

Easingwold Town Council

Easingwold Library, Market Place,
Easingwold, York YO61 3AN

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Clerk: Mrs J Bentley

HDC Planning Application 20/00217/OUT, Easingwold Primary School and Thirsk Road Traffic Management

Dear Sirs,

Easingwold Town Council (ETC) has asked me to write to you to express their considerable surprise and regret that the planning application 20/00217/OUT has been approved. In addition, to demand that North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) and Hambleton District Council (HDC) urgently work together to undertake all the necessary actions to mitigate the consequences of this decision.

The result of this planning approval (and a consequence of the associated legal, administrative and policy failures over some 15 years) is that Easingwold Primary School will be (and already has been) deprived of access to the car park provided for it as part of the Prospect Farm, Thirsk Road Easingwold (06/00078/FUL) development. This development was granted under Appeal Reference: APP/G2713/A/06/1198335 and the provision of the car park was part of the conditions granting the appeal.

In the view of ETC it should never have come to this. Both HDC (by neglecting to safeguard the provision of the car park in perpetuity in the planning wordings) and NYCC (by not taking one of its multiple opportunities over the years to take on responsibility for the car park) are badly negligent in allowing this to happen. The consequence is that the school and town have now lost an asset of high community value; and there is a considerably increased level of road safety risk that has been created for the users of the school and road.

Not only does ETC consider this to be the case, but apparently so too does NYCC given the objections raised by their Highways and Children & Young People Services Departments to the 20/00217/OUT planning application; as well as the observations of the Easingwold Primary School's Head Teacher and Chair of Governors. To remind you, their objections were on highway safety grounds due to the loss of available parking, the lack of provision for displaced vehicles and the increased congestion outside Easingwold Primary School particularly at pick up and drop off times.

In fact, ETC is astounded that the HDC Planning Officers report recommended the granting of this application; and was surprised to note in paragraph 5.15 it says that the proposal would not create harm in terms of highway safety:

5.15: *The proposal would create seven further homes in a sustainable location, without causing harm to the appearance of the settlement and without harm in terms of highway safety, the capacity of local infrastructure, or adversely affecting the supply of employment land.*

And yet, in para 4.3, they acknowledge that the Highway Authority wishes the application to be refused on highway safety grounds:

4.3: *the Local Highway Authority recommends that Planning Permission is REFUSED for the following reasons 'The Planning Authority considers that loss of the 22 parking spaces for the use of the school would be likely to result in vehicles being parked on the County Highway to the detriment of the free flow of traffic and road safety'.*

It seems that the HDC Planning Officers believe that they are more skilled in their judgement of road safety than those in NYCC specifically charged with the task and we should be grateful for an explanation of this apparent anomaly.

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Despite this, we are told that ETC cannot practically object to this deplorable decision; nor can it successfully seek a judicial review.

Hence, we can only request that both HDC and NYCC now fulfil their responsibilities to enable Easingwold's people, road users and primary school children, parents and staff to cope with the on-going situation as well as possible.

Demand for places at the Primary School is growing and will continue to do so as a result of the considerable expansion of the town. The school, however, serves both the town and a semi-rural population. Much of the town, villages and countryside are beyond possible walking access. The primary school specific buses have been axed.

The VAS data shows a significant proportion of the traffic using the road exceeds 20mph by a considerable margin. It is perhaps 'good fortune' that the car park's closure has coincided with the Covid pandemic situation. However, that will not last forever, and this change is permanent and congestion on Thirsk Road Easingwold is increasing with the growth of the town. Finally, ETC can confirm that the local road and footpath conditions and infrastructure in front of the school are already poor and in urgent need of improvement.

