

**Morcott Parish Council**  
**Issues with RCC St Georges Masterplan Consultation**  
Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018

**Introduction:**

Morcott Parish Council (“MPC”) is a signatory to the joint response proposed by Empingham Parish Council attached as an appendix to this paper.

MPC is opposed to the current proposals to develop the St Georges site and believes that there should be a fundamental rethink of the size and scale of the proposals.

Like the other local communities and councils immediately affected by the development we feel abandoned and let down by our elected representatives on Rutland County Council and the executives of the Council.

We would like to add our voice to the chorus of concern and rejection of the proposals which has been anecdotally reported to be evident at the consultation meetings held to date.

We are further concerned that the response of RCC to the feedback obtained from the consultation has been to restate the reasons for the proposals without attempting to listen to the valid points being made by the electorate.

**Endorsement of others’ input:**

Rather than repeat in detail their points here we would wish to express our endorsement of the points made by other parties from neighbouring villages. These can be summarised as the comments concerning:

The overall large scale of the proposals vs existing settlements and the effects on employment, car usage, infrastructure requirements; and service provision;

The infrastructure improvements required and the security & availability of these infrastructure upgrades;

Service improvements to cope with the extra population and changing demographics;

The inappropriate assumptions regarding the changes in demographics in Rutland resulting from implementation of the proposals;

The damage to the Rutland way of life and all that makes the County attractive in which to reside;

The governance & conflict of the proposals vs existing planning legislation and precedent;

The governance and scrutiny of the relationship between the RCC and the MOD;

Challenge of the methods by which the RCC executive has circumvented the elected members of the Council and the governance issues that this raises;

The paucity of legal advice underpinning the relationship with the MOD and the proposals;

The incompatibility of the proposals with the previous version of the Local Plan Review and the implications of the proposals being bulldozed through;

The haste by which the St Georges proposals are being pushed through to a conclusion and resultant inclusion in a revised Local Plan Review.

We would like to add the following points to those already made:

**Governance – to date:**

The proposals appear to have been rushed through to a “final” position without due examination and scrutiny of the elected representatives of RCC and by the communities affected. The use of the executive and “Cabinet” to make decisions on issues of such a scale rather than subject these to wider consultation and the scrutiny of the whole council is regrettable. The style which has been adopted by RCC is not consistent with public sector obligations under the “Nolan” principles but is redolent of a group of individuals who view the electorate as an unfortunate, irrelevant, inconvenience which can be bypassed at will. RCC has current form on the use of this style – the Oakham town centre proposals are a recent, unfortunate, example.

**Governance – in the future:**

It is vitally important that this dictatorial style be changed forthwith. Should the current consultation continue, as is likely, through to a consultation on the revision of the Local Plan Review and beyond the governance structures relating to the St Georges proposals need to change drastically in favour of local communities and their elected representatives. The balance of non-executive to executive representation on committees must change in favour of the non-executive members. Non-executive members should be drawn from existing elected ward members and representatives of the local communities affected. The elected representatives of RCC should be consulted and given the opportunity to scrutinise the proposals at every stage. Similarly whichever delivery and other decision making boards are set up they must have a dominance of elected and representative voting members rather than executive members.

**Employment & industrial opportunities:**

There needs to be much more thought given to the timing & type of employment that Rutland is able to offer in the future. The timing of the provision of employment opportunities is vital – employment must come before housing if it is to attract a younger population to the area. Emerging and innovative industries should be at the forefront of the thinking. Non-capital intensive industries such as technology, (internet related) software, robotics, services, and emerging industries to support (for example) changes in transport methodology must be the priority. Capital intensive industries and those of the old economy should be discouraged as the jobs they create will necessarily be transient and a false dawn.

**Future infrastructure:**

There have been many valid points made by others regarding infrastructure. We would like to point out that the infrastructure needs & demands of a new town the size of Uppingham should not be dismissed lightly.

The situation which would arise should RCC not be successful in its applications for central funding for infrastructure improvement needs to be assessed as a realistic option: this does not seem to have been completed in sufficient detail.

The consequences of not obtaining central funding need to be contemplated so that this is not a surprise. The new town of “Normanton St George” will demand an expansion of capacity to service that Rutland has not experienced previously and which could be devastating to its economy and way of life if not properly anticipated and implemented.

When RAF North Luffenham and the successor occupiers of the site were in place they were largely self-contained communities. For example employment was on site with no need to travel. The demand for schooling; health care; dentistry; utilities; water supply; sewage & waste processing; household waste collection & processing were largely provided within the confines of the military base.

This represents a major difference to the situation which will arise with a new independent settlement on the site. The implications must be properly thought through with local representation and opinion at the heart of any decision.

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## APPENDIX 1:

### **Morcott Parish Council is a signatory to the following joint response proposed by Empingham Parish Council:** **ST GEORGE'S MASTERPLAN CONSULTATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Rutland County Council (RCC) recently published a Summary Guide inviting comments on a High Level Masterplan for the site to inform the preparation of the Local Plan for Rutland. This document is the united and unanimous response of the organisations which are signatory to it to that invitation. We have not taken detailed legal or planning advice in the timetable available, but would urge RCC to reconsider its vision in the light of our comments.

