

County Councillor comments on Planning Application S/2791/14/OL: 199 homes off New Road, Melbourn

In principle I support the development of affordable homes in the Melbourn area. There is a particular need for affordable housing for lower earners and young people seeking to work and live in the area but for whom affordable housing is in short supply. This need is in the process of being systematically addressed through planning applications that have been approved within a strategic planning policy framework and which are aligned with the Melbourn Village Plan.

I cannot support a planning application submitted for consideration in the absence of an agreed strategic planning policy framework, due to the absence of an accompanying plan to meet changing infrastructure needs of unplanned population growth. Allowing the development of a large number of homes without strategically planned accompanying infrastructure would harm the village of Melbourn by creating significant new problems relating traffic conflict, inadequate provision of early-years education, and an over-subscribed local surgery. Neither the parish nor county council would be equipped to solve these problems; furthermore other speculative planning applications in nearby villages (Barrington and Foxton) will compete for the same limited early years education and health services, and place some additional pressure on Melbourn traffic through the need to access services based there. indeed it is precisely for these reasons that growth must be handled within a strategic framework that oversees the creation of necessary infrastructure.

National Planning Policy Framework and Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire Transport Strategy and draft South Cambs Local Plan guidance require new developments to be sustainable, and where transport and travel are concerned, the necessity of fostering a culture of first choice for non-motorized vehicle travel. It should be noted that while some walking and cycling currently takes place in Melbourn, the predominant travel culture is one of car use. This planning application fails to persuade me that a significant proportion of the prospective new population would elect to travel within Melbourn and the surrounding area other than by car. There is nothing in the application to suggest that the new population will behave differently to the existing one. This will create inevitable significant additional pressures on existing points of traffic conflict.

As a local councillor, most of the casework brought to my attention by local residents is transport and traffic congestion-related. I have been asked to address multiple points of traffic conflict in the village and surrounding area, and cannot see that these could withstand additional pressure.

1. Orchard Road between New Road and Water Lane: unsafe for pedestrians due to lack of footway and pedestrian refuge on section leading to Water Lane. Orchard Road is used as thoroughfare to Water Lane and Back Lane, and also at peak time as a rat run alternative to the High Street.
2. Norgetts Lane one-way traffic system regularly abused. Police aware.
3. Beechwood Avenue: rat running to Water Lane and Back Lane.
4. High Street - Water Lane one-way traffic system - heavy at peak time, no pedestrian refuge for turn-in point from the High Street.
5. Back Lane – rat running and industrial estate traffic; no pedestrian footway or refuge.
6. Multiple traffic conflict issues in the High Street between The Cross and Water Lane, mainly around volume, congestion and parking. Police aware.
7. The Moor: speeding in the vicinity of Little Hands Nursery and Melbourn Village College.
8. Station Road: congestion in both directions.
9. Dolphin Lane and Rose Lane: rat running between High Street and Station Road to avoid signalled junction, though lane is for access only.

10. Cambridge Road: excessive speeding near edge of village dangerous for cyclists.
11. Mortlock Close: primary school pick-up-time parking on junction points with Mortlock Street.
12. Traffic signals at the Cross: conflict and hold-ups at peak time, exacerbated by deliveries to local shops and vying for the three Coop parking spaces.
13. Little Lane and Meeting Lane: abuse of one-way system for rat running.
14. Pavement conditions very poor in many areas with reported incidents of wheelchair users being ejected due to potholes.
15. A10/Frog End junction: right turn into A10 has been demonstrated as significant factor in the County Council accident cluster list. The report by Richard Jackson Consultants states that there are no capacity issues at this junction; there is however a significant accident cluster record at this junction and the cumulative impact of additional vehicle movements at this critical strategic road junction must be acknowledged and addressed. Herein lies the fundamental problem of speculative planning applications: cumulative impact creates additional pressures and unless planning applications are factored cumulatively, through a planning framework with accompanying infrastructure assessment, those pressures cannot be appropriately addressed.

