

Objection to allocation of the Whinney Fold/Know Hill site (S56) in the Arnside Silverdale AONB Development Plan (Draft consultation document)

- The site proposed for development is set within the small valley between Lindeth Rd and Know Hill which is an **important part of the setting of the village** and is an **excellent example of the landscape described in the AONB management plan**:

“The small-scale yet complex nature of the landforms gives an intimate feeling within valleys and woodlands which contrasts with the open nature and expansive views from higher ground and along the coast.”

Arcadis Environmental Consultants, as part of a landscape assessment of the AONB, concluded that **development on this site would result in the loss of an important landscape element** and would **harm the local landscape and settlement character of the AONB**.

- Further **development at Whinney Fold/ Know Hill would not fit well within the boundary of the settlement – it would encroach into the open countryside** not only by reason of built development but also because of the need for a drainage field which would replace the current gently rolling pasture with a flat, more urban land-form. . Furthermore, as identified above this protrusion, beyond the boundary of the settlement, would be into a little intimate valley, **part of an ancient enclosure pattern, with the risk of causing harm to an important element of the AONB**, contrary to paragraph 115 of the NPPF and to Core Strategy Policy SC5 which states that new development, especially in an AONB, should be ‘of a quality which reflects and enhances the positive characteristics of its surroundings including the quality of the landscape’.
- It is assumed that this area has been proposed because it is of a relatively small scale in terms of impact on this landscape area. It should be noted that in the AONB DPD Draft Plan it states that the plan should **‘take full account of the cumulative and incremental impacts of development having regard to the impacts of existing developments** (including unintended impacts and impacts of development that has taken place as a result of Permitted Development Rights, licensing or certification) and the likely further impacts of the proposal in hand;

This site has already been developed (existing Whinney Fold development) and it may be argued that the existing development lies within the settlement boundary. However, when planning permission was originally given for this very contentious site, it was clear that it was given in the context of a small development and a presumption against further development. It is recognized that housing requirements change with time and no legal requirements were placed on extension of the original development. However, proposing further development there has a **cumulative and incremental impact on this particular landscape area**. This cumulative and incremental impact involves encroachment into open countryside beyond the settlement boundary and into open countryside.

In the AONB's response to the original Applethwaite proposal at this site they stated *'The incremental erosion of landscape character must be considered when assessing this proposal. The original development of six houses at Whinney Fold led to a loss of pastureland within the valley and the introduction of modern buildings and hard standing intruded into the rural character and visual amenity of the area. The current proposal would add to this loss and intrusion and would extend development much further out into open countryside. The cumulative impact of development on the landscape character, visual amenity and special qualities of the AONB must be considered.'*

This kind of development should be avoided in an AONB and alternatives prioritised within the existing settlement area or elsewhere in the authority areas, even if this is not possible within the current DPD timescales.

The previous planning history of the site highlights the contentious nature of the existing development and the context of considering future development at that time:

*When considering the adjoining development site at Know Hill land in 1997, the City Council's Planning Committee report stated that: "The proposals have attracted considerable objection," "following consideration of these and particularly the concern that the site might be extended in the future, the layout has been amended. The form of the access road has changed; its design has been downgraded to the standard required for a short residential cul-de-sac, **so that there is no question of its being seen as a way of opening up the land to the south for further development.** At the same time the opposition of the houses has been amended slightly, so that it would be more difficult to extend this road; access to the field is maintained for agricultural purposes only."*

As David Porter highlights in his objection to the recent Applethwaite development : *At appeal, this sentiment was not included in the resulting decision to allow the development of six dwellings at Whinney Fold (APP/A2335/A/01/1070126). It will be for the Highways authority to advise whether or not the access is up to current standards, but there is a danger of repeating the same debate by the way that the layout of the development is presented.*

He indicates that *'To permit this proposed development as designed will open up the further possibility that development will be extended onto further land to the east.'*

Furthermore, in view of the context of the previous history, local people are unconvinced, that a 'defensible boundary' of a smaller development area would prevent further development along this corridor if the economics justified it in the future - and continuing along this 'route' would set a precedent in terms of continuing development beyond the existing houses when they had apparently been identified as the 'end point'.

