

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL UNDER s. 78 TCPA 1990**BY MR PAUL CROCKER**

Hybrid planning application consisting of: Full planning permission for a mixed-use development to erect a food store with cafe, plus office space and 2 No. flats above. Erect building for mixed commercial, business and service uses (Class E), (e.g. estate agents, hairdresser, funeral care, dentist, vet). Form vehicular and pedestrian accesses and parking. Form parking area for St. Gregory's Church and St Gregory's Primary School. Carry out landscaping works and associated engineering operations. (Demolish redundant agricultural buildings). Land west of Church Hill. Outline planning permission (to determine access) to erect up to 120 dwellings. Land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane.

APPEAL REF: APP/D1265/W/24/3353912**LPA REF: P/OUT/2023/02644**

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF
CLLR MARK TURNER
ON BEHALF OF MARNHULL PARISH COUNCIL
A RULE 6 PARTY

I, Cllr Mark Turner, Chair of Marnhull Parish Council ("MPC"), 6 New Street, Marnhull, Dorset, DT10 1PY, will say as follows:

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I provide this Proof of Evidence on behalf of MPC. The purpose of this statement is to provide evidence in support of the MPC's response to this appeal made by Mr Paul Crocker ("the Appellant") in respect of a hybrid planning application consisting of:
- 1.1.1. an application for full planning permission for a mixed-use development on land west of Church Hill, to erect a food store with cafe, plus office space and 2 No. flats above, erect a building for mixed commercial, business and service uses (Class E), (e.g. estate

agents, hairdresser, funeral care, dentist, vet), form vehicular and pedestrian accesses and parking, and form a parking area for St. Gregory's Church and St Gregory's Primary School, together with landscaping works and associated engineering operations, including the demolition of redundant agricultural buildings.

- 1.1.2. an application for outline planning permission (to determine access) to erect up to 120 dwellings on land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane.
- 1.2. The facts and matters set out in this witness statement are within my own knowledge unless otherwise stated, and I believe them to be true.
- 1.3. Where I refer to information supplied by others, the source of the information is identified; facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. Where I refer to the Inquiry's Core Documents these are identified as [CD XX].

2. THE PARISH COUNCIL AND MY ROLE IN THIS APPEAL

- 2.1. MPC elected to participate in this appeal as a Rule 6 Party in order to represent the significant numbers of residents who objected to the original application and subsequent appeal. The many concerns and objections have been apparent from:
 - 2.1.1. the public responses on the Dorset Council Planning portal to the original planning application,
 - 2.1.2. the results of the Parish Survey specifically relating to the scale and nature of the disproportionate proposed development [CD6.001 – Appendix 3],
 - 2.1.3. attendance and comments made at Parish meetings held in December 2023¹ and December 2024 (following the submission of application and notification of the appeal) [CD12.003a], and
 - 2.1.4. the widescale support for the MPC Crowdfunding initiative to enable us to participate as a Rule 6 party at the Inquiry that commenced on 1st February 2025². This initiative

¹ <https://marnhull-pc.org.uk/minutes-5th-december-2023/>

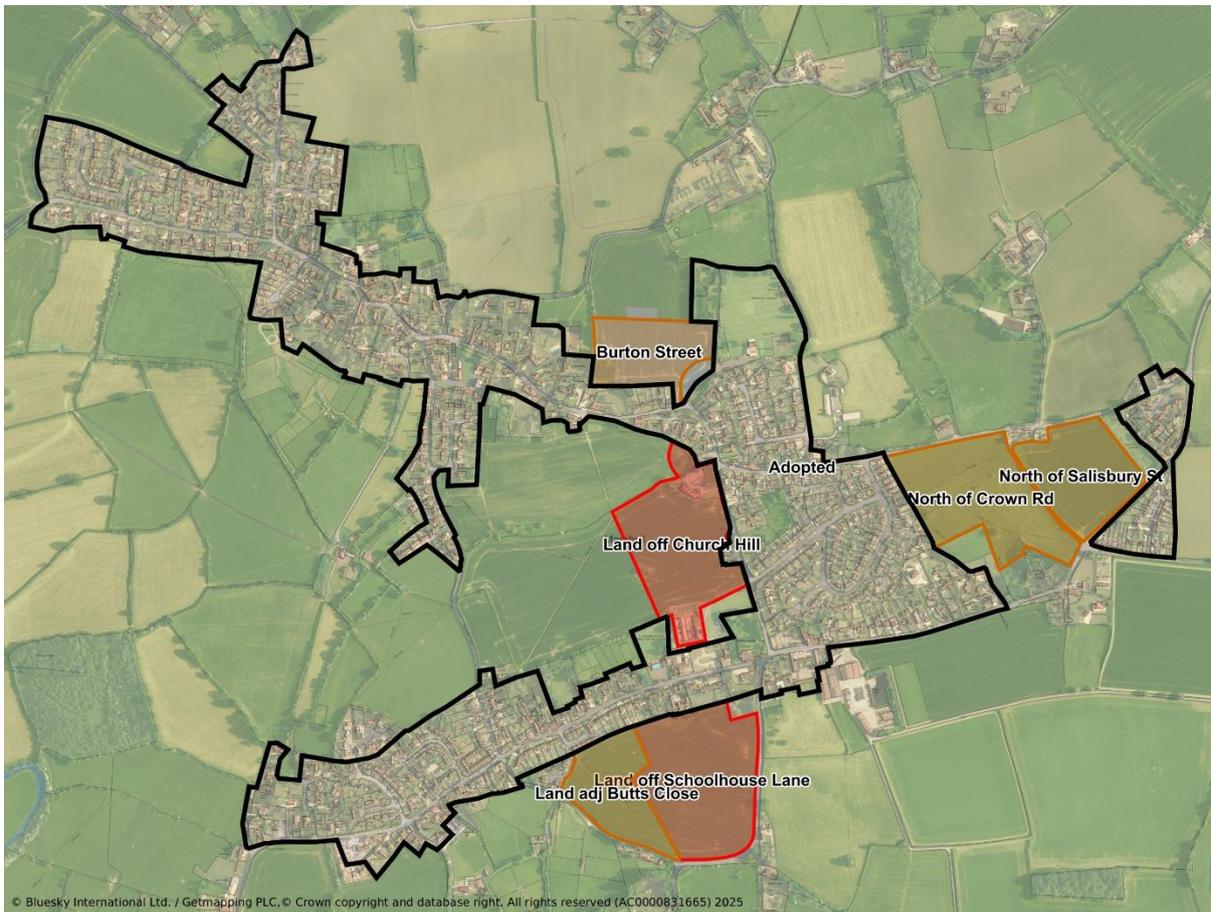
² <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/marnhull-pc-tess-square-butts-close---appeal>

