

BAWDESWELL PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO BRECKLAND ON THE 2025 CONSULTATION ON POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITES

Introduction

Bawdeswell Parish Council (BPC) appreciates the opportunity to comment formally on the notified potential development sites within Bawdeswell, as part of Breckland's welcome 'bottom-up' approach to the formulation of a new draft local plan, catering for the revised government target on Breckland of 903 new housing units per annum over the period of the plan.

Village Categorisation

It is understood that Breckland will not be in a position to declare the status of its villages under its revised categorisation scheme until later in the Summer. This causes some difficulty in analysing and declaring preferred development sites from the potential list, given that BPC is unaware of the likely scale of possible development within the village.

Under the previous plan, Bawdeswell, despite its limited support facilities, was declared (incorrectly in the view of BPC) to be a Local Service Centre (LSC). As such, a new estate of 42 mixed houses was created in recent years, alongside other minor in-fill developments. Yet, and despite claims that supporting infrastructure would follow such developments, Bawdeswell has seen no improvements in sustainability. Indeed, since being first categorised as an LSC, Bawdeswell has lost its public house and seen its post office being downgraded to a satellite facility on 2 mornings per week. Moreover, while its X29 bus service to Norwich and Fakenham has improved, the village still lacks full-time public transport to its local market towns (Dereham and Reepham), and more importantly lacks any scope for public transport to its designated medical facilities in North Elmham, Swanton Morley and Reepham. In addition, the village primary school has now, apparently, only 10 spare spaces available. The village also has only very limited retail/employment opportunities.

Bawdeswell is not averse to sustainable development and would welcome more affordable housing to attract and retain younger families, and bungalows for the more elderly residents; as long as it was undertaken in parallel with local and essential infrastructure improvements in medical support, education, roads, public transport and retail/employment facilities. BPC can also see benefits ensuing from housing and infrastructure development through S106 funding improvements, particularly in the areas of education and social and recreational facilities within the village. However, such S106 improvements, particularly in facilities such as open spaces, car parking, allotments etc would have to be fully funded from a longer-term maintenance perspective; otherwise, the village could not afford them.

With the above in mind, BPC is of the strong opinion that Bawdeswell should be designated as a Primary Village rather than a Key Service Centre.

Potential Development Sites within Bawdeswell (as at June 2025)

Apart from the essential and immediate infrastructure improvements needed to support any potential development within Bawdeswell, it should also be borne in mind that associated development within the village of Foxley will have a direct impact on sustainability within Bawdeswell, given the close proximity of the two areas. Moreover, any major development of the proposed SDA at Swanton Morley Barracks would have a significant impact on the outlying villages, including Bawdeswell and Foxley, particularly regarding medical support, roads and public transport.

Looking at the 6 potential development sites associated with Bawdeswell, all (without exception) pose access and consequent road safety difficulties to varying degrees:

Site 231 – Agricultural Land Adjacent to the Village Hall and Recreation Ground. Declared a 'preferred site' for some 40 houses in the last (2024) iteration of the draft plan, despite the opposing view of the BPC, this site offered a mix of housing with open spaces allocated to allotments, orchards and wildflower areas (according to the potential developer). However, it suffers from its only vehicle access being on to the narrow Reepham Road close to a blind bend and the adjacent start of the 40mph limit. There is also no scope for safe pedestrian access from this area to the village due to 2 houses bordering the narrow road. Alternative pedestrian access from the projected housing estate to the village might be available via the current Recreation Ground, but this would have a significant impact on play and car parking areas, as well as potentially increased pedestrian traffic through a 'private' road/housing area. Major road improvements to Reepham Road would be required if this site was to be developed.

Site 123 – Agricultural Land Opposite to the Street at the Junction of Reepham/Norwich Roads. This was also declared a 'preferred' site for 25 mixed houses, and the initial proposal by the landowner also included an attractive reference to the inclusion of retail facilities; potentially solving the current bus transport difficulties posed by vehicle parking at the site of the existing shop. However, a subsequent briefing to BPC by the potential developer dropped the retail facility option in favour of 29 houses with bordering open spaces. However, being at the junction of the Street and Reepham/Norwich Roads, and adjacent to the right of way down Common Lane (an old Roman Road), BPC continues to have concerns about safe access to and from the site, which could only sensibly be resolved by a major change to the junction, with perhaps a roundabout set back into the proposed development site, coupled with the provision of safe pedestrian access. BPC is also very concerned that any such improvements to the road junction does not have any adverse impact upon the 'village green', the focal point of Bawdeswell, which is also adjacent to the junction in question.

