

Frisby News & Post Office



20 September 2017

Planning Department
Melton Borough Council
Parkside
Burton Street
Melton Mowbray
LE13 1GH

21 August 2017

Dear Sirs

I would like to make the following comments on the Melton Local Plan.

As a shop owner and sub postmaster in a rural location in your borough many of my comments can be equally applied to other shops and Post Offices in villages around Melton Mowbray. The shop at Frisby on the Wreake, which we purchased in 1991, has always had its roots firmly in the delivery of newspapers to 13 villages in the Wreake Valley. Because of this, Frisby has enjoyed the benefits of having a shop subsidised by our newspaper income and myself working for 17 years as a driver for a newspaper wholesaler delivering newspapers to other village shops. My wife also worked for the NHS for two years and for the past twelve years has worked for Royal Mail. In 2004, Frisby's other shop, which included a Post Office closed allowing us to incorporate the Post Office into our shop. In 2013, we began to feel the effects of the decline of newspaper sales and the loss of our lottery terminal due to lack of sales and not forgetting the opening of the new local Sainsburys, bringing a major supermarket nearer to Frisby on the Wreake.



We realised that we had to do something and therefore took advantage of a free retail consultation provided by Leicestershire County Council to help rural shops within Leicestershire. Corin Burchanall from Kerching Retail Consultancy, highlighted the problems that we have.

1. We do not have a captive audience
2. We do not benefit from passing trade.
3. We do not have a destination/tourist or other businesses to attract potential custom.

In reference to these points, the other village shops around the borough tick at least one, if not two or three of the above.

This consultation coincided with Post Office Ltd classifying us as a Community Office which is given to Post Offices which are not financially viable and as a consequence we were entitled to a Community Grant of up to £10,000. The grant is intended to help to increase the retail side of the business as the Post Office remuneration was unlikely to increase going forward. (it has not increased for nine years).

We decided that this was the perfect time to upgrade and see if we could create a viable shop. As part of that process, we took on board many of the complaints that we had received from customers over the years, eg: 1. closed at lunchtime, closing too early and half day on Wednesday. 2. No fresh fruit and veg, fresh bread or ready meals. 3.No Card payments facility.

These complaints were rectified by us staying opening at lunchtimes and until 7.00pm on weekdays with no half day Wednesday. We introduced Hambleton Bakery products and fresh fruit and vegetables plus the ability to pay by card. We didn't stop there, we also introduced fresh ground coffee, teas and hot and cold filled cobs/rolls with a seating area and began stocking produce from local suppliers. We also extended the Post Office hours to match that of our shop which includes Sunday morning. The total cost of this revamp was £16,000.

In November 2014, we re-opened with these new changes in place and had decided that we would give these changes two years to give it the maximum chance of success as we said at the time “we have gone the extra mile for the village, so they only have to go a few yards!” The first six months, went very well. However, as from past experiences we receive a lot of support to start and then as



the novelty wears off we were left with what I would call our 'true trade'. And that trade is not sustainable by any measure, for the hours and effort we put in.

This has left us in an even worse position than before we started as there is now a need for two people (and the additional wage costs) as you cannot prepare hot food and drinks while serving in the shop/Post Office at the same time. The introduction of more perishable items has added to the amount of wastage that we have and a situation where we are left with selling below par fruit and vegetables that we feel embarrassed by. However, a customer in an emergency may welcome the opportunity to purchase a sub-standard item.

Previously we mentioned that these new changes were for a two-year period and that we would carry on regardless as we did not wish to be accused of not committing ourselves for a long enough period. Much to our dismay a year into these changes, in October 2015, Royal Mail informed us that they were removing the sorting operation from our premises. As this made up a third of my sub postmasters income, and bearing in mind Post Office Ltd had stressed to me that this extra income made the job worth doing, I cannot over emphasise the impact this had on our business. Not only because of the lost income, but people from Frisby and surrounding villages were able to pick up their parcels from us and maybe make a purchase at the same time which is one of the primary reasons we stayed open later. There was a campaign to save it, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Melton Borough Council for their efforts, however it closed in March 2016. Following this, it was apparent that we either significantly cut back the hours or close the shop and Post Office. I would also like to point out, that at the same time the village store in Wymondham faced the same fate, but closed their shop and Post Office down.

