

EMPINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL (EPC)

Response to Reg 18 Consultation on New Rutland Local Plan

Empingham Parish Council (EPC) recognises the useful information in the Plan but notes the extensive use of private sector consultants in preparing the plan.

EPC has considered the overall document and prefers to respond by letter rather than to comment on individual sections of document. It is a great improvement on the previous, withdrawn, version that was dominated by St Georges Barracks (SGB) and not supported by local parishes. EPC notes that possible development at SGB is only referenced in the new plan as a possible development for about 350 dwellings sometime in the future. RCC should ensure that only sustainable appropriate modest development is considered.

EPC comments primarily relate to the spatial policy, preferred sites and Planned Limits of Development (PLD).

The document is a dour lengthy tome almost designed to discourage reading. It is far too prescriptive concentrating on control. The wording is also strange for a corporate body. It does little to stimulate sustainable development or encourage response by interested parties or individuals.

Rutland is the smallest county in the UK and the “county” Council should recognise its limitations. It is a unitary authority with limited resources both financial and staffing. The Local Plan is only a framework for development and will not, of itself, deliver any development. It includes a lengthy list of policies but without any prioritisation. EPC trusts RCC’s priority is people and specifically matters directly affecting Rutland residents.

RCC’s policies would be covered by a simple statement ;- Wherever possible Rutland County Council seeks to implement UK policy with due regard to maintaining the rural nature of the County.

Empingham Parish makes a valuable contribution to the rural nature of Rutland. It covers a significant area in the County has one large village/ local service centre, some leisure related activities, protected ancient woodlands, sites of historic importance, a major agricultural contractor and a business area at Woolfox.

In common with other parishes Empingham is becoming a dormitory area with most of the working population choosing to work from home or to travel to work out with the parish, eg in Stamford. Peterborough and London. The

spatial policy to concentrate development in the two existing towns follows a tried and tested pattern in most economies. It is questionable whether it will remain valid for the next 18-20 years. Economies will be forced to adjust eg as private travel becomes too costly or difficult. ***With continued developments in, or problems with, telecoms RCC should formally review that policy each year to confirm, or otherwise, whether it is the right way forward.***

The eastern end of Rutland Water and the Dam are in Empingham Parish. The Habitats Regulations Assessment was a desk study. It fails to take account of recent developments which affect the Reg18 document. Empingham village needs to expand if it is to continue as a local service centre both in respect of the Medical Centre and to a lesser extent the primary school. Expansion of the village is constrained by natural water boundaries to the east and south. The only practical expansion is to the west, towards Oakham, on both sides of the Whitwell Road.

The Medical Centre has recently increased both the scope of its services and the number of patients it serves to more than 10,000. Most staff and patients do not live in Empingham village and need to travel by road to the Centre from within the Centre's extensive catchment area (from Whissendine to North Stamford). The Clinical Commissioning Group require the Centre to further expand its operations. The Centre, the Patients Participation Group and village residents all want the Centre to remain in Empingham. Expansion cannot be met on the present site. A potential site has been identified to the west of the village and discussions between the Centre and the landowner are progressing with survey work contracted. The site is outside the current PLD but within current Rutland Water Area (RWA). It is not owned or managed by Anglia Water.

The Habitats Regulations Assessment of November 2023 states at 4.3.32 that Rutland Water is fed primarily by abstraction from the river Nene upstream from Peterborough and from the river Welland upstream from Stamford. The natural upstream catchment is small with minimal inputs from the river Gwash and Engleton brook. Long standing village residents also advise that during reservoir construction there was concern that the significant volume of water abstracted would exceed the design specification for the project.

EPC and local landowners consider that water from land to the north and south of the Whitwell Road drains into the river Gwash and does not contribute to supplying the Rutland Water reservoir, a protected wetlands area (RAMSAR

etc). The RAMSAR website records that the most interesting semi-terrestrial habitats occur mainly at the western end of the lake and include lagoons, reed swamp, marsh and damp meadows. Land at the eastern end of Rutland Water in the immediate vicinity of the civil cemetery in Whitwell Road is not owned or managed by Anglia Water. This includes land to the south of the Whitwell Road that also encompasses the five ponds.

Empingham does not have a neighbourhood plan and depends on the Rutland Local Plan to continue to protect its interests. **EPC strongly suggests that ;-**

RCC should review the line of the Rutland Water Area to include only land that directly contributes to the protected wetland status and extend the Empingham village PLD to the west beyond the cemetery eg to Sykes Lane.

A consequential effect would be to make the wide verge north of the Whitwell Road available for potential future development of a decent off road bus stop with facilities necessary to allow access to buses for wheelchair users. There are significant hedges and trees to the north of that verge to shield any appropriate modest development from the road.

The Spatial Portrait of Rutland reminds residents how fortunate they are to live in such a pleasant area.

As to selection of preferred sites and development EPC considers that the document should be less concerned about housing numbers and seek to give prominence to the broader issue of sustainable development.

On more specific issues ;-

The reg 18 document should clarify that the preferred site at Main Street Empingham relates only to the farmyard rather than the farm and the listed barns.

The proposed minor revisions to the PLD for Empingham should be revisited ;-

If PLDs are not necessary for smaller villages why are they needed for larger villages/local service centres; would they serve a practical purpose ?

the map for the Empingham Village PLD and explanatory notes in the Reg document are incorrect and should be revised;-

Emp 1 is incorrectly described as being off Home Court. It is in fact part of the garden to number 2 Well Court,

the PLD from Main Street to the end of the Cul-de-Sac at the eastern end of Willoughby Drive should allow consideration for a possible additional vehicle entrance to the Primary School (there is an appeal pending against refusal of application to build houses at that part of Willoughby Drive),

the PLD should be modified to include land to the rear on numbers 44a and 44b Main Street for which RCC approved 21-7-2021 a change of use from agricultural land to garden land (Planning application 2021/0488/FUL).

RCC purports to put people first. EPC therefore trusts that RCC will support the extension of the Empingham village that is essential if the village is to continue as a large village/Local Service Centre.

.....21-12-23.