

Parklands Residents' Association

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Adrian Arnold
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31 January 2007

Dear Mr Arnold

Response to the Public Consultation on Planning Application WNDC/2006/0154

We are writing to draw to the attention of WNDC further information that we have become aware of since submitting our original planning objection letters. This information relates to the playing fields at the former Parklands Middle School.

Residents understand that something must be done with the site if it is no longer needed for educational purposes, but what we remain firmly against is;

- i) The summary disposal of the playing fields
- ii) The development of new houses on an estate that does not have the basic infrastructure to support population growth

i) Summary disposal of the playing fields

We have recently become aware, through analysis of background documents, that the original budget put together to cover the £65m PFI agreement was calculated using a figure for Parklands Middle School based only on receipts from the sale of the land occupied by school buildings, and **NOT THE PLAYING FIELDS**. This fact is reported in the NBC 2002 Urban Housing Capacity Study, re. Parklands Middle School;

“2002 Schools Review states the school is to close. The majority of the playing fields are likely to be required by Northampton School for Girls, the rest is to be disposed of.”

and is confirmed in the more recent draft Surplus School Sites Planning Statement, which went to the NBC planning committee of 22 November 2006. This document states;

“The Interim Planning Statement only considers the site of the existing school buildings which is considered suitable for housing. The County Council are now looking to dispose of the whole site, including the school playing fields.”

The sale of these playing fields is clearly viewed by NCC as a windfall bonus, as it was not part of the original PFI agreement and was never mentioned during original consultations on the schools reorganisation project.

The new administration has undertaken not to increase council tax, and this promise has left NCC with no option but to drive through the sale of 'surplus' land. The fact that any surplus money will not contribute to the provision of education in the county is confirmed in a recent response to a Freedom of Information request, which states;

“Finally, should there be any money remaining from the sale of the sites, having met all the costs of the PFI, Section 77 compliance, and other school build across the town as a result of the re-organisation, then it would be for the County Council Cabinet to decide how this surplus money should be spent. “

In light of the evidence presented, we feel that this 'surplus money' is what is motivating NCC's revised strategy to sell off the playing fields at Parklands Middle School.

Northamptonshire County Council now have an extremely well-rehearsed and often repeated argument regarding disposal of the surplus school sites - to paraphrase, "If the sales do not go through as planned, all building works will stop, NCC will face financial ruin, and our children will suffer".

It is clearly in NCC's interest to persuade NBC and WNDC to view the sale of all sites as a necessity for the future of education across the town and to convince you that agreement was reached as far back as 2002 that all school playing fields must be sold. We trust that we have provided sufficient evidence to show that this is not the case for the Parklands Middle School fields.

ii) The development of new houses on an estate that does not have the basic infrastructure to support population growth

Drainage

Over the last two months we have been in regular correspondence with NCC about the drains on the Parklands estate and in particular on Oulton Rise (a major thoroughfare on the estate, serving a parade of shops). Each time it rains drains are lifting and water is gushing up and flooding down the hill. In response to this, NCC wrote

“Further to our conversation this week on the drainage problems in Oulton Rise, I thought you would appreciate an update to the situation. Atkins is responsible for cleaning and maintaining the gulleys, and are currently investigating further the reason for reported flooding in this location.

However I must explain that the problems of flooding may be due to lack of capacity in the sewers which are the responsibility of the water authority. To give an example a team recently visited a site where flooding was reported and found that the gulley was not blocked and the water was coming back up it due to lack of capacity in the main sewer.”

Since they feel that the insufficient capacity of the local drainage is source of the problem, NCC are now gathering evidence to take up this issue with Anglian Water. As part of the evidence gathering, we have provided photographs to show the council just how severe the problem is, and we have attached one such example to show what happens every time we have a downpour.

We are sure that you will agree that this is unequivocal evidence that, for whatever reason, the drainage provision on Parklands is not adequate. Our concern is that if this is the situation we have on the estate now, with existing properties, how can the infrastructure possibly cope with hundreds of new properties?

Traffic

Having undertaken our own 'survey', we are extremely concerned that the traffic assessment presented by Atkins is not a fair and accurate representation of the situation in Parklands.

Although we recognise that we are not professional surveyors, it was encouraging to see our concerns echoed in the reports submitted by both NCC's travel officer and Highways department, with comments such as

"I have serious concerns over the additional traffic movements this site would generate. In particular the effect it would have on the signal junction at Kettering Road / Spinney Hill Road, in further exacerbating the congestion which occurs during peak hours and at weekends at this location. The traffic study also does not take account of the expansion of NSG and the resultant vehicle trips that would transfer to this school from Parklands Middle as a result of the schools review."

We therefore endorse the officers' requirement that before any decision is made regarding this application

- 1) A full review of the submitted traffic assessment be undertaken to ensure that the committee are provided with accurate and representative information when making their decision.
- 2) A comprehensive traffic plan describing how any development will cater for the increase in demands on the already a highly used surrounding road be produced.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we also wanted to take this opportunity ensure that WNDC are fully aware that Parklands residents are not against development of the Middle school site per se. We just want to see the site developed for a use that has a good fit with the area, and will serve Northampton well into the future.

At the end of last year an article appeared in the Chronicle and Echo newspaper about the WNDC and the development of Northampton. Parklands residents were heartened to read the quote from Roger Mendonca, who stated that it was no good people saying they don't want development full stop, but that WNDC were willing to work with communities who may have alternative ideas for land use in their area.

For some time now residents have been keen to see the land at Parklands Middle School developed as some kind of sports facility, retaining as much of the playing pitch area as possible for continued use for sports. We realise that there is no point in having a pipe dream about sports pitches if they are not needed, and for that reason we have made approaches to many of our neighbouring organisations, and other sporting organisations across the town. Without exception all have agreed that they could make use of the facility for sporting activity, subject to obtaining the necessary funding.

Organisations that we have approached include;

Kings Park Youth Centre
Benham Sports Arena
University of Northampton
Northamptonshire Football Association
Northamptonshire County Cricket Club Steelbacks team
Parklands Tigers Football Club

If the population of Northampton is set to expand then sporting facilities will be needed, not just for the local Parklands community, but for the town as a whole. We understand that it is in WNDC's remit to ensure that expansion of housing is backed by adequate facilities to support the population growth. We therefore appeal to WNDC to work with the local community and these organisations to secure a long term future for these playing fields for the benefit of everyone.

May we also take this opportunity to thank all of the staff at WNDC for the courtesy and assistance that they have given to members of Parklands Residents' Association so far, and we trust that Roger Mendonca's statement in the press was not hollow sentiment and that you will be willing to work with us on our idea for a sports facility on the site of Parklands Middle School.

Representatives of our organisation would, of course, be willing to meet with any of your officers to discuss this further at any time, and copies of any correspondence referred to in this letter will be provided on request.

We would be grateful if you would notify us when planning application WNDC/2006/0154 is to go before the committee, as we wish to speak at that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Simon Hegarty

Simon Hegarty
Vice Chair Parklands Residents' Association
For Parklands' residents

Enc – photograph of drains on Oulton Rise