), John Edwards (JE), David Fennell (DF), Nichola Holmes (NH), Rachel Leggett (RL), Andrea Long (AL), Peter Rainsford (PR) - WNPWP
Pauline Catton from WTC, observing.
Geoff Armstrong (GA) from Armstrong Rigg Planning
James Bracey (JB) & Peter Mitchell (PM) from Holkham Estates

• Introduction

Geoff Armstrong of Armstrong Rigg Planning on behalf of Holkham Estates asked for a meeting with the WNPWP. Holkham Estates wish to discuss elements from their written comments with the working party. It was agreed that this meeting would be recorded and minuted.

After the introductions, AL summarised the current situation of the Wells NP.

RL is preparing the Consultation Statement and AL the Basic Conditions Statement. Both are statutory supporting documents.

“Locality” is currently undertaking both the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Habitat Regulations Assessment. These reports are also a statutory requirement for submission of the plan to NNDC. This work is due for completion in February 2023.

All the written responses from the July-Sept 2022 consultation period have been read and amendments are being made to the draft Plan for consideration by WNPWP during February 2023. The working party are still in listening mode and will be having further discussion about the key policies but expect to present the amended draft NP to the WTC in March for the Town Council to consider and decide whether the Wells NP is ready for submission.

• Holkham-owned land for development.

GA confirmed that the Warham Rise proposal outlined in spring 2022 was not part of today’s discussion. He has not been instructed to move that site forward at this stage. Priority is being given to considering how to develop the two preferred sites currently in the NNDC Emerging Local Plan. Site W01/1 (south of Ashburton Close) is planned as a residential mix of 24 dwellings.

Site W07 (north of Mill Rd) is proposed for a development of about double the size, also using the new “Policy Plus Plus” housing model created by Holkham Estates, and inviting the involvement of Homes for Wells who are primarily interested in providing intermediate rent accommodation to local key workers.

Policy Plus Plus proportions were defined as, for example on the Ashburton strip, 24 houses of which 10 would be open market houses for sale, 4 homes retained by Holkham for open market (private) rental, 4 social rental properties (allocated by NNDC), 2 first homes and 4 homes to be owned and rented by Homes for Wells. When asked, PM stated that the open market rental properties would be for principal residence, not holiday use. He suggested it was likely that more than half of the open market houses would be used as principal residence properties.

CC asked about Holkham’s policy on open market rent for long or short lets. PM confirmed the Estate uses its own criteria to place suitable tenants in its 278 properties. JB said that the average stay is over 15 years and with tenancy turnover at 20-30 p.a. the current Holkham housing waiting list is over 200. Properties are renovated as they become vacant.

JE asked for clarification of the extent of the Mill Rd. site which Holkham wishes to develop because the Estate put forward more land during the NP Call for Sites process in May 2021. GA confirmed it is only the original W07 site as defined in the emerging LP. PM said road traffic access to the development would be from Mill Rd.

JE asked how the housing mix on both sites would be secured and how robust is the viability of these projects. GA said the mix could be achieved through a "section 106 agreement". PM said the projects may not be viable in the current economic climate but he believed the developments may be possible within the next five years.

- **Principal Residence.**

GA and PM see the Holkham Estates PPP as more effective than a Principal Residence Policy (PRP) and stated that the policies conflict. They are concerned that a PRP could reduce the price of open market homes by as much as 20% and make a commercial housing development unviable. They are concerned about enforcement of a PRP.

- **Site WELLS1 and the Holkham Estates Covenant.**

RA raised the question of the Covenant which Holkham Estates hold over the triangle of land bounded by Two Furlong Hill and Mill Rd. The land is now owned by WTC but is designated an "open land area" by NNDC so the draft NP site shown as WELLS1 within that area would need to be permitted as a "Rural Exception Site" for Community Led Housing Development if the Covenant could be lifted. PR reiterated that the development was proposed as a non-profit making project comprising a mix of 45 Affordable Housing units. GA understood the possibility of such a development.

PM said that the Holkham Trustees would need clear information about what is proposed in order to decide on the circumstances under which the Covenant could be lifted. The working party will write to the Trustees with the necessary detail for their consideration. The next full Trustees meeting is in June 2023.

- **Non-Designated Heritage Assets; Local Green Spaces; Important Views.**

AL explained that all these items will be re-examined in the light of public comment and PR pointed out that the lists reflect the wishes of the local community. Mill Farm is a particular issue. GA would like it removed from the NDHA and LGS lists as it creates a constraint on the W07 site, even though that is not yet approved for development. CC tried to clarify for GA, JB & PM the Mill Rd. "important views" as shown in the draft NP and she asked what effects they thought the possible W07 development would have on local views and dark skies.

CC also asked about the substantial number of saplings recently planted in fields near the old Water Tower. PM said they were part of a programme of tree planting all over the Holkham Estate.

RA thanked GA, JB and PM for their time and input to the continuing work on the draft Wells NP. Following their departure from this special meeting it was agreed, after some discussion as to content, that AL and members of the wp will prepare the letter to Holkham Trustees and send before the next working party meeting:

Date: Friday 13th January 2023, 10.30am by Zoom.