Given the critical importance of persuading a significant proportion of the prospective new population to travel other than by car, it is disappointing to note that the two local sustainable transport campaigns working to augment take-up of rail and cycling have not been contacted, nor their expertise utilized (Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group and A10 Corridor Cycling Campaign, both of which I chair). This is reflected in factual errors and omissions in the application:

1. New Road enhanced cycle/pedestrian path: no cycle path currently exists. The proposal for enhancements is unclear and yet this is a critical link.
2. Distances to local amenities from the development: presumably these are measured from site entrance rather than properties within it? These should be adjusted due to the large scale of the site operating on a single entrance point.
3. Traffic signals at High Street junction: currently there is no priority scheme to encourage cycling. The Mortlock Street approach is narrow and confined and bicycles must compete with motor vehicles.
4. 128 bus is under review, scheduled to lose its current subsidy, and future subsidy is by no means guaranteed.
5. There is no regular bus service to Meldreth Station, in spite of the existence of bus stops near the station entrance. The 128 makes one trip to Meldreth per day at 12:45PM and this may not continue beyond spring 2015.
6. Bus services to surrounding villages: the only regular service is the 26 between Royston and Cambridge, which calls at villages on that linear route only. It does not stop at Meldreth, although Stagecoach has been approached in the past year to ask if alternate services could be directed through Meldreth. The response was that it would not be economically advantageous to do so.
7. Community transport is a valuable local service but depends on council grants which are not guaranteed; like funding for subsidized bus services this is under review.
8. Meldreth Station is not step free – to the contrary it is one of the least accessible stations on the Cambridge-King's Cross line and is the subject of a long-running accessibility campaign. The London-bound platform on the Melbourn side is isolated by two sets of steps; one to the field and one over the track. This renders the station particularly difficult for people with mobility impairment including wheelchair users and pushchair users, and anyone who

- cannot manage the steep flights of stairs over the tracks. Please see the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group website, hosted by the Melbourn village website:
<http://melbourn.org.uk/railusergroup/accessibility/>
9. Pedestrian route to Meldreth Station over farmland: It is pleasing to hear that the applicant proposes to contribute to improving this route, however it is mostly in private ownership and a number of issues would need to be addressed that are not listed in the consultant's report: a DDA compliant ramp to the station platform on a combination of Network Rail and private land; a DDA compliant footpath connecting to Station Road with new additional lighting on private land; and a maintenance plan including cost sponsorship for that path surface and lighting. Information exists about this aspirational route is on the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group website, hosted by the Melbourn village website:
<http://melbourn.org.uk/railusergroup/accessibility/>. Nevertheless, achieving this upgrade is already regarded as essential and would be all the more important for the proposed New Road development, in order to avoid additional impact on traffic conflicts on the approach to and vicinity of Meldreth Station including the multiple junction at Meldreth Station Road war memorial junction near the station entrance, and on-street parking caused by drivers wishing to avoid station car park charges. These problems have occupied much time for Meldreth councillors over recent years.
 10. Cycle parking at Meldreth Station is insufficient at present; given the importance placed on this issue by CCC planners it is surprising that the applicant has made no evident effort to ascertain from the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group what plans might exist to make improvements to station cycle parking, or how the applicant might contribute to this.
 11. Pedestrian/cycle route to Meldreth Station must factor in the distance over the main route, which is over the Station Hill bridge and through the main station car park entrance.
 12. Proposed new circular minibuss route connecting to Meldreth Station – a good idea, but who would operate this service and how would it be funded?
 13. The £50 cycle voucher and one week bus voucher outlined in the application will not serve as inducements to cycle or use public transport. Financial resource should be invested in creating safe and achievable sustainable transport infrastructure, not wasted on short-term treats. People will take up cycling only if they feel it is safe to do so. If there are to be any inducements relating to public transport, it is perplexing that rail not included. It is understandable that inducements to use concessionary bus passes would be made as this would not incur any cost to the applicant; however, it should be pointed out that concessionary pass holders would by definition be least able to manage the 900 m walk from the site entrance to the nearest bus stop; furthermore they are the least likely demographic profile to be able to take up cycling as a way of joining up with bus travel.

Care Home

The addition of a care home to the site presents other concerns in terms of transport, due to the unrealistic walking distance from the village centre and its public transport access points.

Other factual corrections

Library: The report omits the main Melbourn Library Access Point and the Community Hub which houses it. The Mobile Library likely to face funding cuts and may disappear in the near future.

Cllr Susan van de Ven

