



Wirksworth Civic Society

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WIRKSWORTH CIVIC SOCIETY COMMENTS ON TARMAC'S PROPOSALS FOR NEW HOUSES AND EMPLOYMENT ON LAND OFF MIDDLETON ROAD, & MIDDLE PEAK QUARRY WIRKSWORTH

NOTES FROM A SMALL TOWN

IT IS ESSENTIAL that any proposal be in conformity with the Wirksworth Neighbourhood Plan and in particular with the Plan's concept statement for development of this land.

Wirksworth Civic Society's main concern is the impact that such a large number of people and cars would have on the existing town. A development of 126 new homes will mean a possible extra 200 vehicles on the streets, and if the development in Middle Peak Quarry were to go ahead on the scale proposed, this could increase by about 2000. Narrow streets and lack of car parks must be the first concern. Our small historic town is a precious asset, brought back from a condition of decline in the 1970s to physical and economic well being. It cannot support such a massive expansion in population without severe impacts upon its character.

Existing Character: The Neighbourhood Plan includes a Character Statement for the town as a whole. This should be used as a guide to ensure development proposals respect the town's special character. The following comments relate to the Middleton Road/Cromford Road Site in particular : Study of early maps and other documents reveals a landscape of historic lead mining, early narrow field enclosure of medieval strip fields, quarrying, and latterly natural regeneration of plants and trees producing a rich ecology. Inevitably the development will impact severely upon this. In particular the development should not negatively impact on the setting of the Rantor and Nether Ratchford lead mine scheduled monument or on the area of associated mines and strip fields which is identified as a High Priority Lead Landscape. The integrity of this landscape should not be damaged or masked by development within it. Every effort should be taken to minimise damaging impacts.

Urban Form: A clear design philosophy is essential. Many questions need to be answered as to the type and style of housing needs of Wirksworth, and this must be evidence-based. The Society would strongly oppose the building of houses which are outside the price range of local people. The relatively low density proposed seems appropriate. As does the scale of two storey houses. The choice of brick for nearly all the development does not seem appropriate. It is recommended that the proposed development be referred to a design review forum - either the regional one OPUN - or a more local one. Whilst the disposition of the housing, in two groupings, does largely respect the site's landscape character the grouping of industrial sheds does not. This proposal for a 1980s type industrial estate seems totally inappropriate and sits clumsily in the historic landscape. There are already empty industrial sheds in the town. Wirksworth has latterly become a town of makers and people working in the creative industries. Live/work units would be much more appropriate and could be built in the 'brown-field land shown as 'Potential Station Car Park' which the Society doubts is needed. Has Wyvern Rail been consulted? Are they prepared to take on the maintenance and

would it be used? Alternatively this part of the site might be suitable for a new joint infant/junior school. The Society does not believe Middle Peak Quarry is an appropriate location for the school, largely because of distance from the town centre and associated access problems.

Recreation Routes. The Society is pleased that the proposals take account of the recreational routes through the site.

Access roads. The proposed road engineering of the access off Middleton Road urbanises this rural lane. Design approaches advocated in Manual for Streets and Manual for Streets 2 should provide a steer rather than using standard designs from the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

The Civic Society has received a number of representations saying the demolition of Rock House would be a wasteful and unnecessary loss.

The Society notes that the Sustainability Appraisal of the Draft DDDC local Plan commissioned from ClearLead Consultancy Ltd by the District Council identifies, for this site, negative impacts upon: The historic landscape and in particular the lead mine scheduled monument, geology, ecology and the setting of the Wirksworth Conservation Area.

MIDDLE PEAK QUARRY

Quite aside from the considerable logistical problems of development in a quarry the provision of 645 houses here would be a massive increase in the size of our small town, presenting major challenges in terms of town centre parking, road cycle and pedestrian access, sewage, health care and schools. The only reason it is being seriously contemplated by the local planning authority is because of the government's pressing demands and the pressure from protesters in Matlock, Ashbourne and other parts of the District that they should not have to accommodate any further growth. It has quite reasonably been described as 'lazy planning'.

However the Society would not totally oppose some development here if the following provisos were met.

- A. A commitment from the local planning authority that there would be no further green field development within the next 20 years, thereby protecting the town's outstanding landscape setting.
- B. A liaison group be set up to shape the proposals in line with local needs, with the majority of places on the group given to representatives of the Town Council and with one place given to the Civic Society and one place to Transition Wirksworth.
- C. A design forum be set up to work with the developer's design team to produce a design vision, with advantage being taken of such a discrete location to allow experimental energy saving design and the provision plots for self build housing.
- D. Omission of the green field parts on the west side from the development site.
- E. A much lower limit to the number of houses to be constructed, in line with the first draft of the 2016 local plan.