



Thorp Arch Neighbourhood Plan
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3 October 2012

THORP ARCH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP
PRELIMINARY, NON-BINDING ASSESSMENT OF SITES FOR DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE THORP ARCH
PARISH BOUNDARIES

This letter is written at the request of Leeds City Council (LCC) Planning Officers to help inform their review of potential sites for development as part of the Site Allocation process that forms part of the development of LCC's Core Strategy.

The view expressed in this letter are not intended to have any formal status, but are merely the current, preliminary, non-binding views of the present members of the Thorp Arch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (TANPSG). Those views may change as the TANPSG develops the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and, in any event, may be rejected by the community in any subsequent referendum.

In carrying out this preliminary assessment, the TANPSG has had regard to the developing Vision for the Thorp Arch community adopted by the TANPSG, namely that the community should be - **Active - Well run and safe- Well connected – Environmentally sensitive – Thriving – Well designed and built –Fair for everyone.**

The TANSPG has not undertaken a sustainability appraisal on any of the sites referred to below which are current SHLAA sites (that being the responsibility of LCC) and, having regard to the current status of the NP and the short time available, no sustainability appraisal has been conducted on the one non-SHLAA site referred to below.. Formal Equality and Diversity appraisals have not been carried out on any of these preliminary proposals as yet.

The potential sites for development have taken into account criteria agreed by the TANPSG and have had regard to the key objectives that have been developed by the TANPSG for the community, and the areas for protection and areas for improvement that the TANPSG has identified to date. In particular, regard has been had to the following :

1. The Thorp Arch Village Design Statement [2006]
2. The Conservation Area
3. The historic and rural nature of the Parish
4. The mediaeval Tofts and Cofts and Ridge and Furrow farming

5. The scale of any development and its impact on local infrastructure

Applying the above to the current SHLAA sites, namely 1239,1240,1241,1289,1290,2067 and 2068 (site 1055 is dealt with separately below), only 2067 was considered for further review. Site 2067 could sustain a development of 15 to 20 units without having any material impact on the local infrastructure. It is bounded by trees and housing to the North and West and by agriculture to the East and South. However, the site is designated as a "Protected Playing Pitch".

Outside of the SHLAA sites, the TANPSG has considered other potential sites. Following discussions with the Ministry of Justice at a senior level, the TANPSG believes that the MoJ would support a development of between 10 and 30 units on the site of the former Prison Social Club and (now demolished) prison staff housing off Walton Road. The scale and positioning of any development should have regard to the environmental aspect to the East of the current residential units on Northfields and Rudgate. There should also be an appropriate buffer zone between the developed area and the Prison boundaries.

The TANPSG is mindful that SHLAA 1055 on the Thorp Arch Trading Estate (TATE) represents a significant site within the Parish Boundaries and that the owners of TATE have advanced proposals in respect of the site involving a possible 1150 residential units, a primary school and certain other facilities. Limited "consultation" with the affected communities took place earlier this year. The owners of TATE put their proposals to a Pre-application hearing on 27th September. The TANPSG has begun its own preliminary community survey, which it intends to expand and refresh as the NP process continues. As at the date of this letter, therefore, the TANPSG is unable to express any definitive views of its own as to the sustainability or, indeed, desirability, of any material residential development on site 1055. The TANPSG's preliminary views on the TATE proposals were expressed by Parish Clerk, Colin Pool, on behalf of all of the affected communities at the Pre – application hearing.

For the purposes of this letter, however, we note only that TATE (or a significant part of it) was the subject of a Public Inquiry in 2005, on an application (Alteration 24/003) for the site to be introduced into the UDP as a strategic housing site for 1500 dwellings. The principal question for the Inspector at the Inquiry was whether the site would "*comply with guidance on sustainable development, housing land requirements and the sequential approach to housing*". In rejecting the application, the Inspector made the following relevant statements, observations and findings:

"It [the site] does not lie within urban areas identified by the UCS. It is in fact well outside the Main Urban Area [MUA] as defined by the Council.... It cannot therefore be seen as a form of urban extension and it would not be new development around a node in a good public transport corridor as existing public transport services are poor; there is no node and no such corridor.

..it conflicts with Policy P1 e) i) which says that market towns such as Wetherby should be the focus for development.

In terms of guidance on development in rural areas there appears also to be a conflict in principle in that the proposal involves much more than a limited amount of housing and is not infill development or peripheral expansion of an existing settlement.....it would in my view constitute a new settlement and its viability and sustainability should be examined as such.

The sustainability issue in this case therefore centres upon..... firstly, location and accessibility and secondly, the ability to build communities to support new physical and social infrastructure and to provide sufficient demand to sustain appropriate local services and facilities.

The existing road network in the area is acknowledged to be poor; it is rural in nature and poorly maintained. It has poor vertical and horizontal alignment, a poor surface, no footways or cycle facilities and no street-lighting. The Council state that it has a poor safety record evidenced by warning signs and three speed cameras between the A1 and TATE.

