



THORP ARCH TRADING ESTATE ACTION GROUP
OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION 13/03061
2,000 HOUSES ON THORP ARCH TRADING ESTATE

Vol 18 – Objection to WYG Technicalnote 10 - Highways

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Thorp Arch Trading Estate Action Group

Objection to planning application 13/03061 – 2,000 houses on Thorp Arch Trading Estate.

Highways – response to WYG technical note 10

1. Introduction

Highways issues are central to this planning application. The Inspector at the UDP review concluded, based on the highways, accessibility and public transport provision to the site, that:

“...the location is not, and has been not shown capable of being made, sufficiently sustainable to warrant residential development of such scale”. Note that the scale was 1500 houses at the time, and that the public transport provision put forward at the review was **better** than that currently proposed.

So, what has changed to make the location sustainable?

The proposal includes a ‘relief’ road (now also referred to as a ‘link’ road). This was added at the request of Walton Parish Council, initially being called a Walton by-pass. However, despite many requests from TAG, no highways justification for the road has been put forward. Indeed it has significant disbenefits for the locality, as evidenced by the 300+ signature petition opposing it, and because it displaces traffic from Thorp Arch’s current ‘by-pass’ (Church Causeway) onto the main village street. An obvious retrograde step.

Apart from the ‘relief’ road, which just makes the highways situation **worse**, there are **no other concrete measures** to address the problems the Inspector identified.

2. Technical note 10

It is now over 5 months since the Plans Panel asked for more information on the highways position. After nothing appearing on the open access website until 10 April, what then appeared, ‘WYG technical note 10’, is a completely inadequate document. It gives peak-hour morning and evening figures for total flows on a number of local roads. It has the following major deficiencies:

- There is no information on the assumptions and traffic patterns inherent in the calculations.
- The numbers provided are peak hour two-way flows on certain local roads. Without the AADT figures, the directional split, and the calculation bases, these figures cannot be analysed or challenged properly.

- The traffic generation is predicted on an inadequate trip generation, and then dilutes vehicle movements still further by significantly overestimating the number of pedestrian and bicycle movements.
- The junction designs, despite being shown at the December Plans Panel meeting, have still not been made available on the website.
- The walking isochrone is still flawed, but does demonstrate that the vast majority of residents on the site will have to walk more than twice, and for some more than three times, the maximum recommended distances for a 'walkable neighbourhood', in order to access any facilities apart from primary school or whatever is eventually provided on site.

3. Challenging the conclusions of technical note 10

Because of the deficiencies in the information presented, there are limitations to what analysis can be performed. TAG put it to the 'common sense' test. Does it match with the current experience? Do the high-level traffic numbers appear sensible? In short, is it credible? The clear answer is **NO**, as follows:

3.1 Common sense

3.1.1 Background

The highways network around Thorp Arch is remote and rural in nature and the River Wharfe and A1(M) act as a natural barriers for access. There is only one crossing of the river - an eighteenth century single track 'packhorse' bridge. This alternating-one-way-flow system operates on a courtesy basis. It interacts with the restricted flow on Bridge Road (due to required parking) and the T-junction with the A659 (with very tight turning radii). Northbound vehicles, particularly large vehicles and busses, often run over the pavement in order turn at that junction. The result is a 'chaotic' system, not amenable to traffic modelling. Delays and queues are unpredictable but frequent. In addition, when Bridge Road becomes log-jammed, vehicles have to mount the narrow pavements on to unblock the system. This is a daily occurrence.

From WYG's own figures the bridge complex is effectively at capacity now. The other main access to the site is via the Wetherby-Walton road, which crosses the A1(M). This road is shown to be at stress level of 75 and 125%, with approximately 1,800-2,200 cars per hour in the afternoon peak, as against 700 currently. This road has speed cameras and is dangerous even at current traffic levels. Even the current volumes create queuing at the Privas Road roundabout, and also at the 'Mercure' roundabout. The extra slip lane on the A1 bridge will not be in any way sufficient to preclude far greater queues, and consequent rat-running through Spring Lane to the A1(M) northbound junction.

3.1.2 Traffic Impact:

The WYG submission, by inspection, contains errors. It demonstrates both incorrect figures and incorrect modelling.

A Trip Rate of 8.964 quoted in the Applicant's Transport Assessment revision 3, November 2013 is lower than that for the less isolated East Leeds extension (10.015) and the assumptions for the number of walking and cycling trips are much too high (table 7.4).

If people would walk/cycle FROM the site, then currently the employees working on TATE would be walking/cycling TO the site. There is very little non-motorised commuting to TATE at present. It is far too remote. These percentages should be reduced virtually to zero.

In the WYG section relating to traffic flows on the Bridge, it states the maximum observed queues were of five and two vehicles respectively. It goes on to say that it took approximately six seconds to disperse and concludes that...

"given that the existing traffic flows at the Bridge are currently accommodated satisfactorily throughout the day and during peak periods and that the addition of the flows associated with the proposals do not have any significant impact, it is considered that the development will not have any adverse effect upon the operation of the Bridge."

As local residents, who use the bridge on a daily basis, know only too well this is patent nonsense. The current traffic flows are NOT accommodated satisfactorily during the day. On many occasions queues form, the approach to Boston Spa High Street becomes logjammed and delays are counted in minutes not seconds.

The photographs below were taken on April 29th 2014 ... clear evidence that their claims are untrue.



Queues of up to 25 vehicles were observed and gridlock ensued. The very next day (April 30th) there was an accident on Bridge Road resulting in serious damage to four vehicles. This highlights the fact that Bridge Road is at capacity already.