was launched on 31st January and had met its target of £15,000 within 14 days. It currently stands at £16,417 with 159 separate contributions. Of the contributions that are NOT anonymous, 68 out of 76 are from residents in the village or parish. In addition, we have received further donations amounting to £925 from parishioners by cheque or BACS who did not wish to use the crowdfunding site.

- 2.2. MPC plays a vital role in representing the interests of the community we serve and improving the quality of life and the local environment. Furthermore, we seek to use our local knowledge to inform decision makers to ensure that developments and services are brought forward to meet local needs and in a way that is compatible with our local environment. On a day-to-day basis, we deal with enquiries from the public on issues ranging from planning, flooding, footpaths to traffic concerns. We work with many local community groups and organisations (over 30) to provide and enhance the facilities available in the vibrant village of Marnhull.
- 2.3. As part of our role in improving the quality of life and local environment in the village, in a typical year MPC is responsible for the care and maintenance of the Recreation Grounds, the Village Cemetery, St Gregory's Church yard and the playground and sports equipment within the Recreation Ground. MPC also provides financial support for organisations such as Marnhull Village Care.
- 2.4. MPC engages fully in providing comments as a Statutory Consultee on all planning applications within our area.
- 2.5. MPC has one member of staff (the Clerk), contracted to work 15 hours per week and all other responsibilities outlined above rely on a substantial voluntary time commitment from councillors.
- 2.6. I have been a resident of Marnhull since October 2017, and a Marnhull Parish Councillor since February 2021. I was elected Chair of MPC in May 2023 and have been a member of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Working Group since its inception in June 2023.
- 2.7. I do not however hold any professional planning qualifications and therefore I present my evidence not as an expert in planning but as an experienced Parish Councillor and local resident. I intend to set out clearly the reasons why Marnhull Parish Council

continues to strongly object to this proposed disproportionately large development – why the proposals are of limited benefit and the harmful impacts that we consider will result. This includes:

- 2.7.1. how the development would fundamentally change the nature and form of the historic village, artificially creating a village centre where none exists;
- 2.7.2. how the development would negatively impact on our conservation areas and heritage, and how residents currently enjoy the village and surrounding countryside.
- 2.7.3. how the development will adversely impact on matter such as highways safety
- 2.7.4. the cumulative impacts that arise over and above the four large-scale housing developments already approved in the village that will increase the population by c. 30% in a short period of time, without any forward planning or significant improvements in local infrastructure. See the overall impact on the village in the following map



- 2.8. The Parish Council has appointed a highways expert (Mr Richard Fitter) to assist the Inspector in understanding the Parish Council's concerns in respect of highways issues, including the adequacy of the proposed mitigation measures. Mrs. Jo Witherden, MPC's planning consultant will also be providing evidence on our behalf, dealing with points of planning policy and her assessment of the appeal proposal.
- 2.9. The Parish Council has also asked a local resident (Mr Stephen Boyce) who has knowledge of the heritage sector, to give evidence on heritage matters from a local resident's perspective. I will defer to their evidence where appropriate. My evidence is based upon my own knowledge and draws on the evidence that has underpinned the production of our first Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.10. It is important to state that MPC is not averse to development and to evolution of the village. We are not NIMBYs, which is a pejorative term used more frequently these days by both the media and Government Ministers. We recognise the importance of providing affordable housing for young families and older residents alike. We have considered the need for housing, employment and local service provision in the draft Neighbourhood Plan, and we are not opposed to the increase in provision of shops and services that would meet the local needs of a growing village.
- 2.11. However, this development and the cumulative impact of other large, proposed developments in the village are not proportionate to our village and community, and whilst there may be some local benefits these are overshadowed by the harm to the character of the village, its heritage, the local road network and social cohesion. As per the Written Material Statement on building the homes we need³, the Deputy Prime Minister explained that the revised housing requirements was "*a stable and balanced approach*" and that this "*requires local authorities to plan for numbers of homes that are proportionate to the size of existing communities*". Our contention remains that the proposed development contradicts this statement given the size and location of Marnhull and the existing planning approvals. Put simply, the appeal proposal is simply not proportionate to our settlement.

³ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-07-30/hcws48>, 30 July 2024

3. THE MARNHULL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (4.1 (g))

- 3.1. The Marnhull Neighbourhood Plan (“MNP”) [CD6.001] has been drafted and by the time the Inquiry sits will have completed its Regulation 14 consultation, which is due to complete on 31 March 2025.⁴
- 3.2. Work on preparing the MNP started in earnest in the Spring of 2023, when Marnhull Parish Council agreed that, in view of the significant speculative planning applications being brought forward with a major impact on the character of the village and on the existing infrastructure, it was important for Marnhull to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. A Working Group was set up to undertake this task and engage the local community to ensure that the MNP would be truly representative of the ambitions of people living and working in Marnhull. The Working Group is made up of a broad cross-section of volunteers from the community, including Parish Councillors, and has been supported by an experienced planning consultant.
- 3.3. The purpose of the MNP is to provide an agreed vision and policies to guide the development of the village over the next 15 years, in particular to protect the distinctive character of the parish while allowing for necessary growth, to give the community a voice and to champion local needs. As part of the work underpinning the MNP, the Steering Group organised a Parish Survey in late 2023, with nearly 500 households or individuals responding. The Group also reached out to local businesses, and worked with various local parties to produce:
 - 3.3.1. Conservation Area Appraisal [CD6.003]
 - 3.3.2. Design Guidance and Codes (produced by AECOM) [CD6.002]
 - 3.3.3. Housing Needs Target (assisted by Dorset Council Planning Policy) [CD6.001 Appendix 10]
 - 3.3.4. Strategic Environmental Assessment (produced by AECOM) [CD6.006]

⁴ <https://marnhull-pc.org.uk/draft-neighbourhood-plan-for-consultation/>

3.3.5. Traffic Survey (assisted by Dorset Council Transport Planning) [CD6.005]

3.3.6. Views Report [CD6.004]

3.4. The MNP seeks to support the sustainable and sympathetic development of Marnhull by representing local opinion and the needs of the community. The purpose of the plan is to allow for growth within clearly defined parameters which are designed to reflect local needs and to protect the distinctive character of Marnhull. The Plan will help guide future developments to help create the conditions – social, environmental and economic – necessary for the village to evolve and thrive, and to be sustainable. The vision for our Neighbourhood Plan reflects these aims and aspirations, and considers the concerns and hopes of our community:

“A thriving, sociable and sustainable village that retains its unique character -specifically its collection of hamlets on a limestone ridge flanked by green fields, linked by quiet lanes and focussed on the Grade I Parish Church.”

3.5. I understand that the MNP is draft and I also took note of the Inspector’s wish to focus on the benefits and impacts of the development (as per the discussion at the Case Management Conference). In this regard, I would draw the Inspector’s attention to the fact that, given the recent approval of a number of large development applications and the progress now made on the plan, **allowing this appeal would further undermine this community’s confidence in the planning system.** It is hoped that the MNP will provide a positive guide for how our village develops, which we will review and roll forward alongside the new Dorset Local Plan, yet these proposals undermine the vision and proposals in our Neighbourhood Plan before it has the opportunity to come into effect (which we think should be by the end of this year).

4. ISSUE 1:

THE EFFECT OF THE DEVELOPMENT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF MARNHULL AND ON THE SETTING OF ITS HERITAGE ASSETS.

4.1. Mr. Boyce is providing evidence in respect of the impacts that the appeal proposal has on Marnhull’s heritage assets (and their settings). However, in what follows I set out

the local community's concerns in respect of the effect the appeal proposal will have on the wider character and appearance of Marnhull.

- 4.1.1. As explained in Mr Boyce's proof of evidence, unlike most villages within Dorset which have grown around a crossroads or village green, Marnhull has developed from several hamlets which have joined over the years creating a distinctive linear settlement pattern with outlying areas. Historic England considers "the village's unusual and dispersed layout of the settlement to be a key aspect of its special character" [CD 8.009]. The village retains its strong rural qualities, the network of green lanes, footpaths and hedgerows contributing to the rural character of the village with views of surrounding fields and more distant vistas across the Blackmore Vale and towards Cranborne Chase. These are highly valued by residents of the village as reflected in our Parish survey ([CD6.001 – Appendix 3]. The following statistics from the survey are worth noting:
 - 4.1.2. The area's rural character was the main reason why most residents chose to live in the parish (69% of respondents);
 - 4.1.3. The rural character of the area, and character of the village, were the top two choices of what people value most (85% and 80% of respondents respectively)
 - 4.1.4. The footpaths and bridleways were considered 'very important' local facilities by a large majority of residents (83% of respondents, with 91% saying that they were a key feature that was important)
 - 4.1.5. Green spaces allowing views to the church are much valued (69% of respondents, with 78% agreeing that such views were a key feature that was important)
 - 4.1.6. The central field between Church Hill and Sackmore Lane (the Tess square field) is a valued green space (71% of respondents)
- 4.2. Whilst landscape harm was not cited as a reason for refusal by Dorset Council, it is worth noting that the Council's Landscape Officer [CD 8.010] acknowledged that "*The proposals are extensive, and will impact on the character of Marnhull and its setting, especially when considered in combination with other planned development in the*

village”, and was not able to come to a view without more detailed information, including:

