

## DRAFT PRESENTATION TO CITY PLANS PANEL – 27 SEPTEMBER 2012

My name is Colin Pool and I am employed separately by each of the Parishes of Thorp Arch and Walton as their Clerk. I have delegated authority to speak for them on Planning Issues. I am supported by Sheila Humphreys, Chairman of Thorp Arch Council and James Naylor, Vice-Chairman of Walton Council, who I hope will be able to assist me with any questions you may have. Both Councils have also recently met with Boston Spa Parish Council and discussed the content of this submission which is fully supported.

The parish boundary bisects the Thorp Arch Estate, with the Wighill Lane site being in Walton and most of the remainder in Thorp Arch. The two villages of Thorp Arch and Walton are historic villages –listed in the Domesday book.

Until 1942, this site was farm land until the site was requisitioned for a munitions factory. It wasn't chosen for availability of labour or transport links – it was chosen because it was in the middle of nowhere. The poor local road structure was irrelevant, as everything was delivered and removed by rail. There was limited local housing and the site had little if any impact. Since the site was closed and the Estate was established in the 1950s, there has been a steady increase in the number of dwellings in the locality. Since both villages are in Conservation Areas, development has been sympathetic with the original housing.

There are currently less than 100 properties in Walton, and about 350 in Thorp Arch. This proposal is to build 1150 units, which will almost quadruple the local population and put strain on the villages' facilities and infrastructure.

It is important that the access to the site is considered. To the North and East there are minor roads to sparsely populated North Yorkshire villages. One of these roads has a weight limit and the other has been designated as "Unsuitable for Heavy vehicles" as it passes through the centre of Walton village. To the West is a local road to Wetherby. This is so dangerous that on its three mile stretch it has three speed cameras. To the South, one must pass through the centre of Thorp Arch village and negotiate both the Grade 2-listed single-track pack-horse bridge over the River Wharfe and the junction with the A659 Boston High Street. This is a junction onto a busy road with local shops attracting many pedestrians. The construction of a further 150 or so properties on Boston Spa High Street at Church Fields, another 30 plus with planning consent in the village and another 150 at Newton Kyme which is only a mile away not to mention any additional housing which the current Site Allocations process may add will bring further pressure on the traffic systems which already suffer severe congestion at peak times now.

It is suggested in the brief for this Panel that the Parishes have been consulted on these proposals. They have not. All 3 Councils are in the process of developing Neighbourhood Plans. As part of that process, earlier in 2012 two of the Councils met with the management of the Thorp Arch Estate as a major stakeholder, in the case of Walton, twice. At none of these three meetings did the Estate indicate that it was planning a development of this size, even though it must have been plainly obvious that such proposals would have a massive impact on the strategies being put forward in

those Neighbourhood Plans. Indeed, the first time we became aware of this was in May, when representatives from the three Councils were invited to the estate offices. We were not consulted. We were informed of what was being planned. We were told that this was a brownfield site and as Leeds was so far behind on meeting its housing targets, there wasn't any point in resisting. It was said that even if the plans were rejected the Estate was confident of winning an appeal. We were not consulted on aspects like the proposed school, we were just told exactly what it would be. On the road system, we were told that there wouldn't be a problem as motorists would be encouraged to turn towards Walton on leaving the estate. Even if it was possible to achieve this, it might alleviate problems in Thorp Arch, but is not good news for Walton. We were also told that the Estate planned a drop-in session – on a Wednesday afternoon at the Estate offices. This was clearly not going to attract any local support and at the insistence of the Councils it was changed to a Saturday, but much of the publicity for the event was generated by the Councils and not the Estate. In Walton, there was a drop-in session on the Neighbourhood Plan about the same time. We know how many people attended and what they thought, because we asked them to complete a questionnaire, but we have received no feedback from the Estate on the number of people attending their drop-in session, nor what they said, although we have heard that there were some robust arguments. The Councils have subsequently met with Rockspring management. At these meetings, the Councils' concerns were raised – particularly those of traffic. They said that they would take away our concerns and look at them, but we have since not had a reply. It seems to us that we have been ignored and this pre-application is an attempt to steamroller a process in the face of local community opinion.

Much has been said of the targets on Leeds to come up with an allocation of housing sites for the next 15 years. The allocation for the Outer North East Area is 4600 units. These targets are based on the requirements for housing for people supporting the Leeds economy, not to find homes for those people employed on the Thorp Arch Estate, nor indeed to boost the usage of the Estate. They are there to boost the Leeds economy. A vast percentage of the people living in such properties will be looking to travel to work across the whole of Leeds. We know this, it's what our residents do now. Some might work on the Estate. But we're not convinced about the other large employers such as the prison and the British Library. Ask any prison officer where he or she wants to live and the answer is – anonymously, away from the prison. In recent years this prison has demolished and sold off housing because it had no requirement for it. In the last application by the Library to build new facilities, they assured us that there would be no increase in traffic as the new buildings were large warehouses accessing information robotically, and there might even be some redundancies. So unless there's a massive upturn in employment on the Estate, the vast majority of new residents are going to be living here and working elsewhere. A few of the residents will be catching one of the handful of buses, all the rest will be getting in their cars and looking to drive through one of the villages to their work elsewhere in Leeds. We do not think that the local road structure will support this.