..it is clear ...that there would be likely to be a significant impact on the C78 to Wetherby and the road to Boston Spa. I accept also that, even allowing for a proportion of residents working on TATE, there would be longer delays at the main access to the site.

A packhorse bridge across the Wharfe, which is single carriageway with a narrow footway, provides the only convenient access into Boston Spa which is the nearest settlement other than Walton and Thorp Arch. The likely increase in traffic from the [site.... would, in my view, necessitate the introduction of traffic lights to control one-way flows. **This would add to the existing congestion and delays in reaching Boston Spa.**

The problem of access to and within Boston Spa does not stop there. ...Additionally, the junction of Bridge Road and High Street is a three arm priority junction where the High Street has priority. Given that traffic travelling into the village would come south through the traffic lights at the bridge in groups they would then be likely to experience a second similar delay at peak periods in exiting onto High Street. A pelican crossing some 10m to the west of this junction could add to the delay in making right turn movements, even if a second set of traffic lights were to be introduced at the junction.

Given my conclusion that despite the provision of basic facilities at TATE there would still be a high degree of dependence on Boston Spa for shops and services involving regular trips, I consider that the likely access problems weigh heavily against the proposal.

The highway network in the vicinity of TATE is rural in nature and poorly maintained, with poor road markings and surfacing, and a number of key junctions have severe problems in terms of visibility.

Existing public transport services to TATE are also acknowledged to be poor. The nearest railway stations are at Ulleskelf [some 11km/7 miles] on the York/Leeds line and Cattal [about 13km/8 miles] on the York/Harrogate line.

At present most people living or working in the area have little option but to use the car. **Not only is the service poor in terms of frequency but the journey times to Harrogate, York and Leeds itself are long.**

Whilst I accept that the improved services, if permanently provided, would offer the opportunity for existing employees at TATE to alter their mode of transport to work, I consider it highly unlikely that

large numbers would do so because of the bus journey times involved, particularly as it must be assumed that for many from Harrogate and York, for example, it would involve taking a local bus first to reach the TATE service leaving from those centres. This would add to the already lengthy total travel time between these places and TATE. There is little incentive to use public transport in these circumstances.

The Council consider that in making such provision [for schooling and medical services], and providing dwellings close to existing places of work, a high degree of self-containment would be achieved in TATE. **RD Alteration 24/003 states that a sustainability assessment will be needed to demonstrate that the proposal will provide a high degree of self-containment.**

...guidance in PPG13 [1997] [which] stated that the Government then aimed to avoid the development of "small new settlements" which are unlikely to reach a size of 20,000 dwellings within 20 years. **TATE is proposing to be a finite settlement of 1,500 dwellings or about 3,500 residents. In this context... with a population of 3,500 more than a corner shop, primary school and medical centre could be expected to be viable.**

The minimum threshold capacity to encourage local self-containment is 5-6,000 dwellings or 15,000 population, with the potential to grow to around 10,000 dwellings or 25,000 population. Whilst the range of population and the higher figure is related to the provision of a new secondary school, the proposed population of TATE is below the bottom of the range at which local self-containment is likely.

I am also conscious of the fact that the [site] would probably be developed over a 10 year timescale... In my view in these circumstances it is unlikely that the basic facilities and indeed the proposed bus services, would be provided until some years into the development period except with considerable and lengthy subsidy. Meanwhile residents moving into the area would be reliant upon Boston Spa and Wetherby for their everyday needs which would not be a sustainable situation. Even with some additions to a resident population of 3,500 I do not consider that sufficient service would be viable within TATE to achieve a level of self-containment that would constitute a sustainable settlement. It would be inevitable that residents would have to visit Boston Spa and Wetherby for services which it would not be possible to sustain in TATE.

I [therefore] cannot attach much weight to the argument that adding 1,500 dwellings to the existing trading estate would render TATE significantly more sustainable than the current use of the site. It is true that it would allow current and future workers within TATE the opportunity and choice of living close to their work. **Reference to a survey by previous owners of the site, Rutland Management Ltd,.... is said to have indicated that about 5% of the number employed on the site would be interested in living nearby. On present figures this would suggest some 190 workers might live in the proposed dwellings.**

I would doubt whether significant numbers of workers currently living in say York or Harrogate. which offer a quality of services, facilities and life that could not be approached by TATE. would actually choose to live near their work at TATE. In this respect I am also mindful that it is intended that TATE should retain its character as a former ROFF and that the residential areas are proposed close to the prisons, the BL

and existing and proposed industrial areas which, with the best of intentions and planning, would be unlikely to provide an overly attractive general environment or perception of the settlement.

We are aware that LCC classifies TATE as a Brownfield site and that that attracts different planning assumptions. Nevertheless, absent any evidence to the contrary, the only evidence on sustainability of the TATE site and its impact on the local infrastructure is the findings of the Inspector in 2005. Whilst clearly some circumstances have altered over the past seven years, in terms of roads, transport, facilities and infrastructure the areas of concern identified by the Inspector have heightened rather than improved.

Yours faithfully

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Chairman

For and on behalf of the Thorp Arch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

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