Site 161 – Agricultural Land Adjacent to Foxley Road. A large site, supposedly capable of taking up to 140 houses, which in the view of the BPC would be impossible for the village to sustain! However, a recent briefing to BPC by the potential developer restricted the potential development to a proposed mixed housing development of up to 50 units on the south-eastern half of the site, with access on to the Foxley Road adjacent to Tilney Farm house and opposite the Primary School. Apart from open spaces and a play area, the developer has also proposed the construction of a much-needed car park for the school. However, while NCC is in the process of seeking to extend the current 20mph limit to embrace the road past the school, there is no pavement on the side of the road adjacent to the site, and the area sits on a wide bend in the road which restricts the view from passing vehicles, due to parked vehicles on the wide highway verge around the bend. Again, development of this site would require significant improvements to pedestrian access to and from the site, with an additional pavement and associated 'zebra' crossings for safe access of schoolchildren to/from the School; or, alternatively, the creation of the school car park on the opposite side of the road, on land which is proposed for an open space as part of an in-fill development at Maytree Farm (also owned by the landowner of the Tilney Farm site). Measures would also be needed to restrict school-associated parking to the new school car park as opposed to the sides of Foxley Road and/or adjacent verges.

Site 210 -Land Adjacent to the A1067 and the Old Dereham Road. This private ex-allotment site is probably capable of taking the proposed 12 housing units. It is also reasonably adjacent to the village settlement and amenities. However, its situation adjacent to a long bend and Dereham Road junction in the busy A1067 makes access to this site from the A1067 too dangerous. Hence, the only access would be to, and through, the village via the Old Dereham Road, which would require a significant refurbishment to make it passable **for** any number of vehicles and pedestrians.

Sites 329 and LPRC4S25DEV014 – Agricultural Land Adjacent to Dereham Road. These 2 smaller areas sit well outside the current settlement boundary of Bawdeswell on a relatively busy and fairly narrow road with no safe access, and no scope for the creation of safe pedestrian access to/from the village. Similar proposals for the development of these and adjacent sites have been previously refused, primarily by Highways on the grounds of safety.

BPC Preferences for Development

While not being aware of the planned categorisation of Bawdeswell as part of the Breckland Plan, and hence without any sense of what housing development target Breckland is likely to impose on the village, BPC has considered all potential preferred options from 20 to 100 houses, but has done so solely on the suitability of the sites to safely accommodate housing, and largely ignoring the essential infrastructure requirement that would be required for any further housing development:

Up to 20 Houses: Site 123, with the proviso that additional space be taken up with some retail units and open spaces bordering existing housing.

Up to 40 Houses: Site 123, with the proviso of space for some retail facilities and open spaces bordering existing housing, with the overspill being allocated to Site 210.

Up to 60 Houses: The SE sector of Site 161 for some 48 units, with the proviso of open spaces bordering existing housing and safe pedestrian access via additional pavements and road crossings, and/or the creation of a school car park, preferably on the school side of Foxley Road Site 210; plus, the overspill of 12 houses within Site 210.

Consideration might also be given to a separate creation of 2-3 retail units with safe car and pedestrian access to and from Site 123.

Up to 80 Houses: The SE sector of Site 161 for some 45 units, with the same proviso as above on open spaces and safe pedestrian access and car parking; plus, some 23 houses within Site 123 with spare capacity in this site being taken up with retail units and open spaces bordering existing housing; and 12 units within Site 210.

Up to 100 Houses: The SE sector of Site 161 for some 48 units, with the same proviso as above on open spaces and safe pedestrian access and car parking; plus 12 units within Site 210; and some 20 houses within Site 123 with spare capacity in this site being taken up with retail units and open spaces bordering existing housing. The remaining 20 units would be accommodated within Site 231 (with open spaces and recreational facilities bordering existing housing).

Summary

In summary, BPC is firmly of the opinion that Bawdeswell should be categorised as a Primary Village, rather than a Key Service Centre, because of its continuing lack of critical infrastructure to support current residents' needs as well as those which would arise from potential developments. BPC would welcome more sustainable development, particularly aimed at attracting and retaining younger families and also providing housing suitable for the more elderly resident. Such developments would have to be accompanied by parallel infrastructure developments, particularly in the fields of medical support, education, retail/employment and improved roads and public transport. Any additional open spaces and any much-needed improvements in recreational/social facilities would have to be fully funded from a longer-term maintenance perspective.

At the moment, BPC could not advocate any further housing development without associated infrastructure improvements. However, by considering in the main varying access difficulties and the relative size of the 6 potential development sites within Bawdeswell, BPC has concluded its preferences for development. These conclusions, which are based on potentially varying sizes for future housing targets on the village, start with Site 123, followed by the south-eastern 'half' of Site 161, coupled with Site 210 to take any overspill requirement. Site 231 should only be brought into play with development targets of over 80 houses. The 2 smaller potential sites down Dereham Road (Site 329 and LPRC4S25DEV014) should be completely ignored on road safety grounds.