There are other errors in the document. Perhaps the most glaring is the fact that traffic reduces over the bridge between now and 2023 base case (without any development)! Also traffic volumes on the link road are shown as less in the scenario when traffic is assigned to that road, than in the scenario when the maximum volume of traffic is assigned to the High Street. Not credible. The data is flawed and their conclusions invalid.

There has been talk recently of a 'mitigation pot' to be used by Thorp Arch Council in the event of highways issues occurring after the development has started. Traffic lights in Boston Spa or at the bridge have been mooted. Traffic calming measures through Thorp Arch Village have also been mentioned. Quite how this will solve the above problems has not been explained. They would just be tinkering at the margins of the problem, and not going to the root cause, the inadequate highways network in general. This development is unsustainable and will completely overwhelm the local environment.

The new junctions with the 'relief' road (except the Wood Lane one) are shown as having traffic lights and being constructed to prevent some turns. At the UDP review, Leeds noted that junction improvements should be "appropriate to a rural setting". Complicated, restricted-turn, traffic light controlled junctions may be appropriate for Leeds' city centre: they are certainly not suited in this rural environment. Even Wetherby has no such junctions.

Many of the traffic volume numbers look extremely 'suspect'. For example, in the High Street case, pm flow, with development, it shows the 2023 volume on Wood Lane as 461. This will all be northbound because of the one-way 'plug'. At the same time it shows the flow on Church Causeway **reducing from 268 to 59**. In the afternoon peak, much of the Church Causeway flow is traffic to/from the Prison and British library, as well as from the housing along Walton Road and in Walton itself. Where has this traffic gone? It feeds directly onto Church Causeway/Walton Road, so the introduction of the 'relief' road should not affect these movements at all. This is obvious nonsense.

Detailed examination of many of the other traffic volume figures presented in technical note 10 arrives at similar inexplicable comparisons. This objection will be followed up with addenda covering some of these, as TAG get the opportunity to further analyse the numbers.

3.1.3 Walk Distance Isochrones

It is unclear exactly where the centre of the site is in the WYG submission. Yet again the walking distances have been fudged. The applicant's egress route from the site is indicated as a direct line, which is unrealistic, and also seems to be outside the site boundary, and crossing land not in their ownership. The isochrone has clearly been manipulated in order to include some shops in Boston Spa within the 2km distance (2km being inappropriately used).

The site fails ALL major accessibility criteria. More than half of the development will be in excess of 2km from Boston Spa, the average for the site being 2.5km. Is it realistic to expect a resident to undertake a 5km round trip, up and down several steep inclines, and on narrow dangerous footways, to visit the doctors surgery?

A 'comfortable' walking neighbourhood range is 800 to 1,000m and there are virtually no offsite facilities within that range. A convenience store and 'other small retail outlets' are planned on site but, it appears, only after some 836 houses are built. Even at WYG's figure of 150 houses/year (which TAG consider far too high to be realistic) that would take over 5 years. See TAG Objection Vol 16 Infrastructure and Sustainability. All other domestic requirements will involve a journey to Boston Spa or Wetherby.

3.1.4 WYG Traffic Flow Comparisons

It is unclear as to what these comparisons are trying to achieve. There is no conclusion.

One can only assume it is to illustrate that 'similar' villages have higher traffic flows than Thorp Arch. They are not similar. Thorp Arch's population is 700, Otley is a market town with a population in excess of 14,000!

In all cases the roads illustrated are 'A' roads. Double yellow lines are clearly evident. The road through Thorp Arch is not even classified as a 'B' road. It would appear that the photograph is an archive one. The pictures below demonstrate current on-street parking in Thorp Arch village. Any additional traffic generated by the proposed development would cause considerable disruption and be a safety hazard to nearby Lady Hastings School.



3.1.5 Safety

TAG have now seen the 'safety audit' report. It covers only the new junctions, and is limited to analysis of sight-lines.

The real safety issues of this development are:

- Wood Lane. The intention is to put a one-way 'plug' at the north end of this road. Since there are no road junctions between Thorp Arch village and the north end of Wood Lane, apart from one farm exit about 300m north of the village, it means the entire stretch is effectively one way. The vehicles using that road will not expect any vehicles to be travelling southbound. The sight lines are poor. Yet **there will be both cyclists and farm vehicles allowed to travel southbound**. (The farm vehicles can originate from surrounding fields). This is a recipe for head-on collisions.
- The Village (Thorp Arch main street). This road requires parking on both sides for the residents, many houses have no other parking provision. The photo above shows this. It also has a primary school located on a corner with poor visibility. Buses frequently get blocked from making the turn from Dowkell Lane, or in the Village itself. A safety analysis of its operation in the High Street scenario is required.
- Pedestrians. The local footways are inadequate and dangerous. Particularly the narrow footpath leading down to the bridge from Thorp Arch, and the pedestrian strip crossing the bridge itself. They are particularly unsuited to either any form of pushchair or wheelchair, or to use by anyone unsteady on their feet. This also needs a proper safety audit.

4.0 Summary

Throughout this paper it has been shown that the rationale used by the Applicant to form conclusions is suspect. Further, by comparison with surveys of the current traffic patterns, it is clear that the Applicant's models fail to predict traffic flows which meet the "common sense" test, and therefore cannot be used as a basis for extension to other scenarios.

The accessibility and public transport provisions of the site are not in accordance, nor even close to being so, with the requirements of the Leeds Core Strategy and national guidance.

This latest technical note 10 has done nothing to resolve the outstanding issues, or demonstrate sustainability. Instead, after so many additional months of effort, it is a clear demonstration that the Inspector was correct in his analysis:

"...the location is not, and has been not shown capable of being made, sufficiently sustainable to warrant residential development of such scale".

TAG. 19 May 2014.