

Woodthorpe Village Community Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2012

This is the first Annual Report of the Group since it was formed in 2011.

The group was formed in response to threats to the village of inappropriate and extensive building development proposed by both Chesterfield Borough Council and the Chatsworth Estates who own much of the land around Woodthorpe – development effectively encircling the village, potentially increasing the population from the current 550 residents to several thousand and creating an urban sprawl that would encompass Mastin Moor village also. The developments would ensure the destruction of good quality arable land yielding annual cereal crops or rape seed crops in rotation.

This report covers the actions of the group in fighting this threat and other events which the group has organised over the year.

For much of this time the Woodthorpe Group has liaised with the Mastin Moor Eventide Group who also do not wish to see major developments 'across the road' from their village which would affect Mastin Moor adversely.

The Origin of the Threat

The threat's origin can be traced to three causes and goes back to early 2010 and prior:-

> A requirement of (the previous) National Government for local authorities to plan for major house building in all local authority areas. Chesterfield Borough Council decided that it needed almost 8,000 new houses in the medium term.

> A minor requirement of Mastin Moor for a limited number of *affordable* homes at Mastin Moor (20 – 40 homes). The homes that Mastin Moor needed (and still does) is affordable rented accommodation catering for those villagers who wish to remain part of the village. This problem in part arises from local people not being able to access existing rented accommodation when it becomes available, for instance where families evicted from Nottingham (because of anti-social problems) are foisted on the Mastin Moor Community thus denying the thoroughly social Mastin Moor Residents who are driven out.

> The desire of Chatsworth Estates to develop the land that they own for maximum profit. This led to the formulation by them of the 'Jubilee Farm Development' – effectively for a major private housing development around Woodthorpe. It was this plan (once discovered) that led to the formation of the Woodthorpe Village Community Group).

The Council Officers' Reasons Given for Building at Woodthorpe.

The reasons given by the Chesterfield Borough Planning Department have changed considerably since 2010. This has been caused in part by the actions of the Woodthorpe Village Community Group challenging the Borough Officers reasoning and some examples of changes are given below:-

> The Borough Officers have now (rather reluctantly) accepted that Woodthorpe is not deprived and in need of regeneration (thus this can no longer be given as a reason for development around Woodthorpe).

> The Borough Officers have now dropped their assertion that the housing is needed for the Markham Vale industrial development (it is not best sited for this – their assertion that people would easily cycle from the new estate to Markham Vale being incredulous)

> The Borough Officers have now dropped their assertion that the development around Woodthorpe would be sustainable (a Derbyshire County Council report pointing out that East of the Doe Lea is the least sustainable area of Chesterfield to develop).

The New Council Officers' Reason is:-

That Mastin Moor needs regenerating and that building a vast new estate (which they now link to Mastin Moor rather than Woodthorpe) would achieve this.

The newer scheme is in essence very similar to the Jubilee Farm Scheme. Capita Symonds (acting on behalf of the Chatsworth Trustees) state that the new scheme will assist (i.e. not cause) regeneration at Mastin Moor.

This appears to be based on a Chesterfield Borough Council report which highlights:-

> Greater numbers proportionately of sick residents at Mastin Moor.

> Greater numbers proportionately of unemployed at Mastin Moor.

Chesterfield Borough Officers appear to be saying that building a huge private housing estate at Woodthorpe would somehow make life better for the Mastin Moor unemployed and for the Mastin Moor sick.

The Campaign in 2011

The campaign started with the discovery of the original Jubilee Farm project in 2011. Research associated with this revealed that:-

> Chesterfield Officers were planning to change Council Policy to permit major building around Woodthorpe by designation land all around Woodthorpe as building land.

> July 26th. 2011 was the closing date for representations regarding this change.

> Capita Symonds (with the knowledge of Chesterfield Borough Planners) had arranged a private meeting with the Labour Councillors representing the Staveley area to discuss their proposals. This meeting was not an official Staveley Town Council meeting and thus local citizens were excluded both from the meeting and having access to the minutes of the meeting.

The Woodthorpe Village Community Group was successful in entering a holding objection to this process and gained time for the group to submit a major submission of several hundreds of pages with accompanying diagrams and photographs to back up the submission.

Part of this submission included a petition signed by almost 550 citizens (about equal to the number of people who live in Woodthorpe) showing solid opposition to the proposals.

This was only partially successful as it did not stop the proposals, merely altering the Council Official's excuses for building at Woodthorpe and causing them to link it to Mastin Moor instead..

The battle that Woodthorpe was undertaking can be gauged by the Council's response to the petition which, although equalling the entire population of Woodthorpe and being almost 100% representative, was less than the Borough's 1,000 names policy which allowed the Council Officers to dismiss the petition almost out of hand. Rather later it transpired that Council Officers had claimed a population of about 1,600 for Woodthorpe – this was achieved by adding in some of the populations of Lowgates and Netherthorpe – actions which have raised unresolved questions about the Council Officers.

