



Northumberland County Council

Ashington and Blyth Local Area Committee

Wednesday, 13 March 2024

Submitted Petition - Crofton Grange, Blyth

Report of Councillor(s) Cllr Horncastle, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Communities

Responsible Officer(s): Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration

1. Purpose of report

To acknowledge and respond to the petition and update the Local Area Committee on progress made in addressing the issues raised.

2. Recommendations

That Members determine the appropriate action to take in response to the petition, which can include:

- Making Recommendations to Full Council, Cabinet, a Committee or to Officers
- Taking no further action
- Accepting the actions officers propose to take as set out in this report

3. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

The issues raised in the petition and the Council's response to the petition are indirectly relevant to priorities included in the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2023-2026 as follows:

- 'how' - The Council faces tough decisions that will not be universally popular. These are not taken lightly and the council pledges to listen and consider views
- 'enjoying' - the Council wants to protect and improve quality places, but also make sure that the places where people live, work and play continue to evolve and grow whilst retaining and deepening their appeal.

4. Key issues

A petition has been submitted and received by Northumberland Planning Department from residents of Crofton Grange, Blyth, raising concerns pertaining to unfinished work on the residential site. The petition states that Persimmon vacated

the estate with Taylor Wimpey having left some years prior. However, both developers did so with unfinished work, which has presented a number of issues.

The issues have become increasingly frustrated once the developers have left the site with neither having taken responsibility for completing certain areas of work and outstanding issues which have created a detrimental impact on residents of the estate. The outstanding issues have become a deciding factor in some families looking to purchase properties on the estate.

The residents have become increasingly concerned at the level of incomplete works and/or works that they consider have not been in line with the planning permission that was granted.

The Council takes the matters raised very seriously. This report outlines how decisions are currently made and why, and where relevant identifies some matters which we will look to pursue to improve and refine the planning decision-making process.

The Petition

Finalise Crofton Grange housing estate (Blyth)

The Crofton Grange estate has existed for over a decade, houses on the estate are by Persimmon Homes & Taylor Wimpey.

In 2022 having completed all house building on the estate one developer - Persimmon vacated the estate, with Taylor Wimpey having left some years prior. However, they both did so with the estate not completely finished.

Having two housing developers share a site and then vacate once all work has been completed in terms of building homes has presented a number of issues. These issues have become increasingly frustrated once the developers have left and neither have taken responsibility for the completing of certain work and outstanding issues which are having a detrimental impact on residents currently. In addition these issues to be complete, were in some cases a deciding factor in certain families purchasing a property through the developer and moving to the estate.

After Persimmon Homes left site mid 2022 frequent emails and letters have been sent to both developers and local councillors from residents which have led to no movement on the most pressing topics.

The issues in which we seek some assistance in helping progress to being resolved include:

- *The topping of all existing roads on site,*
- *The topping of all existing paths on site,*
- *missing/damaged kerbstones replaced,*
- *Proposed Park/Play Area included in site plans from developers to be erected,*
- *The adoption of ALL green areas by landscapers to ensure everywhere is cut and maintained when on site,*
- *A completed path to exit the Crofton Grange estate on both sides of the entrance road (currently only one side has a entrance path), communication from all parties with relevance to the one and only entrance to the estate causing significant congestion especially AM, proposals were to have two.*

These are an example of some but not all of the issues within the estate currently.

Opened for signatures on 06.10.2023

Closed for signatures on 12.12.23

Number of signatures as at 12.12.2023 – 102

5. NCC activity since receipt of the Petition

Northumberland County Council Planning Department were made aware that a petition would be forthcoming in 2023 regarding the matters identified above. Since then, discussions have taken place with the Highways Development Management (HDM) officers to establish an up-to-date position around adoption of the site.

From a highways perspective there are no signed s38 agreements (new highways) for this estate, nor has there been any s278 works as the developers have not undertaken work in the existing publicly maintained highway.

Notwithstanding this, there has been an understanding that the developers were moving towards adoption and, as such, throughout the lifespan of the development HDM have been inspecting the works that have been undertaken and are currently pursuing the developers to complete the highway elements of the scheme, namely the repair of damaged kerbs and the laying of the final surface course to the carriageways, footways and footpaths which the developer is proposing to put forward for adoption.

