

From the chairs of
Bramfield and Thorington Parish Council
Blythburgh Parish Council
Wenhampton Parish Council
Walberswick Parish Council
c/o David Tytler, Abbey Cottage, Blythburgh, Suffolk IP19 9LQ
Date as postmark

To: Councillor Ray Herring
Leader Suffolk Coastal District Council
Melton Hill
Melton
Suffolk
IP19 9LQ

Re Pine Lodge – Thorington C 13/1208 & 1210

Dear Councillor Herring

We have taken the unprecedented step of writing a joint letter to you because of the considerable concerns expressed by very large number of our parishioners concerning the above planning applications.

To widespread dismay, Suffolk Coastal planning officers have recommended approval of developments at the caravan site at Pine Lodge despite cogent objections received from Bramfield and Thorington, Blythburgh and Wenhampton Parish Councils, which are attached for your information. No written objection was sent from Walberswick as at the time the interim parish council felt that it did not have the remit to comment on planning matters. Nevertheless concerns were raised by parishioners there and the newly elected chair has joined with us in this letter.

There are three main areas of concern:

1. When the land at Red House Farm was sold to the applicant, he told the previous owners that he wanted a small plot of land to keep horses on. There was a covenant on the land that it was to be used for agricultural purposes only. Since the sale, the applicant has set up a camp site for touring caravans and tents and has lived on the site for a number of years. (The permit from the Caravan and Camping Club has been removed in recent weeks.)

Initially, SCDC tried to put an end to this illegal activity through enforcement action over an extended period of time. Appeals to the planning inspectorate had been made and the council's position upheld. The four parishes are extremely disappointed that SCDC did not carry through this action to a proper conclusion. We believe effective enforcement is essential if the public is to have any faith in the planning system. Poor enforcement leads to people believing they can do as they wish to their property..

This history leads us to conclude that any limitations imposed on planning permission are likely to be ignored.

2. We are all aware of strong local feelings on this issue but the evidence suggests that these are being ignored by the planning officers. There has been a lack of communication from SCDC in marked contrast with the regular contact between the officers and the applicant's agent. There is a growing feeling that parishioners' views are being ignored and they are being treated as troublemakers. We would fiercely reject this and claim that the objections from the parish councils were well thought through and accurately reflected the views of their parishioners.

In Wenhauston a meeting called by the parish council was attended by 60 or so parishioners. There can be no doubt that all who attended were against a new caravan site being built in the AONB and the granting of what is in effect a new residential permission in Pine Lodge. These objections were mirrored in Blythburgh and Bramfield.

3. We are delighted that the Local Development Framework has been agreed and found ‘sound’ by the Planning Inspectorate. It has taken all of us many years to achieve an agreed policy that is compatible with the NPPF. We are therefore very surprised to read the planning officers initial report which recommended approval of a new Camping and Caravan touring site (ten pitches for caravan and forty for tents) at Pine Lodge. The site has no mains water and inadequate sewage arrangements.

Access onto Hazel’s Lane is very poor and the access onto the A12 is extremely dangerous especially when towing large caravans. The SCDC policy is against new caravan sites in the AONB. The preservation of the AONB is important in its own right but also as an important element in attracting tourists to this part of north Suffolk. Tourism is important to our local economy and we feel strongly that the landscape that attracts so many tourists should be properly protected.

With regard to the application Red House Farm is not an appropriate site for a new dwelling given the distance to Blythburgh village, 0.8 mile and Wenhauston, 0.5 mile.

We want to make it absolutely clear that we are not anti-gypsy or traveller. However, if the first gypsy/traveller is in SCDC’s area is to be created, it should be the result of more measured consideration and wider consultation than can result from an opportunistic application linked to other issues.

The local MP, Dr Therese Coffey, has been actively involved and we appreciate her support. We have therefore copied this letter to her. Please could you, Geoff Holdcroft, the portfolio holder for planning, and Bob Snell, chair of the North Area Development Committee, consider our objections carefully and reflect on whether the officers’ recommendations are correct. We understand that the matter is to be considered at a council planning meeting in November when we sincerely hope the application will be rejected.

If you require any further details we would be more than happy to come to Melton to discuss the matter with you and your colleagues.

Charles Mullett

Chairman Bramfield Parish Council

Denise Corbett

Chairman Wenhauston Parish Council

David Tytler

Chairman Blythburgh Parish Council

Robin Buncombe

Chairman Walberswick Parish Council