

LAND SOUTH OF CHURCH LANE – RIDING MILL

LPA Ref: 20/01932/FUL. APPEAL

BROOMHAUGH AND RIDING PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE

Introduction

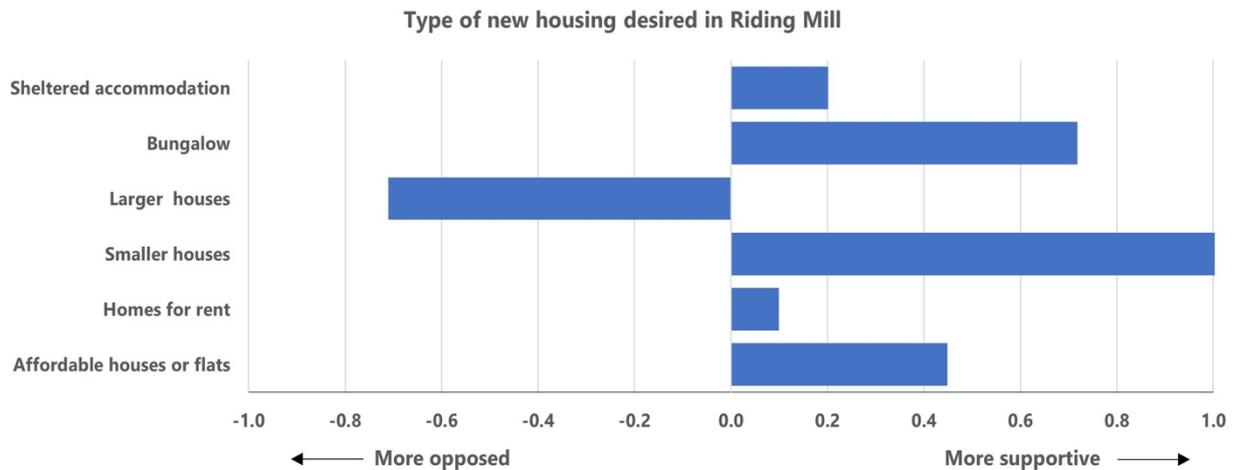
NCC's refusal of the application included 7 reasons, and whilst some of the points have been answered by revising the application and adding details, there remain the main questions regarding context and inappropriate development in the green belt. The PC support the LA in backing the refusal.

This objection includes information and evidence that was not available when the original application was submitted. It is perhaps worth noting that there was no serious effort to engage or consult with residents or the Parish Council. The applicants did circulate a letter prior to making their initial planning application, but the majority of responses were simply ignored and there has been no attempt to discuss design approach or access with the village.

Village survey

Northumberland County Council agreed, in October 2020, to the Parish Council's request for designation as a Neighbourhood Area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning. The first action of the Parish Council was to undertake a village survey (<https://ridingmill.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BRPCsurveyReport.pdf>). Some 54 per cent of those eligible to respond did so, making the results statistically significant. One question asked whether residents perceived a need for further housing in Riding Mill; a subsequent question asked them to say what type of housing they might like to see in any new development.

The answer to the questions is illustrated in the figure below and is self-evident. Most age groups were in favour of some new housing, but the survey revealed that all age groups were opposed to the development of larger houses. Additional comments included a desire for 'age restricted' developments with housing specifically designed for older residents and a desire for houses which will attract families with young children, thus effectively supporting the school and pre-school. Several respondents stressed the need for sustainable housing, affordable housing and energy efficient housing. Several respondents explicitly stated, in addition to answering the questions, that they were against any new housing. Many respondents explicitly stated that they were strongly against building in the green belt.



Source: Broomhaugh & Riding Neighbourhood Plan: results of a parish survey

Emerging neighbourhood plan

Following the survey, the Parish set up working groups to develop the content of a Neighbourhood Plan. On receipt of the survey results we had a Housing Needs Assessment carried out by Aecom and this indicates the need for smaller homes in preference to large houses. Whilst we recognise that nationally there is some demand for them, there appears to be no demand from residents to add to the existing stock of large houses. Indeed, all the large houses that have been built recently have been sold to people moving to the village from elsewhere.

There is an overwhelming desire amongst villagers to retain the green belt, with its open vistas and wildlife habitats. Indeed, that is a key reason for many to live in the village. The County Council, in its assessment of green belt contribution, considers that the fields and woodland to the south of the village make a significant contribution to green belt purposes. The Fold House proposal is for a development that will be right in the middle of this high contribution area and would be completely contrary to the principle of preserving openness. See figure 2 below.