We have asked ourselves why did our changes not work? I feel the simple answer is the poor demographics of the village. We have a disproportionate amount of old people along with affluent individuals. According to a survey by the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) these two types are the worst possible customer bases' that you could possibly have. With their continual holidays, resulting that they are missing for up to a quarter of the year, and a new phenomenon of retired residents in the village bringing in their even older parents who have little economic value to the shop, pub and school.



If you put the this all together you really do create the perfect storm of un-sustainability. This is without the opening of a brand-new Aldi store, much beloved of the middle classes, about to open this Autumn.

At approximately the same time as the sorting office closed, word reached us there was a strong possibility that there could be 150 new homes to be built in Frisby. It was explained to us that as Melton Borough Council had no Local Plan, and that if developers submitted plans there would be a presumption in favour of development. We then made a decision that we would carry on as we were until it became clearer how many houses Frisby was to have built as we felt that 150+ houses would be needed to make our business sustainable.

However, this news was not welcomed by other residents of the village who clearly would stop any new homes if possible and the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) committee was formed. This committee along with the Parish Council I believe have produced a flawed and divisive NP, and I would like to make the following comments:

I am confused as to why the Frisby has been designated a Rural Hub when in fact it has high speed broadband and should be a Service Centre as it meets all the criteria. This it is not mention in the NP. It is worth noting that Frisby would still be deemed a small village even with the addition of 200 new homes as most rural organisations use a population of under 1000.

Much is made in the NP of building bungalows to allow older people to downsize. A recent survey by the Joseph Rowntree Trust states that 85% of older people do not downsize and that the biggest freer upper of homes is in fact death.

Bungalows are not popular among young people and developers alike due to a larger footprint and increased costs. Why a village with an elderly demographic wants to build any more bungalows is beyond me. A recent report by Age Concern UK stated that rural areas are a poor choice for older people with the extra cost of rural living and social isolation. But importantly the extra cost to local authorities of social care in rural areas needs to be considered.

I note from the NP that Frisby has a disproportionate amount of 4 to 5-bedroom homes. I would like to have seen something in the NP which would favour existing houses being adapted for either carers to move in or families to move into the main body of the house allowing the elderly resident/s to downsize into a smaller



part of a dwelling. There are some recent good examples of this in Mill Lane and Hall Orchard Lane.

No mention in the NP of creating business opportunities with regard to a small industrial site which I believe could be of great benefit to the village. I have on many occasions been asked by people if I have any office space / storage space available and as Frisby has a burgeoning creative group I can imagine some of the spaces could be used on as semi-commercial basis. I believe an ideal site for that could be offered by the site FRIS 2 and the land adjacent to the railway track.

YOUTH CONSULTATION

I have on occasions asked members of the NP if they could include a youth survey in the plan. I did realise that they could have difficulty in finding teenagers and I have a suspicion that the responses that they would have had from them would not look good in the village plan as the conversations that I have had with them in the shop are that Frisby is a lonely and isolated place with few or little facilities that is of interest to them. A big issue for them is the fact that they can only engage with their peers by relying on parents or public transport to ferry them to their friends.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

It has come to my attention out of only 15 privately rented properties in the village, many of the inhabitants of these properties provide some of the most cherished services in our neighbourhood. From cleaning, car repairs, hairdressing to computer repairs etc. Many of these people would welcome the chance to purchase a house within the village at an affordable price. Affordable housing would allow other tradespersons to inhabit the village. It is not unusual in any given week to be asked “do we know of an electrician/plumber/painter & decorator/cleaner etc”

Affordable housing would help to rebalance the village as we are bereft of these professions. The village would be much enhanced by their presence.