While the current proposal for small scale development might be set in the context of a defensible boundary, it does not take away from the fact that this would ultimately, alongside the existing development, form a large development in its entirety, on the settlement boundary, in a peaceful, tranquil, intimate and important part of Silverdale's landscape.

- It is difficult to understand why this area would be proposed for any development if it:
 - has any impact on an important landscape element of the AONB
 - is part of an intimate valley with an ancient enclosure pattern and
 - and extends beyond the boundary of the settlement into open countryside.....

....when Paragraph 115 of NPPF clarifies 'that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in the AONB'. By virtue of footnote 9 to paragraph 14 of the NPPF, this places a presumption against development in the AONB. Also, Lancaster City Council in previous objections to a larger scale development here stated '**Given the high level of protection for the AONB there is no requirement for the AONB to provide a proportionate share of the of the City Council's housing supply.**

This site seems to be one of the most contentious locally and inappropriate in terms of the significance of the site and its encroachment into open countryside

- The AONB DPD should be in conformity with the Lancaster Core Strategy and should not, without good reason, conflict with policies in the Development Management DPD. These state (Core Strategy Policy SC5 and DMDPD Policy DM 35) that **any development should contribute positively to the local identity and character of the area.** Moreover Policy DM 42 states that all development should be well-related to the existing built form of the settlement and demonstrate good siting and design. It may well be argued that the current Whinney Fold development is regimented and not of a design that sits well in the landscape. The proposal of land for developing 6 houses in the draft DPD **suggests continuation of a 'tight development' which will inevitably have a regimented and 'housing estate' character.** It is **not compatible with the loose and open nature of development in Silverdale** (as described in the AONB Landscape and Seascape Character Assessment 2015) **and will continue to form an extension of Whinney Fold that will create more of a sense of a suburban housing estate identified by LCC as not in keeping with the local character and identity of the area.** Silverdale is a village of irregularity, properties of different shapes, sizes and styles broken up with hedgerows and limestone walls. This will **add to an already regular repetitive layout similar to that in Whinney Fold and essentially be cumulative and incremental development that seen as a whole**, along with the existing development, **might be seen as major development of this landscape.**

Furthermore, **this development does not promote and enhance access by creating places that connect with each other and are easy to move through - it forms a cul-de-sac.** This has previously been identified as a concern in relation to the Applethwaite proposed development at this site.

- Additionally, there is recent evidence that 'effluent' from the current Whinney Fold development is reaching Silverdale shore. While the treatment system there is designed to remove solids and bacterial material, there is **no evidence with regards level of nitrates and phosphates leaching from this site which may impact on the adjacent Morecambe Bay SPA**. It is questionable as to whether further development in the AONB, an area without mains sewerage (already exceeding the size of settlement accepted under EU legislation for an area without mains sewerage) can be justified on a site that:
 - is already prone to surface flooding in parts
 - has no clear way that surface water can leave the site other than percolating through fissures in the limestone bedrock or escaping by other local drainage pipes on to Silverdale shore
 - is within 200 m of the Morecambe Bay SPA

It has already been identified by Lancaster City Council in relation to the proposed Applethwaite development for this site that *'In meeting the requirements of Policies DM38 and DM39, it is important that the value of this open land to offset discharges from nearby development (as well as natural rainfall and run-off) is properly accounted for and not compromised by additional development.'*

Further 'urbanisation' of this area, so close to the Morecambe Bay SPA, in a village already exceeding size criteria for a settlement without main sewage treatment, will increase run-off of surface water and potentially increase the risk of further polluting the groundwater or the adjacent SPA directly.

- While the local authority will have sought input from statutory agencies and NGO conservation bodies, there is little substantiating evidence in terms of the value of the nature conservation of this area. For example, the site is used by curlew, redshank and oystercatcher. There have been recent records of this field being used by these species and as identified in an objection to the original proposed Applethwaite development at this site, it was noted by Tony Riden (who has considerable local knowledge) that *'Flocks of Shelduck, a resident wildfowl of Morecambe Bay SSSI, Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and internationally recognised RAMSAR site, appear annually in the field being proposed for development, and gather in this locality for courtship, pairing, breeding and nesting in the field hedgerow bottoms and adjoining wooded copse. Development and disturbance of this area would deny and remove the breeding habitat for the Shelduck in this locality. Several other wading bird species use the field and adjoining areas for shelter and feeding, particularly during the winter months during periods of storms and high-tides, including Oystercatcher, Curlew and Redshank.'*

As an example of inadequate monitoring, the ecological survey undertaken by Applethwaite on a single date in July, as part of their proposal, would not identify the value of this and other sites adjacent, to the interest features of the SPA. Nor does the lack of records from local bird clubs (with sporadic recording), for example, mean there is no value in the site. Indeed, in their letter with regards the Applethwaite development at this site, **Natural England advises that there is currently not enough information to determine whether the likelihood of significant effects can be ruled out'**.