- 4.2.1. A cumulative impact assessment of the development in combination with those with planning permission, including sequential views from along the Hardy Way;
 - 4.2.2. Visualisations showing the location, size, degree of visibility and form of the development at 0, 3, 10 and 20 years.
- 4.3. The decision-maker and community are therefore in a position where the drawings of the planned development are shown without their context, and neither the LVIA nor the heritage assessments have had the benefit of more detailed photomontage images of these spaces, despite the extensive changes to the landscape and local character that these are likely to bring about. Nonetheless I have looked at the plans and sought to visualise the development as built within our village, and my views on the impacts are expressed here. We have included a number of locations in the proposed itinerary for the Inspector’s site visit that addresses this point and would encourage the Inspector to use the opportunity to review the changes and impact to the landscape that this application will bring.
- 4.4. The Council’s Landscape Officer also draws attention to the findings of the Strategic Landscape and Heritage Study for North Dorset Area 2019 (referenced in Mr Boyce’s proof of evidence) and the online version of the Dorset Landscape Character Assessment management guidance for the Limestone Hills area (in which Marnhull sits). She highlights many of the points in the former as being of relevance, with those relating to landscape including the area’s distinctive and historic linear settlement pattern, the importance of the rural and tranquil character of the area, and the many views experienced from the public rights of way network, and in terms of the latter she identifies the following points:
- 4.4.1. conserve and enhance the varied settlement pattern of the different limestone villages and their relationship with the associated surrounding copses/woodlands
 - 4.4.2. maintain the undeveloped character the area e.g. by resisting intrusive developments on sensitive and exposed hillside locations.

- 4.5. The application fails on all these points.
- 4.6. The residents of the village also value the dark skies around Marnhull and have asked for street lighting to be minimised. For example, the current development North of Burton Street (**P/RES/2022/05524**) for 61 houses will NOT when completed have street lighting at the request of the Parish Council. There is therefore, some concern that the development of a retail centre and large car park will, by necessity, come with significant and conspicuous lighting. It is impossible to determine from the application what the proposed approach to lighting will be. The current car park and surgery/pharmacy facility has very limited lighting and the current convenience stores maintain very restricted lighting, as shown the photographs below.

Robin Hill Stores and Post Office in Burton Street



Spar Store in New Street



- 4.7. Design Guidelines for development in our parish have now been produced for the first time, to help to protect and reinforce the distinctive character of our area [CD6.002].

These have been consulted on, and are now reflected in the emerging Neighbourhood Plan policies. They refer to the importance of the settlement pattern as well as more detailed points on building materials, styles, plot patterns, boundary treatments, parking and external lighting. Their relevance to this Appeal is covered in more detail in Mrs Witherden's evidence.

Development on land off Butts Close and Schoolhouse Lane

- 4.8. The loss of the remaining part of this much important green space (the western section already having planning permission) would have a major impact on the village form and character. The area is very visible from a number of vantage points, is crossed by a public footpath, with important in views of the church and its heritage setting and contributes to the unique linear nature of the village development. Mr Boyce also refers to the field's connection with Thomas Hardy. The eastern part has been proposed as a Local Green Space in our Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.9. The amount of housing development proposed within the parcel of land to the south side of New Street will further encroach upon and erode the heritage setting of the Grade 1 St Gregory's Church and the views to/from the tower.
- 4.10. The indicative layout provided by the Appellant fails to reflect the unique character of the village, and shows that the amount of housing will inevitably result in an estate-like feel. It has created an inverse of the linear settlement pattern with the insertion of linear parks, and introduces many disconnected, cul-de-sac housing clusters that have very regimented, regular plot patterns and parking spaces completely uncharacteristic of the historic nature of the village. The settlement form is undermined, the distinction between New Street and Walton Elm with its brewery buildings along Carraway Lane, will be diminished, and the overall rural and tranquil character of this area significantly harmed.
- 4.11. The Appellant also raises the prospect of a further application for Butts Close in his Statement of Case (Appendix A) and Marnhull Brochure (under Future Developments) [CD4.005] increasing the number of dwellings from 120 to 160 (presumably at the reserved matters stage) which would further exacerbate this issue.

Development on land west of Church Hill

- 4.12. The loss of a significant element of this important central green space would have a major impact on the village form and character. The main fields have been proposed as a Local Green Space in our Neighbourhood Plan. It is clearly important to residents, is crossed by multiple public footpaths, and is critical in views of the Grade 1 listed St Gregory's church and its heritage setting. In addition, it should be noted that the residents of Marnhull are concerned that this application, should it be approved would be the 'thin edge of the wedge' and result in further development into the remaining parts of the field, for example the 'Future Retirement Living' promoted in the Marnhull Brochure [CD4.5]
- 4.13. The creation of a relatively large, artificial, village centre with its sea of car parking spaces will completely change the character of Church Hill and have a major, detrimental, impact on this area – the provision of an area of public open space to its rear, whilst providing an alternative to the Village Recreation grounds, is of limited benefit compared to the network of rights of way our residents enjoy.
- 4.14. Nothing in the application appears to recognise the significance of the distinctive settlement pattern and these two spaces to the character of the village. Both elements of the proposal are disproportionately large, out of character and impinging upon important elements of the village's agrarian nature to the detriment of the village's heritage and form.

5. ISSUE 2:

THE EFFECT OF THE SCHEME ON HIGHWAY SAFETY (INCLUDING PEDESTRIAN SAFETY) AND CONGESTION IN MARNHULL.

- 5.1. Mr. Fitter is providing expert evidence in respect of this issue. As a resident and Parish Councillor, I would like to assist the Inspector by describing the issues experienced by local residents, including myself, based on our lived experience of driving, walking, cycling and riding horses on our local road network on a daily basis. As set out in our Statement of Case, the issues of highway safety represent MPC's most significant objection to the proposed plans.
- 5.2. There are very few employment opportunities within the village, and no 'higher level' facilities (such as secondary schools, leisure centres, hospitals etc). A relatively high proportion of residents work some distance from their home, or have no fixed place of

work, as evidenced in the draft MNP using Census data from 2021 [CD6.001 – Appendix 2]⁵. The limited employment opportunities within the village and rural nature of the area will necessitate travel in many difference directions, to Henstridge, Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton, and further afield to Gillingham / Shaftesbury / Wincanton / Sherborne and Yeovil.