Up until five years ago we had always had a news deliverer waiting list. This no longer exist as there are so few young people in the village. In fact, one of our present paperboys, is the last person to be born to a house owner on Great Lane In 17 years, a street with 40+ houses. The same applies to a weekend student job in our shop. With so many retired or with professional occupations in the village it is difficult for us to even find a part time assistance in the shop.



I believe there is a tourist opportunity to exploit the name 'Frisby on the Wreake' as one of Britain's strangest place names and its reputation as the 'Gretna Green' of the Midlands, along with some of the place names in the village such as 'Butt Hole', 'Slaggs End' and 'Bog Lane'. Not to mention Zion House which is such a landmark of the village, people often referring to Frisby as the place with the "tyres on the roof". I do hope that this monument to the economic struggle of small-holding farmers will remain and I feel I must remind the council it has been there before the adoption of the Conservation Area.

FACILITIES

Not only is the shop under threat, the village pub has had 5 different owners in the last 10 years and at one stage closed for a couple of months. With discussions amongst the Parish Council to place Asset of Community value on it. I would go as far as to say that Frisby almost came close to being unique as only having a shop but no village pub. The church in the last year has had to have a funding programme and as such has sent out leaflets to say the church could close.

The school with only 38% of pupils from its catchment area must rely on pupils who can only attend the school via motor vehicles thus causing all our traffic problems. Going forward, this is expected to get worse as less children will come from the catchment area.

Last year the village hall showed income of £6,500 which by my calculations equates to only 16 hours per week use on average and a look at its online calendar shows that it is bereft of activities. To put this into context, Waltham on the Wolds village hall accounts has an income of £76,000, more than 11 times the income of Frisby, and has a multitude of classes and clubs for all ages. It is able to do this as Waltham over the last few decade has increased in population and it has been able to take advantage of developer's contribution, resulting in a purpose-built building with ample parking. I do hope that the Frisby Village Hall Committee can follow its example and move our dilapidated and inappropriate positioned village hall and that no conflict of interest prevents this from happening as I also noticed that in Frisby's NP Consultation Reg 16 the village hall had asked for £100,000 contribution which is merely papering over the cracks. Frisby Play School in its consultation in the NP states that its numbers are low and that most children come from outside the parish.



SITE SELECTION

The way in which the NP has arrived at its preferred site I believe, does disservice to one of the main principles of creating sustainable neighbourhoods. The site on Water Lane-FRIS2 should be the number one site due to its proximity to the rest of the village. It lends itself more to affordable housing due to the negative effect of being near the railway with no special views and a nice flat canvass.

Even the Parish Council's own professional survey carried out on the three sites came back with FRIS2 as the most suitable. I would go as far as to say, that this site will provide the best demographic group to support the shop and the pub and as such would provide more economic benefit than a site of 60 houses out on a limb on the outskirts of the village. I do have a worry that, FRIS3-Land to the South, could have an impact on the shop as parents dropping off children to the school at present go past the shop. As any retailer knows, passing trade is crucial and as they would no longer pass the shop I feel that this could be detrimental to our trade. I have tried to decipher Frisby's NP site selection matrix and I am reminded of Walter Scott's Marmion "Oh what a tangled web we weave.... when first we practice to deceive".

THE MAKING OF THE PLAN

As the sub postmaster of Frisby on the Wreake that position gives me a unique insight into the goings on in the village when a substantial event is thrust upon it, such as the possibility of 150 new houses being built. It has been disturbing to watch how cliques have formed to protect their own interests along with many self-appointed protectors of the village. This has created what I call, worst case scenario effect. Where a group of like-minded individuals assemble and fuel themselves into a pseudo crisis. In this condition, it is known that people make the worst possible decisions as can be referenced by the NP. One example of this happened at outset of the village plan where each part of the village was asked for a representative. A sign was put up in the shop, one individual came into the shop and glanced at the leaflet and said "I've been asked to join it but I wouldn't like all the arguing and bad feeling I suspect this will create". I did mention to them that the land very near to them could be one of the planning sites involved



