

## Ravensthorpe Village Design Statement Steering Group

### Minutes of Meeting at New Barns, 9 Aug 2016

**Present: R Marsh M Cobbe N Ellison C Freeman D Hayes J Mott M Worthington**

The meeting was called by RM to discuss a response to the query by Jane Parry at DDC querying the absence in the updated VDS of three areas of valued open space north of Guilsborough Road, which had featured in the 1999 version (areas F G & H on the original map).

RM explained the background.

[Extract from communication for ref : *If the situation has not changed, there is no reason why the spaces should come out. Indeed, Site G has previously been successfully defended on appeal on the basis that the development would significantly harm the character and setting of Ravensthorpe. The land itself is in the open countryside, designated as a Special Landscape Area and identified in the VDS as very important to the visual quality of the village. I would be grateful for an explanation for the removal of the three open spaces.*

*The Council would be reluctant to see them removed as this would effectively be saying that the open spaces are no longer important and it could lead to development that would harm the setting of Ravensthorpe.]*

Those present were invited to review the decision to remove the three spaces, based on the records and recollection.

Open discussion took place. The following points were raised:

- An objection to the specification of valued open spaces had been received from one individual.
- There was some personal sympathy by members for landowners and potential developers affected by the specification of valued spaces but such decision had to be taken on behalf of the whole of the village community.
- The Core Strategy and Local Plan have the aim of focussing most new development into the towns and particularly into specific development areas. Development in the open countryside is generally discouraged except in exceptional cases. Development in Special Landscape Areas (as that round the whole of Ravensthorpe) is particularly discouraged and in Restricted Infill Villages it is expressly limited. Infill is defined as a development of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage. There is little development pressure at present in the district as DDC have more than met their target for development sites.
- DDC have stated that they interpret the area of these fields as being open countryside in a Special Landscape area and therefore important to the visual quality of the village.
- The PC had at some point in the past agreed to lend some support to “infill” claims in this area following development on the Orchard.
- Most of the existing development along the North side of the road was thought to have occurred before the Restricted Infill Village designation came in.

- Before the open meeting in May 2015 we did an analysis of the existing open spaces and some proposed additions (millennium wood etc) using the criteria set by the Open Space Society for determining suitability for designation as Local Green Spaces (LGS) . NB LGS is a higher hurdle than valued open space designation but does provide a means of grading.

The matrix showed these three fields as having only borderline qualification for LGS, hinging on whether they qualified for their “beauty” or not.

- The open views in this area had become more obscured over recent years by growth of hedges and other vegetation; however the area along this section of Guilsborough Road is still rural in character and is countryside (albeit including farm buildings) rather than built-up in character.
- Much has been made in the VDS of the village character of “countryside proximity” by reason of its slightly straggly layout with fields etc merging at various places into gardens and other gaps in the built up area.
- Removal of these areas might undermine the status of other valued open spaces areas.
- The request was to explain the reasons and justification for the *removal* of these areas.
- In the VDS survey in summer 2014, residents were asked for their level of support of the aim of retaining the “existing open areas” in the updated VDS. 95% of respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to this. It is very difficult therefore to say we have local support to remove several of them.
- At the Open Meeting presentation in May 2015, all of the 1999 valued open spaces were presented, albeit divided into public and private spaces. Some potential additional valued open spaces were also shown. The only local objection to the three existing valued open spaces anyone could recall being raised at any point in the meeting or the walking tour was by one landowner wishing to develop in this area.
- No other reasons could be recalled for the decision other than sympathy for the situation of the landowner and the fact that the fields were the “least valued” of the valued open areas using the decision matrix.
- On balance the very strong support shown in the survey for retention of existing open areas carried more weight than the reasons for removal. Objections can still be raised

The consensus of those present was that having reviewed the reasons for removal in the context of the village survey and open meeting feedback, the original decision could not be strongly defended and that the three fields should therefore be reinstated as value open spaces , the draft amended as per RMs proposal and DDC notified accordingly.

**Actions:** RM to notify DDC and post VDS progress update on notice board/website to cover this decision. The text on “all” open spaces meeting LGS criteria to be modified ( to “most”).