5.3. As discussed by Mr. Fitter in his proof of evidence, the bus service is poor and not a realistic option for many of these journeys, given the sporadic and limited nature of the timetable – and whilst there are suggestions that with subsidy the service would be made more regular, there are no suggestions that this would provide a half-hourly service for both routes, into the evenings or across the weekends, or include greater coverage (such as to the employment areas at Gibbs Marsh and Rolls Mill, Sturminster Newton), and no certainty that these routes will continue without subsidy. As of 5th March 2025, the village is served by two bus routes, the CR3 (Sturminster Newton to Gillingham) and CR4 (Yeovil to Blandford). [CD12.003b]. A summary of the routes is as follows:

Route	Morning Bus*	Arrival Time at Destination	Evening Bus*	Arrival Time at Marnhull	Notes
CR3 to Gillingham)	0807	0859	1819	1838	5 buses per day Monday to Friday only
CR3 to Sturminster Newton	0723	0737	1900	1912	5 buses per day Monday to Friday only
CR4 to Yeovil	0728	0825	1745	1844	6 buses per day, Monday to Friday
CR4 to Blandford	0735	0830	1740	1831	7 buses per day, Monday to Friday

*Route chosen assuming a working day of 0900 to 1700.

⁵ I am aware that the Census data in 2021 was during a period when work travel arrangements are not considered fully reliable due to the pandemic, but they nonetheless back up my lived experience.

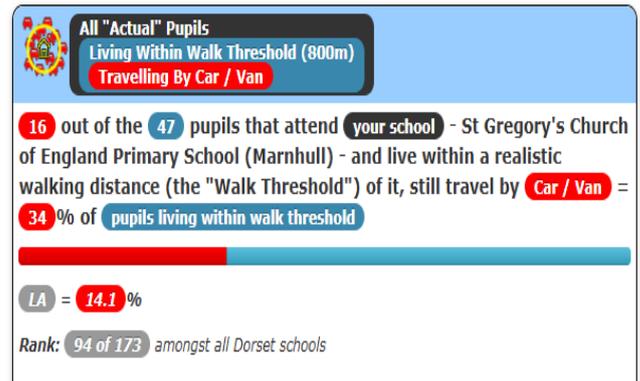
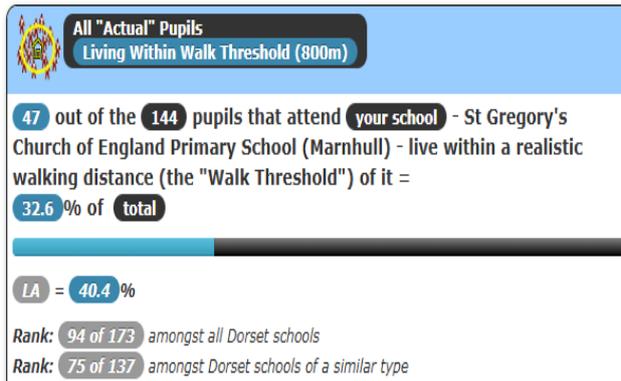
- 5.4. There are no safe or sensible cycle routes for such trips (the former national cycle network route linking to Gillingham and Sturminster Newton is no longer promoted by Sustrans because it was not deemed sufficiently safe for due to high motor traffic speeds and volumes, and therefore only deemed suitable for experienced users⁶), so this increases the need for people to own and use their car to get to and from work.
- 5.5. Given all these factors, it is not surprising that car ownership levels in the parish are higher than average, and that more housing here will inevitably put strain on the highways network but also on the village roads such as Burton Street and Mill Lane to the north and New Street to the west. This will undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on residents as the increased traffic volumes will make navigating the narrow unlit village roads more precarious for pedestrians and more difficult for all residents using their cars.
- 5.6. The Appellant's highways expert suggests that residents will walk and cycle a great deal around the village with statements such as Butts Close is a "comfortable 1 mile walk to the village Post Office in Burton Street". That is simply not reality. The "comfortable walk" referenced above necessitates walking along Sackmore Lane, a single-track road with no footways, few passing places, high hedges, and of course, no streetlighting. Church Hill is disingenuously described as a main road in the application, but is narrow in sections and does not have continuous footway along the whole length. Church Hill is proposed as the access to Tess Square for HGVs (deliveries) and in addition the Tess Square development is clearly intended to be an attractor (given that more than 200 parking spaces are planned) without regard for the fact that much of this road has no footways for considerable stretches, is narrow and is used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. Users of this road include visitors to the area who are walking the Hardy Way, as well as residents going to and from the Crown public house, and to / from the Pilwell area to facilities along New Street and from Crown Road and New Street down to the village hall and other nearby amenities. The eastern end of New Street (similarly described in the application as a main road)

⁶ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/about-us/paths-for-everyone/reclassification-of-the-national-cycle-network-faqs/>

narrows significantly past the school and church approaching the busy B3092 junction and has no footways.