Context

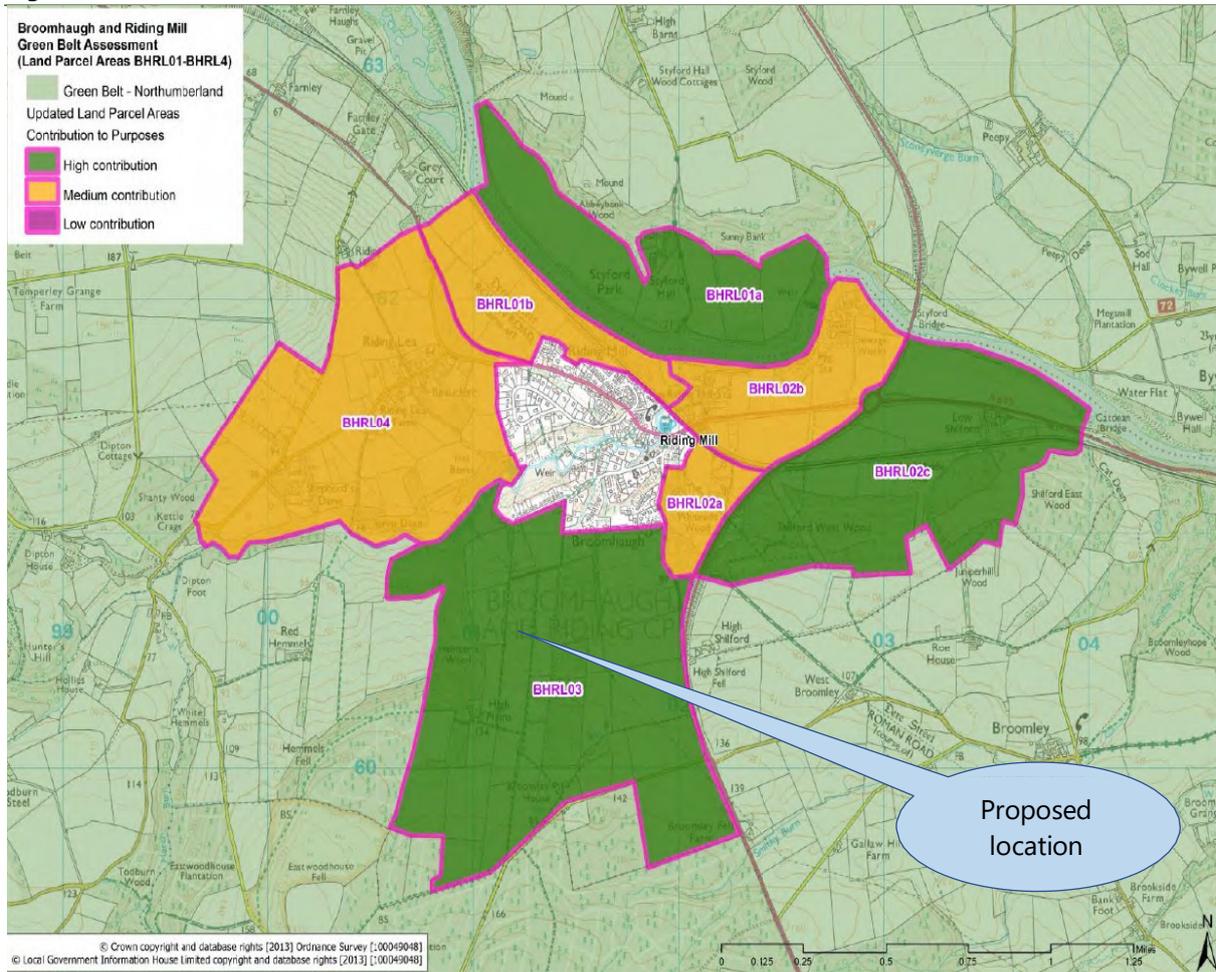
The current National Design Guide places context as one of its ten criteria for any new development, “in order to nurture a sense of community”; and suggests buildings should “enhance their surroundings” and “relate well to the site in its local and wider context”.

This proposal claims to be environmentally sensitive but that seems to be wholly inconsistent with the concept of building in the Green Belt on land that NCC, in its emerging Plan, and the local population, consider to be a crucially important part of the local environment. This open field is a vital part of the Green Belt which was designated a long time ago. The environment would be best served by allowing this field to develop into a wild flower meadow. In addition, the plan to “upgrade” the current access lane to allow private cars to drive to the site is similarly at odds with the claimed environmental attributes of the scheme.

In our opinion the proposal fails the test that it must significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area. As part of the Neighbourhood Plan, the village is developing a design code which calls for respect and understanding of the scale and character of existing and surrounding buildings. A house on the scale of that proposed clearly fails this criterion.

