

PROPOSED BENRIDGE BANK DEVELOPMENT BY AVANT HOMES

For the reasons stated below I propose that at our September 2017 meeting the Parish Council should pass a motion to oppose the development of 70 new homes adjacent to Benridge Bank by Avant Homes for the following reasons:

1. The reduction of the cultural entity of the village.
2. The movement towards the creation of a small town despite local objections.
3. The adverse impact on endangered wild life and Rainton Meadows Nature Reserve.
4. Possible contamination from as yet undiscovered historic mining operations.
5. Destruction of archaeological heritage.
6. Lack of capacity in the village medical practice.
7. Lack of capacity in the village school.
8. It is contrary to the wishes of parishioners obtained during the Parish Plan Consultation Exercise.
9. Lack of sewage and surface water drainage capacity.
10. Increased traffic flow resulting in difficulty in accessing the A690 and exacerbating existing parking issues in the village.
11. The proposed development is not included in the City of Durham Local Plan.

The logic behind the above proposals is contained below:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places an emphasis on sustainable development. The three aspects to this policy are:

- **an economic role** – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
- **a social role** – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental role** – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

Whilst the proposed development may serve an immediate economic and social role for new residents, the size and location of the proposed development is likely to have long-term negative implications upon the

social and environmental sustainability of the village. Specific concerns are as follows:

- The development on Benridge Bank will lead to the abutment of the boundary between West and Middle Rainton, which are two historic villages. Despite the demolition of the latter for the A690, the merging of the boundary would remove the cultural entity of these separate villages and move towards the creation of an amalgamated area of the 'Raintons'.
- The character of the village is already likely to be altered because of the possible commercial and planned residential development off Station Road. To add further housing at Benridge Bank further risks the transformation from a small village into a town despite sustained local objections.
- The adverse environmental impact on elevated land which is located to the north of Rainton Meadows Nature Reserve. Rainton Meadows has over 200 species of animals some of which are protected. The development would lead to a loss of habitat, feeding grounds and risk contaminating ground water and natural springs that run downhill from the site. Mitigation strategies through the creation of a 'new pond' or 'improving drainage' may well have negative effects upon the flow of the natural spring which is home to protected newts. In addition, Red Kites have been seen feeding in the field of the proposed development and any development may place unnecessary pressure on this still endangered species.
- Rainton Meadows Wildlife Reserve attracts much-needed visitors to the area all year round and would lose some of its rural character if it became overlooked by a new development.
- A nearby mineshaft indicated the potential for historic mines beneath the field which could have implications upon the structural integrity of the new development in addition to potential contaminants released through excavation. The public and future residents should be provided with independent environmental assessments that detail contaminants in the soil.
- The location of the proposed development is one of the few in the area not destroyed by the open-cast mining. Therefore, the site is of archaeological importance because it provides one of the few remaining avenues to further understanding of the history of the area not destroyed by open cast. This site could be used for public benefit to facilitate active engagement between local residents and the historic environment.
- The village medical practice is already overstretched and it is difficult to arrange appointments. A further 150 families living at Station Road and a potential further 70 at Benridge Bank will only exacerbate this problem and would need substantial development of the practice to resolve it. Furthermore, parking adjacent to the practice is already extremely difficult and will only become worse if more patients are registered.
- The innovative and positive village school is, never the less, working to capacity with little scope for expansion. The potential addition of 220 families will inevitably have an adverse impact.

- During the recent Parish Plan Consultation Exercise 62% of participants indicated that new homes built in the village should be cheaper starter homes for young people. The remainder was almost equally divided between those who thought more bungalows for those with special needs should be built and those who were opposed to any further development. The vast majority considered that further development should only be incorporated into existing developed sites with a minority supporting undeveloped sites on the edge of the village.
- There is some evidence to suggest that the sewage and surface drainage system is already working to capacity and any additional housing developments would need further investment from Northumbria Water to mitigate the risk.
- Access to the A690, which at times is difficult, will become even more problematic with at least 70 more vehicles adding to the additional 150 or more from the Station Road development. Those attempting to access Durham are likely to drive through the village where the streets are of limited width exacerbated by parked cars due to lack of suitable parking areas. Access to the site is close to the A690 turnoff and is likely to present a significant traffic hazard.
- This proposed development is not included in the City of Durham Local Plan (2004) (which presumably was subsumed into the County Council Local Plan) which emphasises the need to retain greenbelt land. It acknowledges that some development is needed on either previously developed land or is appropriate in scale, design, location and the number of units. However, although the plan mentions Finchale View and acknowledges the possibility of development on Station Road it specifically does not mention green belt land adjacent to Benridge Bank.

R I CLIFFORD

Chairman

West Rainton & Leamside Parish Council