- 5.7. Whilst the plans for Tess Square suggest a connection through the school site that could in theory provide an alternative off-road route for people walking between New Street and Church Hill, this is not understood to have been agreed with the school and is not detailed in any of the proposals that we have seen, and the Appellant does not appear to be suggesting that the development is phased to bring the Tess Square element forward before the Butts Close housing.
- 5.8. We also have concerns regarding highway safety for pedestrians and cyclists in many other locations around the village, including at the junction of Pilwell and Church Hill and north along Burton Street, the main village thoroughfare, through to Mill Lane to the North, as well as along Sackmore Lane and Chippel Lane. The increase in traffic and potential pedestrian / cycle movements may not appear significant when considered for each site, but the cumulative impact and success or otherwise of the planned mitigation (such as travel plans) for the consented sites has yet to be realised. These impacts will be further exacerbated by these proposals. There are no footways on these narrow, unlit roads and many local residents do not feel safe walking or cycling on these roads with the existing level of traffic, and these safety concerns will only increase with more people living here.
- 5.9. With regard to residents' attitude to walking in the village, the Highways Authority has previously collected and published data relating to the extent to which local school children walk or cycle to school⁷, and this data is still available and demonstrates the point that a significant number of residents who might be expected to walk are reluctant to walk what is contended to be a 'reasonable walking distance' (800m), and more-so than other areas of the county. It shows 73% of pupils getting taken to school by car, with only limited car sharing, and that 34% of these were living within 800m of the school. The average for schools in the Dorset area was 14%

⁷ http://sthc.co.uk/portals/dorset/Distance_School_Current.html - whilst the data is from 2016/7, local knowledge suggests there has not been a significant change



- 5.10. The Parish Council has recently (February 2025) surveyed the parents/guardians of the pupils using St Gregory’s school to understand whether they would use the proposed car parking for the school in their daily ‘school run’ We surveyed 35 parents and found that 91.6% of those parents would never use the car park commenting that they “have no time” and “have other children in the car”. [CD12.003c]
- 5.11. The creation of a village centre with the potential for linked trips may seem in theory a ‘sustainable’ option, but is likely to disadvantage many residents should the existing shops close or relocate to the new centre, as has been suggested in relation to Robin Hill Stores. Many residents – particularly the elderly - walk to the local shops to purchase essential / top-up goods. Tess Square would be much further for a significant proportion of the existing population (such as those living in the areas west of Sackmore Lane), and would include sections of road without safe, continuous footways, forcing those residents to use their cars to visit the facility, increasing (not reducing) car usage within the village. For example, assuming that Tess Square would effectively lead to the closure of current Marnhull Stores and Robin Hill Stores, residents would have to travel the following distances:
- 5.11.1. Kentisworth Close to Tess Square via New Street – 1.1km
 - 5.11.2. Kentisworth Close to Tess Square via Sackmore Lane – 1.9km
 - 5.11.3. Ham Meadows to Tess Square via Burton Street – 1.4km
- 5.12. For most people this will mean a car journey (assuming they have one) given people's understandable reluctance to walk on busy lanes with no footway, or across muddy unlit footpaths, possibly carrying heavy loads.

- 5.13. The proposed development provides no safe or segregated cycle routes for trips within the village. It also demonstrates a real lack of understanding of the local highways infrastructure by stating that “it is possible to cycle to Gillingham Station in 39 minutes” in trying to justify public transport connectivity – the reality is that no-one does or would realistically attempt such a journey along the busy and dangerous B3092.
- 5.14. For a rural area, the B3092 through Marnhull is a very busy road, including agricultural, and other heavy goods vehicles. It was not designed to be a main road, and is essentially unlit, with hedgerows and banks often encroaching into the road (as there are sections with no verge) and sharp bends (often coinciding with junctions) with very poor visibility. This is the case at the junction with Chippel Lane (which also floods on occasion), and at the awkward four-way junction by St Gregory’s church. For these reasons, residents have very valid concerns over the proposed new junction on Schoolhouse Lane. We note that the Appellant has now removed the pavements from the proposed Schoolhouse Lane junction, but we do not think this will address pedestrian safety as many of the roads in the village do not have pavements, and walking along the B3092 will be a significant short cut to the main village facilities rather than taking the much longer, unrealistic route across the Butts Close development and then along New Street to access any of the facilities (or visit friends) to the central and eastern side of the village. This topic is addressed in further detail by our expert witness, Mr Fitter.
- 5.15. It is unfortunate that much of the growth in the village has been permitted with no attempt to address the shortcomings of the wider local road network than in the immediate environs of the various sites. All we can do is look forward and ensure that we do address these issues when new proposals are put forward. The MPC’s work on the draft MNP has therefore included development of a vision and measures to help address the concerns of local residents about the safety for pedestrians and cyclists. [CD6.001 – Chapter 9]. Our objectives under this theme are to:

Prioritise walking and cycling for local journeys, and encourage improvements to public transport provision – primarily local bus services.

Minimise the adverse impacts from any increases in motor vehicle traffic on the roads and rural lanes, recognising that many of our rural lanes are unsuitable for large or high volumes of traffic,

and that they are frequently shared with vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists.

- 5.16. The vision for this is further articulated through highlighting how this may be achieved with a mixed parcel of measures (for which locations are indicated on a map) and include:
- 5.16.1. More defined entry points into the village (either as distinct village gateways or otherwise adapted to the space available) where pedestrians are likely to be walking;
 - 5.16.2. Extending the 30mph on the B3092 (effectively replacing the 40mph limit).
 - 5.16.3. Improving the 4-way junction on the B3092 with Church Hill and New Street, and the 4-way junction on the B3092 with Tanzey Lane and Stoneylawn, so that these feel much safer to use.
 - 5.16.4. Using of signage, road markings or changes in surface treatment to warn vehicles of hazards and pinch points, where this can be achieved in keeping with the rural character of the village;
 - 5.16.5. Creating of safe walking routes, focusing on routes to the two schools, and along Burton Street and Sackmore Lane.
- 5.17. Without a more comprehensive suite of measures in place, such as we are suggesting through the MNP, our village is set to grow substantially without being a place where its residents and visitors feel safe walking or cycling for local journeys.

