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To: Mrs Gillian Bjork
Petition Organiser
(by e-mail)

Date: 13 January 2012
Your ref:
Our ref: LG1/467
Please ask for: Mrs Jacky Denning
Direct Dial no: 01695 585384

Dear Mrs Bjork

PETITION: Proposed Developments 'Option 1' and 'Option 2' (Local Development Framework/Local Plan)

I refer to your petition regarding the above, which was received on Thursday, 15 December 2011. The Borough Planner has provided the following response setting out the Council's views about the request:

"Response to the concerns raised in the Petition submitted by Mrs Gillian Bjork regarding proposed developments 'Option 1' and 'Option 2' (Local Development Framework / Local Plan)

The Petition relates to development options proposed in the Core Strategy Preferred Options (CSPO) Paper in May 2011 for the site known as Yew Tree Farm in Burscough. The CSPO Paper proposed two options that involved the release of Green Belt at Yew Tree Farm for development by 2027. 'Option 1' involved the development of 600 dwellings, 10 ha of employment land and a range of infrastructure on the site. 'Option 2' involved the development of 300 dwellings, 10 ha of employment land and a range of infrastructure on the site.

It should be noted that since the public consultation on the CSPO Paper in May / June 2011, the Council has refined its draft local planning policies and taken a new approach to the Development Plan Document that is being prepared, to reflect the changing guidance from Central Government. The Council are now preparing a Local Plan Development Plan Document which incorporates the strategic policy that was to be included in the Core Strategy, together with more detailed policy on site allocations and development management policies.

In refining the draft strategic policies that were in the Core Strategy for inclusion in the Local Plan, the Council has made a decision on preferred development locations that will involve Green Belt release. This preferred option has been included in the Local Plan Preferred Options (LPPO) document which is currently out for public consultation (Jan / Feb 2012). This preferred option for Green Belt release includes the proposal to release land within the Green Belt at Yew Tree Farm for the development of 500 dwellings, 10 ha of employment land and a range of infrastructure by 2027.

The new round of public consultation provides members of the public with a further opportunity to engage in the plan making process and to submit their comments. These comments will in turn be referred to and considered by the appropriate Council Committees and Cabinet later in the year.

The Petition lists seven concerns, which are responded to in turn below.

i) Loss of Green Belt and agricultural land

This concern raises two separate issues; that of Green Belt and that of agricultural land. The former is a matter of planning policy and, like any planning policy, Green Belt policy can be periodically changed, or more pertinently in the case of Green Belt policy, Green Belt boundaries can be periodically reviewed and altered through the preparation of a Local Plan if there is a need and justification.

Given the shortage of available brownfield land in the Borough, and the general lack of available land for development within the existing built-up areas full stop, in order to meet West Lancashire's locally-determined targets for residential and employment development it is anticipated that a small amount of Green Belt land will need to be released for development. While this is not ideal, and is only being considered due to the lack of other viable alternatives, only the most appropriate Green Belt sites adjacent to the existing boundaries of the Key Service Centres have been released for possible development before 2027.

In relation to the Yew Tree Farm site specifically, it does not entirely fulfil any one of the purposes of the Green Belt (as identified within the West Lancashire Green Belt Study, December 2011) and it is a logical location for such a large release in Burscough because the site is surrounded on three and a half sides by built development (and therefore does not constitute urban sprawl). Development of the site would essentially fill the enclosed and non-strategic gap between the town and the employment area. No other substantial site, or even any collection of smaller sites, around Burscough or anywhere else in the Borough could accommodate such a level of development without extending a settlement out into open countryside.

Taking into account the total figure for Green Belt release proposed in the LPPO document, over 90% of the Borough will still be designated as Green Belt and this will be preserved and protected from development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. While it is true to say that once a Green Belt site is lost to development it can never be reclaimed as Green Belt, it is also true to say that by allowing a relatively small amount of Green Belt (that in the case of Yew Tree Farm no longer fulfils the purposes of Green Belt) to be released for development, we are protecting much more valuable Green Belt around Burscough and elsewhere in the Borough in the long-term.

In relation to the issue of agricultural land, like Green Belt, it is never ideal to lose agricultural land to development. However, in a rural borough such as West Lancashire, it is difficult to avoid losing agricultural land or open countryside when considering development on the edge of an existing settlement, which, as discussed above, is a necessity to meet the Borough's housing and employment land targets.

Therefore, one factor assessed in identifying the preferred locations for development on the edge of existing settlements was the quality of the agricultural land. In the case of the Yew Tree Farm site, compared to the other sites considered for release from Green Belt, the quality of the agricultural land is not as high. In addition, the information available to the Council indicates that much of the Yew Tree Farm site is not currently farmed but has been left fallow and unattended.

ii) Loss of safety buffer between residential and industrial areas

Any development of the Yew Tree Farm site, whether for residential or employment uses, would be required to meet standard planning and building regulations in relation to distances between residential and employment uses, and so an appropriate and safe buffer between residential and employment areas would be maintained. The land at Yew Tree Farm as it currently stands provides a far larger buffer than is required to maintain the safety of residents.

iii) Further strain on inadequate infrastructure; roads, sewers, health services and schools

The Council's draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) identifies that there are several potential infrastructure constraints in the Burscough area and that these would need to be resolved before development takes place, or at least through the delivery of new development proposals. The draft policy in the Local Plan Preferred Options document relating to development at Yew Tree Farm, and indeed the previous draft within the Core Strategy Preferred Options paper, identifies these infrastructure deficits and requires them to be rectified either prior to development on Yew Tree Farm being permitted or through the development proposals themselves. This includes:

- addressing the waste water treatment infrastructure (which affects Ormskirk as well and must be addressed by United Utilities before any development proposals are permitted at Yew Tree Farm);
- resolving surface water flooding issues in the town;
- the provision of a new primary school in Burscough to accommodate the increased demand for places by the new development;
- improvements to health facilities in the town;
- the provision of new open space, preferably as a new park to serve the whole town; and
- improvements to transport and highway infrastructure to help mitigate any impacts on traffic as a result of new development.