The current understanding and the most recent feedback received from the developers is that, after having received details of the outstanding work from HDM that are required to complete the highway elements, the developers have gone out to tender to get prices to complete the works. HDM will continue to liaise with the developers to pursue the S38. It should be noted that whilst all the indications are that a S38 will be entered into, there are no powers available to the local authority to ensure this happens. As such, until this is entered into, the site remains in private ownership (i.e. the developers).

With regards to the play area, the Planning Enforcement Team is currently preparing a notice to issue to the developers to establish their latest position on its installation. The response to that will determine the next course of action from the team. It is noted, however, that the play area features in the original plan and all subsequent plans relating to the development.

6. Background

Outline planning permission was granted for circa 850 dwellings on land at west Blyth accessed from Chase Farm. The original application was made by George Wimpey UK and Millhouse Development Ltd and was considered by Blyth Valley Council. The application was refused planning permission as the report set out the following:

To advise Blyth Valley Borough Council that planning permission should not be granted for this development unless it has been demonstrated that approval

- would not result in an oversupply of housing land in Blyth;
- Would not prejudice the bringing forward of previously development sites in the town for housing development in the future; and

- that the release of the site for housing on the scale proposed at this time would not prejudice the potential release of previously developed land likely to arise in the foreseeable future, in particular from regeneration proposals within the Blyth Estuary quayside areas of the town

The report to Members concluded that the need for development in this location at that time and its impact in terms of the potential to develop better located sites, including previously developed land, which demonstrated wider benefits towards achieving regeneration and housing market rebalancing aspirations in the town of Blyth must be fully considered before the Borough Council considered granting planning permission.

Members of the committee agreed with the officer's report and planning permission was refused for the following reasons:

1. The local planning authority is of the opinion that the proposal is not required to meet a five year supply of housing land in Blyth.
2. The local planning authority is of the opinion that there is a significant amount of previously developed land identified in the Urban Capacity Study which is sequentially preferable to this peripheral greenfield site.
3. The local planning authority is of the opinion that the release of this site for housing in the scale proposed at this time would prejudice the potential release of previously developed land likely to arise in the foreseeable future from regeneration proposals with the Blyth Estuary.
4. The local planning authority is of the opinion that the release of the site would compromise the ability to meet housing needs in the main town and service centre of Cramlington where there is a current shortfall of housing land.
5. The local planning authority is of the opinion that the proposal is contrary to policies H14 and policies WB12 as it fails to deliver an element of affordable housing.
6. The local planning authority is of the opinion that there is inadequate information provided to assess the design and built form of the proposed development against the criteria set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3.
7. The local planning authority is of the opinion that inadequate information has been provided in the Environmental Statement in relation to the effects of Archaeology, Wildlife and Nature Conservation to allow a positive decision to be made on the application.
8. The local planning authority is of the opinion that the Transportation Assessment does not adequately address the transportation issues raised by the development in particular the matter of junction capacity and the implications of traffic generated by the proposed development on traffic congestion on Cowpen Road.

The applicant appealed the refusal decision to the Planning Inspectorate who, in their deliberations, concluded that planning permission should be granted for 850 dwellings with associated infrastructure together with 0.25 hectare site for community uses. This decision was referred to the Secretary of State for their consideration, who also concluded that the proposal should be approved and in doing so, attached 36 conditions to be adhered to as part of the permission.

It is understood that all housebuilding is now fully complete on site.

7. Implications

Policy	Corporate Plan 2023-26
Finance and value for money	Dependent on outcome of future meetings and proposed solutions
Legal	As set out in the report
Procurement	There are no direct procurement considerations
Human resources	None
Property	As set out in the report
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point Dependent on outcome of future meetings and proposed solutions
Risk assessment	None
Crime and disorder	None
Customer considerations	That failure to resolve matters will continue to cause disruption and concern to the residents of the estate
Carbon reduction	None
Health and wellbeing	Benefits to the health and wellbeing of the residents to having the issue resolved
Wards	Kitty Brewster;

8. Background papers

B/02/00621/OUT
B/07/00434/REM

9. Links to other key reports already published

N/A

10. Report sign off

Relevant Executive Director: Simon Neilson

Director of Housing and Planning: Rob Murfin

Portfolio Holder: Cllr John Riddle

Cabinet Member for Looking after our Environment: Cllr Colin Horncastle

11. Author and Contact Details

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