6. ISSUE 3:

WHETHER MARNHULL IS AN APPROPRIATE LOCATION FOR HOUSING, RETAIL AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THIS SCALE

The housing land supply position going forward and the contribution the scheme would make to the supply of housing, including affordable housing

- 6.1. Whilst I make no comment in respect of the Dorset-wide housing supply, and implications of the revised NPPF in calculating the Dorset-wide housing requirement figure in the longer term, MPC would like to draw the Inspector's attention to local information on housing need and supply.

- 6.2. Appendix 10 of the MNP sets out some basic information relevant to housing needs in the parish. This includes:
- 6.2.1. the typical build rates in the parish from the start of the Local Plan period (2011), which range from 1 – 15 dwellings.
 - 6.2.2. the ‘proportionate share’ of the housing need based on a range of assumptions, which ranges from 4 – 17 dwellings a year. The upper end of this is based on the new (2024) standard method used on the advice of our consultant and Dorset Council.
 - 6.2.3. the typical level of affordable housing need registered in recent years – which is 11 people / households with a local connection, and a further 63 – 89 people / households with no local connection but specifying Marnhull as one of their preferred areas (most would have selected multiple areas). The change in mix highlights the ‘churn’ as people’s needs change and they find / vacate homes, but overall the main need continues to be for 1 and 2 bedroom homes (40% of the expressed need is for 1 bedroom properties, and 35% for 2 bedroom properties).
 - 6.2.4. the amount of housing with permission in the parish as of April 2024 – which amounts to over 250 dwellings⁸.
 - 6.2.5. the amount of affordable housing with permission in the parish as of April 2024 – which amounts to 141 dwellings.
- 6.3. All of this leads the Parish Council and parishioners to see no benefit at all in the provision of further market or affordable housing at this time. The scale of opportunistic planning applications approved in Marnhull has been unprecedented in the last five years, and is not compatible with the organic and largely linear evolution of the village which is causing much concern to MPC and residents alike. When these are built (which could well take 6-8 years as indicated by the Appellant in his Marnhull

⁸ This data was compiled by our planning consultant in conjunction with Dorset Council, It was based on the LPA’s latest monitoring data and takes into account new permissions up to December 2024 and has removed lapsed permissions in that timeframe. As far as we are aware these are all likely to be built with the exception of 1 dwelling (The Old Brewery) where work was undertaken, but the new owners have informed Building Regulations that they no longer intend to subdivide the property.

Brochure [CD4.5]), Marnhull will have grown by more than 25%, which is quite a significant population increase over a comparatively short period of time.

- 6.4. Even taking the highest proportionate derived housing target for this area - 17 dwellings a year – the current supply without the appeal scheme would equate to the equivalent of a 15 year supply.
- 6.5. Taking the highest evidence of affordable housing need – 100 dwellings – the current supply without the appeal scheme exceeds this by 41 dwellings.
- 6.6. Whilst the Appellant’s Statement of Case refers to the provision of affordable housing in the village being a ‘key concern for the Appellant’, he was also the applicant / owner for both the site north of Burton Street (2/2018/1808/OUT) that is under construction, and the site off Salisbury Street (P/OUT/2023/00627) in neither case did the application include an up-to-date affordable housing needs survey in order to clearly identify the house types and sizes needed, reflect the evidence of housing need on Dorset Council’s housing register, or propose to increase the affordable housing provision either been increased above the expected threshold. If the Appellant were genuinely looking to meet an affordable housing need, then he would be proposing primarily 1-bedroom homes (given that 40% of the expressed need is for 1-bedroom properties), yet the mix on the indicative plan for Butts Close shows only 2-, 3- and 4-bedroom affordable units (much like the other sites). The actual need for 2+ bedroom homes is even more outweighed by the existing supply.
- 6.7. Marnhull is situated in what can best be described as a peripheral and very much rural part of Dorset, with very limited local employment (as described above) and far removed from the main towns and centres of employment.
- 6.8. Whilst as a resident I consider it an excellent and attractive place to live, this is because I, like many others, moved here for its village character and not for work purposes. The development not only harms the reasons why residents choose to live and stay here; it also is not an area which people will look to settle down in if they need to be close to job opportunities and have limited access to a car. In MPC’s view, if all of the homes are built, the affordable housing providers are likely to struggle to find people who will want to put down roots here, which means either that many of the affordable housing tenants will be unhappy and looking to move on quickly (which is not conducive to a

socially cohesive community and can lead to unsociable behaviour) or, if the homes remain empty (either fail to find a suitable tenant or, in the case of first homes / shared ownership, fail to find a buyer), the S106 clauses kick in which would release the homes onto the private market. We have seen this happen in Stalbridge as is referenced by our planning expert, Jo Witherden in her evidence.

Infrastructure planning

- 6.9. The cumulative growth of the village at this scale, coming forward as speculative development – without the benefit from the forward thinking and planning linked to the Local and Neighbourhood Plans - has resulted in poor and uncoordinated infrastructure planning. The various financial commitments secured with the developers through S106 agreements are summarised in the Neighbourhood Plan [CD6.001 – Section 8.34].
- 6.10. Whilst these contributions are welcome, it has been difficult for the Parish Council to respond to Dorset Council's requests for what is needed as and when these applications arose – as it makes a difference whether the village grows by around 40 - 50 people every 10 years (which is what happened over the last two Census periods and which was projected to continue under the Local Plan strategy), by about 100 people (which was the rate suggested in the emerging Local Plan), by about 550 people (which is what is now expected if all the current permissions are built – typical occupancy rate of 2.15 x 256), or by whatever this may increase in light of this Appeal, or if the Appellant's 'Future of Marnhull' plans are all approved.
- 6.11. MPC is consulted on the application and has been asked to advise Dorset Council on the need for new or improved facilities – but when these are considered individually, they do not by themselves seem enough to identify a big project. If we had known we were getting an extra 720+ people (which would be the total with the application added) back in 2016 when the Local Plan was prepared), MPC would have worked with the community and existing organisations – and even the surrounding parishes - to identify what would be needed in terms of community facilities, and where this should be located (including land within any of the development sites). However, the piecemeal approach to planning that has happened has meant that we have ‘missed the boat’ on any 'big project' we may have come up, as most of the applications and funding agreements are already decided, and we do not want to raise unrealistic expectations in our community.