All of the above infrastructure issues should be addressed through the Yew Tree Farm development, either in the form of financial developer contributions or on-site / near-site delivery of new infrastructure funded by the developer, except the first issue which would be addressed by United Utilities. Therefore, any development of the site may actually improve the infrastructure situation in Burscough, or at the very least will not be allowed to make it worse.

iv) Damage to the environment through pollution and loss of habitat

Any application for the development of the Yew Tree Farm site would need to demonstrate that, so far as is possible, habitats on the site would be protected and, where this is not possible, that any impact on wildlife would be mitigated through the appropriate preparation of the site for development and the provision of new habitats on or near the site (e.g. as part of any new open space).

In relation to the length of development and its impact, the Local Plan Preferred Options proposes that 500 dwellings and 10 ha of employment land would be developed on the site, and that this development would take place between 2020 and 2027. Therefore, at this time, only seven years of building works is planned for. In addition, such building works are now heavily managed through planning conditions and building regulations to minimise impact on surrounding properties. Some impact is of course inevitable, but this will be minimised and virtually nil for the vast majority of the town. In the long-term, the infrastructure improvements the development would bring would also be significant benefits for the whole town.

v) Devaluation of property

Planning can have no regard for impact on property values in making decisions on development. However, a well-designed development of the scale proposed at Yew Tree Farm can have a positive impact on property values in the long-term.

vi) Loss of identity as a village

It is recognised that Burscough has grown quite significantly over recent decades, but this growth must be put in context. Within the Borough, both the Skelmersdale & Up Holland area and, perhaps more tellingly, the Northern Parishes area delivered more than twice as many new houses over the last 20 years as Burscough, and the Ormskirk & Aughton area also delivered more houses than

Burscough over the same period. It is the Council's view that Burscough is a Key Service Centre and, most crucially, is the third largest settlement in the Borough providing a very sustainable location for new development, relative to much of the Borough.

With regard to the relationship between new housing and a growing population, while new housing development will almost certainly result in an increased population (hence the need for a new primary school and improved health facilities), the growth may not be as significant as some might think. The housing "need" for the Borough is based upon national household projections, which in turn are based on population projections and changing demographic trends. For this reason, much of the nation's, and West Lancashire's, housing need is not entirely based on population growth, but is based on changing demographic trends.

Recent trends have seen a change in the make-up of the average household, with smaller households becoming more typical, and an ageing population meaning that more households are elderly. There is therefore a need for more housing to meet these changing trends, as well as "natural" growth in the population and housing needs.

Finally on this point, the Council agrees that one of the purposes of the Green Belt is to check urban sprawl, as suggested by the petition. However, it must be clarified that development of Yew Tree Farm would not constitute urban sprawl (and indeed the West Lancashire Green Belt Study (December 2011) demonstrates that the land at Yew Tree Farm no longer fulfils this, or any other, purpose of the Green Belt) as the site is enclosed between the southern residential part of the town and the existing employment area in the west. Therefore, overall, the settlement of Burscough would not sprawl outwards into open countryside as a result of any development on the Yew Tree Farm site, and this was one of the key reasons it was selected as a preferred option for Green Belt release.

vii) No guaranteed benefits for local residents

As addressed above, any proposals for development would be required to provide the new infrastructure that is necessary to ensure that the development would not have an adverse impact on infrastructure and services in the town, and this would include a new primary school. If the developer is not able to provide such infrastructure, the development would only be allowed once infrastructure / service providers are able to improve their infrastructure and services to cater for the development.

Any disruption caused by the development to local residents would be minimised as much as possible, as discussed above.

Overall, the Council recognises and understands the concerns expressed by local residents to the proposed allocation of land at Yew Tree Farm in Burscough for a mixture of residential and employment land development. However, in identifying the site for allocation, the Council has considered all such concerns and weighed any impact into the balance against the positive benefits of the development (for Burscough and the wider Borough) and against alternative options around the Borough.

I should be noted that the Local Plan Preferred Options document is currently subject of a new round of public consultation. This provides members of the public to once again engage in the plan making process and to submit their comments. These comments will in turn be referred to and considered by the appropriate Council Committees and Cabinet later in the year."

I hope you are satisfied with this response, however, if you feel that we have not dealt with your petition properly you have the right to request, within 20 working days, that the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the adequacy of the step that the Council has taken, or proposed to be taken, in response to the petition. If you wish to

request a review I will need to hear from you by **Friday, 10 February 2012**. Any request must contain a short explanation of the reasons why you feel the Council's response is not considered to be adequate.

Yours sincerely

J Denning

Assistant Member Services Manager