#### **HOW DID WE GET HERE**

The 'Summary Guide' takes it as a fait accompli that there will be extensive development of the St. George's site, increasing the size of RCC by over 25% at a stroke, developing a new township with a bigger population than Uppingham in a very rural area. It is understandable that RCC would wish to have as much influence as possible over the development, if it is taken as read that the M.O.D have the power to bulldoze through whatever is the most lucrative outcome for them. The Memorandum of Understanding was obviously based on this premise, but we think that is challengeable and we believe normal planning powers would provide a better and more suitable outcome for Rutland.

#### **REASONS TO CHALLENGE THE SCALE OF THE DEVELOPMENT ON NATIONAL GROUNDS**

- If this were an application based on the original agricultural use of the land it would be laughed out of court. The existing airfield use does not overturn that fundamental logic.
- The Government's draft planning guidance, about to be published, states that "*significant (housing) development should be focused on locations*

*which are or can be made sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.”* Given the location and current infrastructure, it is hard to envisage anything other than reliance on cars.

- The desire to create 3000 jobs on site clearly needs challenging, given the paucity of the employment space allocation. Jobs in local retail, education, leisure, health etc. are just as likely to be taken by individuals from the surrounding areas, further exacerbating generation of car traffic.
- The established nationally identified areas for major sustainable housing development need in the immediate regions (based on economic grounds- for example the Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge arc, the Peterborough/ Cambridge corridor and North Northamptonshire) are all well away from this site, and neither the existing nor any feasible proposed transport developments will link to these areas. Car use is implicit throughout the Masterplan. In the last few weeks the Royal Town Planning Institute has stated that *“the desire to get housing built is overriding the need to make sure that we are not getting ourselves into a terrible situation regarding transport, greenhouse gas emissions, inactive travel and air pollution.”* The outline scheme for St. George’s could have been the blueprint for that statement.
- The size of the proposed development swamps local housing needs, as identified in all local housing projections.
- The M.O.D. sites disposal programme to provide support and funds to a reduced military presence has an offshoot to support sites for 55000 homes. But this particular site’s contribution must be balanced against other Government advice and professional comment above.
- The recently published ‘Better Defence Estate’ document identifies the site as one of a large number of disposals. It states that the targets for fund generation and the tangential housing contribution *“are challenging and subject to a number of external factors such as achieving sufficient planning permissions.”* Rutland County Council are in effect handing the M.O.D. a very low hanging plum by entering into a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly develop the site so extensively. The M.O.D. is clearly under significant time pressure. Why should we suffer totally inappropriate development without objection? They have more lucrative options elsewhere to concentrate their stated limited resource.

- The South Hampshire experience used to guide the masterplan is clearly invalidated by the real and chronic housing shortage in that area.
- This is not just nimbyism. The site clearly has development potential, but this should be in scale and in keeping, both with the wider area and with the immediate surroundings. A much smaller housing estate, enhanced leisure offerings, a small science park in attractive surroundings etc. can easily be envisaged, and there would be far less antagonism to development along these lines.

For all these reasons we think Rutland County Council has good grounds to reconsider its support for such a massive change to our local community.

## **THE LOCAL AUTHORITY ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT ARE FLAWED**

We would condense RCC's arguments for supporting the proposed form and scale of the development as follows:

1. Addresses the imbalance of the current ageing population.

Rutland is far too small to consider population balance. If we take a sub region defined by Leicester, Peterborough, Corby for example then Rutland is the part where retired people choose to live for a variety of reasons. The more economically active would choose to live nearer job opportunities.

2. Residential leads economic growth

Of all the parts of the country or sub region, Rutland is one of the least likely areas in need of growth. Local employment is not an issue. Anecdotally, employers struggle to fill vacancies.

3. Contribution to unmet housing need in Rutland

The current outline scheme would be a massive overprovision compared to local need. The problem of affordable low cost housing is a function of national housing policies and will not be addressed in any scale by this development. Rents at 80% of local market rents and prices of houses for sale at £250k , are not going to have low income families rushing to this location, even if they can afford a car.

4. Redevelopment of brownfield sites is a national priority.

This is clearly stretching the definition of brownfield sites, which commonly refer to urban infill locations.

Given the reasons already outlined above, we do not find such local arguments for supporting this massive development in any way convincing.

**CONCLUSION**

We recognise that we are not commenting here on the detail of the proposed plan, as asked for. Rather, we are asking for a complete rethink of the size and scale of the development.

We believe that we have set out our reasons as succinctly as possible. We consider them to be good reasons, supported by Government planning guidance and professional opinion, and more than sufficient to underpin our call for a fundamental rethink.

Comments on the detail of the outline scheme - which we are sure will be many and diverse – are secondary to the basic question of whether the under-pinning basis of the scheme is correct in the first place.

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