Woodthorpe was not the only area to produce a petition however. Brimington (population several thousand) and the seat of the Borough's Deputy Leader and Chairman of the Borough Council's Planning Committee had managed a petition of a very few hundred which was fully taken into account.

As part of this process it transpired that the Council Officials were 'summarising' as they saw fit any representations made by the public to the elected officials who only saw the 'doctored' versions and the officials, responses.

Action by the group itself and by some individual members of the group acting independently (but in co-operation), including questions asked at the December 2011 Council meeting and other representations caused future representations to be reported to the elected members verbatim.

Meanwhile meetings were held in the Autumn of 2011 with the Council Planning Officers and with local elected representatives.

The meeting with the Officers came first who, having devised the plan, were not in any mood to change what they wanted to do and seemed amazed that anyone would question their plans stating that the people of Woodthorpe would love the new estate when they saw it and suggesting that they be congratulated for the work that they had done on the plan suggesting that Capita Symonds (Chatsworth Trustee's architects) were experts in garden cities (inappropriate for Woodthorpe) and would base the plans on the Poundbury scheme (Dorchester – and not relevant as neither Mastin Moor or Woodthorpe resemble this town not having a shopping centre etc.)

A meeting with local councillors was a little more productive in that at least the group was able to establish the main points.

The campaign in early 2012

Matters did not stop with the Council adopting the draft plan December 2011 as further consultation was called for (in which Woodthorpe pressure was possibly a factor) and a consultation period was announced for Spring 2012.

Meanwhile the Group had met with Capita Symonds early in the year and rejected their (then) current proposals.

A meeting was called including the chairman of Chesterfield Borough Planning, local councillors and the senior paid officer from forward planning at which the group were able to get over all major points. No promises were made to Woodthorpe village however the concept of green wedges – one between Woodthorpe and Netherthorpe, one between Woodthorpe and Markham Vale, and one between Woodthorpe and Mastin Moor were expounded. This caused the concept of a green wedge (undefined) between Woodthorpe and Netherthorpe to find its way into the Core Strategy along with another green wedge (undefined) between Woodthorpe and Markham Vale. Although no green wedge between Woodthorpe and Mastin Moor was included, provision was made in the Core Strategy for the consequent Sites and Boundaries committee to consider such a wedge. If all three were to be implemented properly and with no dilution this would afford some protection to Woodthorpe.

The next round of consultation required representations by 23rd March 2011. The Group responded and submitted a robust representation as did some other members of the group acting in a personal capacity which complimented the group's submissions.

During 2011 the group had talks with the Mastin Moor Eventide group. Mastin Moor were also against the development and these talks resulted in both groups complementing each other in fighting this development.

Staveley Town Council Planning Committee

Throughout the campaign members of the group have been active in attending the planning meetings of Staveley Town Council. Although only an 'advisory' council (planning authority lies with the Borough) this enables the group to keep matters in front of local councillors and thus promote the fight against urban sprawl as well as keeping an eye on any developments locally.

The general public are allotted a 15 minute question slot at the start of each meeting and this has been used to good effect as questions may be used to highlight concerns.

Recent questions have highlighted the threat of opencasting (coal has to be excavated first before house building can proceed) and prompted a discussion suggesting that merely building a lot of houses would not regenerate Mastin Moor nor help with any of Mastin Moor's current problems and requirements.

During one committee meeting in June, the whole meeting as given over to a discussion about the new proposals of the Chatsworth Trustees and the proposed Core Strategy the point being made on behalf of both Woodthorpe and Mastin Moor being well received.

It is envisaged that the links with the Staveley Town Council will continue.

The Campaign More Recently

One result of the Spring consultation was a further round of consultations between June 21st. and August 3rd. 2012.

As before submissions have been made by both the group and individually by some group members as well as the Mastin Moor Eventide Group. The results are expected to go to Chesterfield Borough Executive late September 2012 however the result of this may not be known until after the next full council meeting.

In preparation for the Executive meeting and ultimately the Council Meeting a letter has been sent out to all council members on both Chesterfield Borough and Staveley Town Councils urging their support for both Mastin Moor and Woodthorpe.

The fight continues!

The Village Green

2012 saw the group applying for village green status in respect of the 'field' adjacent to Norbriggs School. The application with supporting evidence and statements from villagers has been presented. Currently Derbyshire County Council are inviting representations from others, the representation period ending this September.

Further action will depend on the nature and numbers of any representations and strategy cannot be formulated until these have been made available to us, however all first stages have been successfully completed in a project which may see the village get its village green back.

Village Events

Efforts on the fight against urban sprawl have been time consuming and intensive however the group has managed two significant events and is planning a further event presently.

The significant events have been a 'Pie and Pea' supper at the Albert Inn at which a presentation was given in the upstairs room on the case against the urban sprawl.

A later outdoor event – Brass on the Grass – saw the Ireland Colliery Band performing on our village green for the benefit of local people – an event much liked by those who attended.

It is intended that village events from time to time will continue to feature for the enjoyment of villagers.