Moreover, the footpath that extends from Church Lane has been identified as a potential protected open space by the Neighbourhood Plan working group on the natural environment.

Figure 2: Green belt assessment



Design

The only valid arguments that can be used to build on the green belt are that the proposal is outstanding or innovative and that the benefits outweigh the harm. Para 143 of the NPPF says that by definition building in the green belt is harmful except in very special circumstances. We contend there are no special circumstances here.

The Parish Council would like to reiterate their original objections as to the 'exceptional' quality of the design. As the appellant's architect states, design quality is somewhat subjective, and given there were only 3 architects on the design review panel, this is a limited view. The panel were giving their opinion mostly on the design, not the context. The fact that the architect of the proposed house sits on the design review panel means that he does have a relationship with them, and therefore there may be a conflict of interest.

The architect's claim that the PC have no design qualifications to back their objections is untrue. The Chair has been an architect for over 40 years and, although now retired, spent many years as a director of a firm who had considerable experience of submitting applications for para 79 houses (and their previous iterations), both successful and unsuccessful.

The photos below show similar designs



Compare the submitted design :



This suggests that the design, whilst it may well be good, is not necessarily exceptional, and is not innovative. The PC also does not recognise that it would help to raise standards of design.

The house is large in scale and the reference to other large houses in the outlying areas of the Parish is misleading because almost all of them are old, probably pre WW2 and were built before planning legislation was initiated in 1947.

Interestingly the revised relevant section of the NPPF (as para 79 becomes para 80) omits the word innovative, and relies solely on excellence of design. In our opinion, the proposal fails the test that it must significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.

Services

The main thrust of the argument for the Fold House development is that it is of such an innovative and exceptional design that it can be built within open countryside under NPPF paragraph 79.

Whilst the appellant doesn't claim all the elements of the services design are innovative, they do claim that all together they are innovative. We fail to see the logic of this argument.

We assert that there are no new technologies involved in the design and that the sum of the parts does not add up to anything exceptional enough to warrant the very special circumstances required for building in green belt in open countryside.

In support of this assertion, we would like to submit the following evidence:

The use of inter-seasonal heat transfer and its use, coupled to dynamic thermal walls is not a new idea and therefore not sufficiently innovative to merit VSC or the concept of exceptional design.

The appeal correctly makes the case that the technology has surpassed that of 'passive house' or 'Passivhaus' technology, However, the original application makes the claim that: *"the 'Active Home' strategy is an innovation. the combination and operation of the dynamic thermal wall/earth battery are new developments". Statement of Community Involvement page 13].* The architect still claims in the appeal that there are new technologies being combined with old. This combination is established existing technology. When Mark Jansen of *Property Week* published an inspirational list of Britain's 20 Greenest Buildings in **June 2008**, he included Howe Dell School as the second building on this list because of the inclusion of Inter-seasonal Heat Transfer.

The use of deep bore holes to store heat, described in the application as 'interseasonal earth batteries' is a development in this technology, promoted by firms such as ICAX who report to have installed such 'inter-seasonal heat transfer banks' and have been installing them for more than 13 years, in at least ten properties, which were noted in the appendix to our original objections (repeated below for ease of reference), along with examples of those with dynamic walls.

Photo-voltaic cells, positive ventilation systems and wind turbines are all established technologies

There is no special reason to build this house in the green belt. It could deliver its claimed carbon benefits in any location.

Conclusion

For the above reasons, we believe this to be an inappropriate development on this site, and would urge the inspector to confirm the original refusal.

Appendix to services

Examples of interseasonal heat transfer banks schemes

- HM Prison, Garth (completed 2007)
- Howe Dell School (completed 2008)
- Merton's Acacia Centre, an intergenerational community centre, (opened 2010)
- Tesco's new store at Greenfield, Oldham (opened 2010)
- The new 16-19 College 'Suffolk one' college at Ipswich (opened 2010)
- Wellington Civic & Leisure Centre, Shropshire, (opened 2012)
- UTP for its new factory at Daedalus Airfield (opened 2016)
- A new build for Hackbridge Primary School (under construction)
- The Owen Square Community Energy Project at the Easton Community Centre, Bristol
- Private residences such as Cambridge Terrace, Regent's Park, London, where the inter-seasonal heat transfer system is being fitted to this grade 1 listed Nash building

Another company, Rehau (UK) have used solutions in some buildings, which combine 'inter-seasonal heat transfer' with 'dynamic thermal walls'. Examples include:

- Oakley Court Development, Gerrards Cross
- Leicester University Centre for Medicine.

Solex (uk) have also been fitting the ICAX system to UK domestic homes.