Again, while it may be suggested that the development area proposed in the draft DPD is of a smaller scale, it should be noted that there are **cumulative and incremental impacts of this kind of protrusion beyond the settlement on the biodiversity value.**

In the AONB response to the original proposed Applethwaite development it was noted that *'While we acknowledge that the site itself is not formally designated for its biodiversity value it nevertheless performs a valuable role as wildlife habitat and helps support a range of species. It also forms a part of a green habitat corridor along the coast which is an integral part of the AONB's ecological network. The diverse mosaic of habitats and the way they are connected is a key part of what makes the AONB so important for biodiversity.'*

While it is accepted that the area proposed for development is not noted for its significant botanical interest it should be noted that this is part of a **complex of fields adjacent to the coast that have the potential to be restored to unimproved grassland which has declined by 98% across England.** The AONB management plan notes that in the National Planning Policy Framework *'planning should contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.'*

Indeed the draft DPD highlights that *'Arnsdale & Silverdale AONB supports an exceptionally diverse range of priority habitats and species, many of which are designated at an international, national or local level, but some of which are not formally designated. It is therefore important that policies promote the **preservation, restoration and recreation of priority habitats and protection and recovery of priority species and the wider ecological networks that support them.** The whole of the AONB is contained within the Morecambe Bay Limestones and Wetlands Nature Improvement Area.'*

This area, as part of open countryside within an AONB, should be positively contributing to enhancing biodiversity and have the potential to be restored to unimproved grassland in the future.

If this area were to be developed, even on a small scale, that cumulative and incremental development, continues to impact on the potential to restore the biodiversity loss identified in the State of Nature report (2016) and which the AONB should be positively contributing to.

- With regards the potential housing need in Silverdale, it should be noted that despite the Local Housing Needs survey, there has been difficulty renting/selling the low cost-housing properties on Whinney Fold and in recent years, either properties have been empty for a period or in some cases rented to people from outside of the AONB (Carnforth/Morecambe). **It is questionable whether the basis for extending beyond the settlement boundary, into open countryside, in an area of important landscape with potential to restore priority habitats, can be justified for a questionable need, especially when there is no requirement for this housing need to be met within the AONB.**

Also, as previously highlighted in relation to the Applethwaite application:

'Given the high level of protection afforded by the NPPF to the landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB, there is no requirement for the AONB to provide a proportionate share of the City Council's housing supply. Any needs identified from the Housing Needs Survey that cannot be met within the AONB because of the protected landscape will be met elsewhere.'

Also, as there is already an indication that Applethwaite propose to reapply for planning permission for this site – and as the requirements around low-cost housing seem to have been relaxed under the current government in favour of less affordable 'starter homes', it is likely that even low cost housing may well not be delivered on this site, if the proposed area remains within the DPD.

In conclusion, this area is perhaps of least suitability to develop within the AONB *i.e.*:

- It impacts on an important landscape character
- It encroaches beyond the boundary of the settlement into open countryside, especially when taking into account the need for a drainage field
- It will impact on biodiversity and reduce the potential to restore biodiversity into the future
- It has the potential to impact on the adjacent SPA through loss of habitat and potential impacts on groundwater/ direct drainage into Morecambe Bay
- It reduces local people's sense of ownership and positivity around the planning process when clear historical statements are disregarded
- There is questionable need which should not be prioritized over the impacts, within the current DPD timescales *i.e.* there is no going back
- Considering the sensitive and contentious nature of this site, it is questioned why it is proposed if there is no requirement for demand in the authority areas to be met in the AONB
- **It will have a cumulative and incremental impact on the landscape character and broader conservation value of the area including biodiversity, in an AONB where "Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in ... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty." (Paragraph 115 of the NPPF)**