- 6.12. The table on infrastructure funding in the MNP also helps demonstrate other issues with this approach, such as:
- 6.12.1. Uncertainty over where land will be found for the allotments – this needs time and negotiation with landowners to deliver, which is all the harder to do when they are hoping to maximise housing.
 - 6.12.2. Difficulties funding a project when the wording is too narrowly defined – for example, with the village hall enlargement now complete, we may have to think again as to whether it remains adequate for the growing population – or whether it may be better to use the remaining funds to improve (or build) another facility.
 - 6.12.3. Uncertainties about the future management of the various facilities – whether the expectation is that the Parish Council manage those that are intended for wider public use. For example, whether the facilities such as the in-site LAPs and LEAPs will be genuinely public for parish use or will be managed by the residents of that estate (and whether in such cases other residents will be allowed access if this isn't specified in the agreement)

Local demand and impact on existing retail provision

- 6.13. The feedback provided from the Parish Survey [CD6.001 Appendix 3] indicates there is little perceived demand for such a large retail and commercial development. The following statistics from the survey are worth noting:
- 6.13.1. The significant majority did not agree that it would be a good idea to have a larger food store and other commercial units in a “new” village centre location (68% of respondents disagreed, 11% had no opinion and 21% agreed it was a good idea);
 - 6.13.2. Robin Hill Stores and the Spar were considered ‘important’ or ‘very important’ local facilities by almost all residents (99% and 97% of respondents respectively) – other shops such as the hairdressers and carpet shop were also deemed important but to a lesser extent (68% and 53% of respondents respectively)
 - 6.13.3. Having more shops was not considered to be amongst the top priorities for improvements to our facilities, or new facilities (only 11% of respondents considered this to be amongst the top three priorities)

- 6.14. The residents of the village value greatly the existing convenience stores and these are reasonably well placed to serve the older Burton Street and New Street areas. This is not the case for the Appeal scheme, which locationally favours the more recent shift of development to the eastern side of the village (although in our view, this area would be better served through provision further east as suggested in the Neighbourhood Plan).
- 6.15. Whilst some residents may benefit from living closer to a supermarket, and the fact that at this size it would provide a wider choice of produce (albeit not as good as the larger supermarkets in the towns), other residents would be disadvantaged, particularly those less mobile who currently walk to the existing stores which may no longer be viable. Given the village survey feedback it is our view that there is no real benefit of a new supermarket of this size in this location.
- 6.16. We are also concerned that we are being sold a ‘white elephant’ that may either never be built in the form proposed, or if built, will fail and need repurposing. The applicant has not provided any evidence that a supermarket retailer has expressed any interest in the site, which is not on a main thoroughfare or in a town and therefore unlikely to be of interest to a national operator. This is covered in more detail within Mrs Witherden’s evidence.
- 6.17. The application also proposes five Class E premises. Discussions with Sturminster Newton Town Council have confirmed that it is proving challenging to fill empty shops and offices in the town and many shops are occupied by quite niche enterprises and not by the typical retail concerns proposed by the Appellant. Given the significantly larger catchment in Sturminster Newton this further confirms our concerns regarding viability of the Tess Square development.

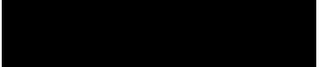
7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1. This Application creates an artificial village centre and does not respect the historic character and form of the settlement. Aside from the significant heritage impact, it is contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of residents based upon our Parish Survey and extensive feedback on the planning application and appeal registered with Dorset Council.

- 7.2. It is also contrary to local planning policy, which was produced to guide development to the most appropriate locations, and which made sense to our community.
- 7.3. Moreover, it will have an adverse impact on Marnhull in several ways:
- 7.3.1. The Application will transform the nature of the village, creating an artificial ‘village centre’ where none currently exists, creating additional traffic onto a rural village road network with the consequent increase in risk to drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. There is no real consideration given to sustainable travel options.
- 7.3.2. The proposed retail development will disenfranchise residents at the remote edges of the village as they would need to travel far further to do their ‘local’ shopping if, as expected, this development results in the existing shops, which residents say are very important to them, closing.
- 7.3.3. The proposed retail development is disproportionately large and in the wrong place for a village such as Marnhull. As it is not on the principal highways network, we are very concerned that the convenience store will fail (if it ever gets started as it is unlikely to attract major retailers), and few of the smaller business premises will be taken up, meaning the whole concept will become a ‘white elephant’ with little commercial activity, leading to the inevitable request for a ‘change of use’ to yet more housing.
- 7.4. The housing development at Butts Close is another large-scale housing development to add to those that have already been approved in our village. Our existing approval of more than 250 houses far exceeds any future local needs in both market and affordable housing and is therefore not needed at this time. Our rural location away from the main towns, and the lack of local employment opportunities, means that many of the people looking for affordable housing are unlikely to want to live here and this in itself can cause social cohesion issues.
- 7.5. For these reasons, and those set out by our expert witnesses, I respectfully ask the Inspector to reject this Appeal.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:..... 

Print name: Mark Turner

Date: 11th March 2025