at which point you could see instant radicalization. Subsequently that person has become one of the most outspoken and active members of the NP committee. A look at the list of acknowledgments on page 75 of the NP shows a clear correlation between those people listed on it and proximity to planning applications. It is of interest to note that only one individual from Main Street had any input into the plan. An example of how mayhem can be created by protectors of the village, you only need to look at a planning application made in March 2014 (13/00846/FUL) installation of a wind turbine. This application caused uproar in the village, with leaflets circulating stating that this turbine would cause migrating birds to be slaughtered, cars to crash on the A607, roads to be blocked while the installation of the turbine was taking place, planes from and to East Midlands Airport would have to be diverted over the village. I recall one comment on the planning portal used the obligatory “carbuncle”. Eventually, the wind turbine was installed and it was widely agreed around the village that its installation had no consequences whatsoever and that our emotions had been played with.

History is repeating itself once again with the same individuals at play except it is on a much larger scale and with bigger consequences.

This has largely manifested itself with the site selection votes. The very fact that we had to have 3 votes prompted people to mimic Brenda of Bristol

“Oh no not another one”! However, help was at hand for weary voters. Instead of the voting paper being put through their doors and left for them to place in the ballot box located at the shop, some members of the NP committee would wait until you were at home, watch over you while you voted on the doorstep and to help you concentrate your mind they would inform you that a nonexistent road was to be built behind their garden or the house would be washed away by flood water! Finally, they would deposit your vote into the ballot box for you if you were lucky enough to get one.

As our news delivery stretches over a wide area, we do talk to members of other parish councils and they have told us that Frisby on the Wreake has been putting undue pressure on them to help them fight off development. They could not understand why our parish council could not embrace new sustainable development and that they felt Frisby would run the risk of ending up in a very bad position.



According to a survey by the London School of Economics 50% of residents of an area where housing development has taken place changed their minds and were happy that the development had taken place.

I would like to point out that the Wymondham and Edmonthrope NP in contrast on pages 11-13,18,25-29, 32 and 48 you will find words such as: diverse community accessible to younger families, encourage new arrivals, thriving amenities, start-up businesses and vitality etc, etc, etc. It sets a much more healthier tenure than this village's plan. As I believe the same firm of consultants were used in both these village plans, would it not be possible to ask them why they are so vastly different in content?

I feel that I need to warn Melton Borough Council, that if by some mistake, Frisby's NP is adopted Melton Borough Council could well be faced with legal action by a developer. This has been the case with Aylesbury Vale District Council who were forced to withdraw Haddenham NP.

IN CONCLUSION

I believe that Frisby is at a tipping point and would go as far as to say that Frisby has been economically re-shaped over the years and is now socially in-balanced the result of which is a less diverse and inclusive community and one that is no longer a microcosm of society. I firmly believe that to adopt the NP would result in Frisby becoming even more un-sustainable and thus it will become a hamlet.

As Frisby has not had any large-scale development in nearly 50 years it is obvious that Melton Borough Council has played its part in Frisby's decline into un-sustainability. I have been told anecdotally that Frisby has always been very pestiferous when faced with proposed developments with residents using their economic muscle to stop any proposal. I have been aware that the same is occurring now and I urge Melton Borough Council to be strong in the face of this. I would go further as to say, that Frisby needs to have positive discrimination in favour of affordable housing.

Finally, I wish to give notice that if Frisby on the Wreake's current NP is adopted, with its limits to development of only 72 homes, our shop will close and we will be applying for change of use to incorporate it into our house, and I do hope Melton Borough Council will look favorably on our potential application.



I am more than happy for a professional auditor to come out from Melton Borough Council to substantiate our financial position.

Peter Dulieu

Frisby on the Wreake sub postmaster/store owner

