

STATEMENT OF HELEN DIMOND BA, MPhil, Dip Hist Con, IHBC, MRTPI(rtd)

I have been a regular visitor to Lymptone since my parents retired here in 1968 and came to live in the village myself in 2005. I have a Master's degree in Town Planning, and am a member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation and a retired Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute. I worked in planning, latterly as a Conservation Officer, for some 36 years

Sustainability Issues

The appellants have stated that the proposed development is sustainable. This is primarily based on the provision of various facilities within the development itself, the proximity of the site to a bus route and the opportunity for walking and cycling to work. I believe the sustainability of the site has been greatly exaggerated.

Included in assessments of sustainability are environment protection and enhancement. These include the protection of historic assets, the conservation and wise use of land and the protection of landscape character. We have already heard about the impact that this development will have on the setting of Courtlands House and its boundary wall, both listed Grade II. We have also heard about the landscape impact of the proposals.

I would like to make two further points in relation to the impact on the landscape.

The proposals for the access to the A376, while meeting highway requirements, will have a devastating effect on this section of road. There is a difference in level between the carriageway and the site of some 2m at the point of access. Widening the carriageway and providing the necessary sight lines will completely destroy the rural nature of this stretch of road. Despite the note on the Masterplan that the existing hedgerow is to be retained on the north side of the proposed access I cannot see how this can be achieved, given the extent of the carriageway widening.

The section of the East Devon Way that crosses the site provides a pleasant rural walk with views across the estuary to the hills beyond. Despite the claims of SLP's landscape architect, walking through a housing estate, crossing the main spine road into the estate and passing a parking lot will severely detract from the enjoyment of this walk with the views across the countryside obliterated.

The land is high grade agricultural land. In times of concern about food security it is more important than ever that such land be protected

Community provision

The proposed scheme includes offices, a doctor's surgery, creche/nursery, a shop/café and a community space. It is estimated that 145 full time equivalent jobs will be created.

I have spoken to NHS Devon who have no knowledge of the proposal and work on roughly 1600 patients for the creation of a new surgery. There are two spare consulting rooms in the Lypstone surgery of the Claremont Practice and the practice manager considers that a further surgery in this location is unnecessary.

There is a small shop in the BP garage at Courtlands Cross and a general store and post office in Rivermead Avenue some 900m away. There is also a shop in the centre of Lypstone village. I find it hard to believe that anyone would be interested in opening a shop or café on the site.

A creche/nursery could succeed as it would be very convenient for children to be dropped off by parents driving to work from Exmouth to Exeter, but this would add to traffic to and from the site.

It is not clear who would run and maintain a 'community meeting room' – I have experience of running a village hall in a small community in Somerset and it is very hard to find enough volunteers to organise events and carry out maintenance work.

A sustainable residential development would expect to have a primary school within a reasonable walking distance. RPG10 suggests a target distance of 300m and a maximum distance of 600m. The nearest school, Lypstone, is approx 1.7km from the site, nearly three times the recommended maximum distance. It would be over half an hour's walk to reach the school along narrow, unlit lanes with few or no footways. Alternatively it could be reached on a narrow footway beside the A376, a busy main road (which would have to be crossed road twice) and then along Longmeadow Road which has a minimal length of footway. Parents with young children will simply not be prepared to walk to the school. The appellants propose that all children will go to school in Exmouth. It is probable that some parents would prefer to send children to a village school. This is confirmed in the statement from Tony Priest, the head of Lypstone School, to which reference has already been made. The appellants have promised that developers will run a bus to primary schools in Exmouth for a period of 10 years – what happens at the end of this period? How would children get home following after school activities?

I think that this illustrates that the site is unsustainable in terms of access to community facilities.

SLP do not normally develop sites themselves and I feel that the community uses have been included simply to make the development more acceptable, not based on local considerations or any assessment of viability. I fear that when in the hands of a volume housebuilder the community provision will be dropped in favour of building more houses.

Walking and cycling

The attractiveness of these alternatives as a means of travel to work has been exaggerated. PBA estimate a cycling time of 3mins from the site to the Exe Estuary Trail and a walking time of 7mins. Cycling from the site to the trail in 3mins would be extremely hazardous both for the cyclist and other road users. Unless one is an Olympic speed walker it will take at least 15 mins from the centre of the site to the trail, bearing in mind the nature of the lanes and the need to stop and squeeze into the hedge every time a vehicle passes. This will only bring you to a dedicated cycle/pedestrian route to Exmouth. NCN2 continues up hill along Sowden Lane and The Strand until Lympstone station is reached in another 10 mins. Again this stretch of road has no footways and blind bends. In the winter a walk of about half an hour to the station in the dark along mainly unlit lanes is not an enticing prospect at the beginning and end of a working day and will not appeal to many people. Walking or cycling to work, or to the station, from this site will only attract a very small minority of residents.

My colleague has already spoken about the limitations of public transport.

Conclusion

The proposed development does not adjoin the main built up area of Exmouth, as is apparent from the artist's impression on the cover of the application. It is an isolated pocket of development in open countryside.

For the above reasons I am of the opinion that this proposal cannot be considered to be sustainable development and would ask that this be taken into consideration when making your decision.