We have been told that the Estate plans to build a primary school. With the additional children from 1150 houses, and the local school in Thorp Arch already full and with nowhere to expand and with the very limited spare capacity in Boston Spa schools where else will they go? Whilst there may be some space at primary schools in Bramham and Wetherby and secondary in Wetherby, the pupils need to be bussed either across the Thorp Arch bridge or on that road to Wetherby. Even with the offer to build a new primary school this will not be provided until sufficient houses are built and

occupied so it won't be there until well into the development period. Where will the children go in the meantime?

Primary and secondary education is not all. Local villages such as Bramham and Boston Spa have pre-school nurseries for toddlers. Whilst it is accepted that these are in private ownership with their own premises, any development on the Estate will need to make provision for buildings to cater for this type of activity. New housing will have its allocation of teenagers. Unless concerted attempts are made to provide them with leisure activities, they will make their own arrangements, which, if history is anything to go by, will result in anti-social behaviour such as under-age drinking, petty theft, vandalism and graffiti. The Estate proposals suggest that an arrangement can be made with the new primary school to let this out in the evenings for leisure activities. This will require substantial involvement with youth leaders and the like and substantial running costs. What is probably needed is a Community Centre with volunteers, who run the bookings, and do the cleaning and caretaking at a fraction of the cost. Also it would be available during school hours for pilates classes or senior citizens get togethers. Unless there is some building available for community activity the Estate will be a soulless place.

People living in the new houses will need access to medical facilities. The Boston Spa practice is full and has no room for expansion, and the nearest other facilities are in Wetherby. You are a pregnant young mother with a two year old toddler and you need to go to the ante-natal sessions in Wetherby. Your breadwinner has gone off to Leeds in the car, so you're left struggling on the bus together with the little one and his pushchair. And all the pensioners needing regular medical attention will be on it too. Are we really sure that's what we want or should there be a medical centre on site?

As the Planning Officer's report says, the adopted UDP review of 2005 does not allocate the site for residential development. What it doesn't say is that this was following a Public Inquiry to determine the matter.

The Planning inspector raised in his report the issue of location; the poor local road network, the problems with the pack horse bridge, Boston Spa High Street and Wetherby Road; the poor public transport and the lack of facilities for schooling, medical care and shops.

The key conclusion of the inspector's report is that the site as proposed was not sustainable. Nothing has changed since then.

In summary, we are opposed to this proposal proceeding on the following grounds:

The site is not designated for residential use within the current development plan. An application to bring it into the UDP for residential use was rejected at a Public Inquiry in 2005, and the key findings of the Inspector at that Inquiry remain valid today. It is the view of the affected communities that it would be wrong to proceed with the application for the proposed development ahead of the emerging Leeds Core Strategy as informed by the Neighbourhood Planning process which, for most communities has only just begun. In our view, therefore, the proposal is premature and the proposed development is of such a size and importance that it is in the public interest that its implications ought to be investigated and considered by the Local Plan process.

Moreover, as with the Inspector in 2005, we are deeply sceptical as to whether there is any current and pressing need for the development and, even if there was, whether the proposed development would address any such need.

The main reason for the inspector dismissing the appeal in 2005 was that the proposals were unsustainable. We do not believe that the proposals as we have seen them do anything like sufficient to address these issues and we believe that any proposal without them is flawed.

The consultation undertaken around this application has been minimal and mostly meaningless.

Without any feedback from our meetings with Rockspring, we find ourselves here with only one week's notice of a formal application and this presentation today. This underlines our belief that only lip service has been paid to the Consultative requirements for such an application.

The fundamental issue for our communities is not to prevent any development of this site but to be sure that there is a coherent, long term strategy for the future of the whole of the Estate. The proposal being pursued is for a part industrial/employment strategy and part residential. We believe the approach is not sustainable and this approach will result in piecemeal development of the site to address this failure for years to come. Consideration needs to be given to a proper highways solution which will settle the local communities' fears regarding traffic impacts. It requires a funding strategy linked to a fully self-contained sustainable residential development. We believe that the Industrial/ employment Strategy being pursued by Rockspring is not deliverable because of better local and regional opportunities available, all of which have far better transport links to the national motorway system.

### **In Conclusion**

Any development must be demonstrably sustainable. This means addressing all the issues about schooling and community assets as well as the highways issues from the outset. Failing to do this will destroy the two communities that we represent and will adversely and significantly impact upon Boston Spa as was so clearly articulated by the UDP Inspector.

Persuading people to buy homes in an area with little or no facilities, together with the nearby prison with its 3.2m high fencing, not to mention the close proximity to a sewage works and local authority tip is going to be difficult, and any developer needs to invest in environmental features to overcome these drawbacks.

We would look to the Estate to take these issues on board and work towards addressing them. We would expect to participate in a joint development team which not only includes the Estate, but also LCC planners looking at not only the issues that housing development brings, but the wider issue of the place of the Estate in Leeds City Council's future.