In line with this we request that:

1. Hambleton District Council

- a. Take all the necessary steps to ensure that the inevitable building site that will be the result of this decision will be closely monitored and regulated to operate in a manner conducive to protecting the safety of the school users and traffic. (For example: preventing ingress of deliveries and removal of waste during school pick up and drop off times; or avoiding the creation dust, noise or other hazards whilst children are present; not blocking emergency vehicular access during school times; etc.)
- b. That, when full planning permission for the site is granted, it insists on proper pedestrian footpaths, crossing measures and accessibility provisions on the development's (western) side of the road. (There are no such continuous provisions along that side of the road in place at present and people using that side of the road are forced to cross a congested highway or walk in the road to progress). Also, to ensure that the back of the development does not become an access point for further developments in the fields behind, thus increasing the traffic risk from the site.

2. North Yorkshire County Council

- a. Undertake an urgent review of the traffic, road conditions and infrastructure along Thirsk Road in Easingwold with the new situation of the primary school in mind
- b. Create a plan and quickly implement it that makes the road as safe as possible. This includes: Improvements in the road's condition, markings and infrastructure; provision of incremental safety measures; provisions for displaced vehicles; and a holistic approach to pedestrian safety and accessibility on both sides of the road
- c. Ensure that these provisions allow for improved pedestrian usability and accessibility all along Thirsk Road. This includes around the mini roundabout at the junction with Long Street, Raskelf Road and Church Hill; as well as allowing for the anticipated higher traffic volumes coming from Husthwaite Road following the 175-house development being planned there.

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To assist you in understanding the current situation in the area around Easingwold Primary School and along Thirsk Road and what might be achieved; please find attached:

- *Appendix 1: Photographs of the Thirsk Road Location and Current Condition of the Roads*
- *Appendix 2: Examples of Potential Actions to Improve Safety Around Easingwold Primary School*
- *Appendix 3: Survey & VAS Data from Thirsk Road*

We look forward to your response to this letter and will always be available to work with you to achieve an optimum solution; one which relieves the consequences of this planning decision.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Bentley
Town Clerk, Easingwold Town Council

- *Appendix 1: Photographs of the Thirsk Road Location and Current Condition of the Roads*

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The view from the Thirsk Road zebra-crossing looking towards the school on the left, showing the poor condition of the crossing itself, the low visibility of the crossing lights and the deteriorating condition of the road markings. At this point there is a footpath on both sides of the road. This crossing serves the Prospect Farm estate only as there is no continuity of footpath on the western side of the road into or out of town. There is no further crossing point allowing pedestrian access to the school provided between this point and the junction of Thirsk Road with Raskelf Road and Church Hill.



A view showing the deterioration of the road surface and markings in front of the school.



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View across the front of the proposed development directly opposite the school showing the car park already closed and unusable by the Easingwold Primary School.

View along Thirsk Road towards Long Street and the junction mini roundabout. This shows the absence from this point of a footpath on the western side of the road between the development and Raskelf Road. It also shows the poor condition of the traffic calming bumps and the complete invisibility of the bus stop and its markings on the other side of the road. There is no matching bus stop on the western side of the road that can be used by the school.



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calming measures beyond this point are equally as tired as those shown earlier going towards the centre of town due to the constant attrition by heavy traffic.



View of Gill Croft (on the school/eastern side of the road) showing the poor condition of the road and the lack of markings. It is narrow, a cul-de-sac and has many local residents needing to pass, so it is an unsuitable location for displaced vehicles. Despite this, Gill Croft already becomes saturated with parked vehicles at peak times causing frustration of residents who are blocked in.



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View of the mini roundabout at the junction of Thirsk Road, Long Street, Raskelf Road and Church Hill. This shows the relatively poor condition of the road surface and the significant deterioration of the road markings. It also shows how inadequate the crossing provisions are for pedestrians and those with mobility problems. NYCC have recently withdrawn funding for the guided crossing on the Church Hill side exacerbating the problems of crossing with young children.



There is a need for more maintenance and conditions in the area around Easingwold Primary School; changes that

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would significantly improve its useability and accessibility. The following are some suggestions that might, amongst others, be considered:

1. Road Maintenance & Markings

The condition of Thirsk Road in the area immediately around the school is rather tired:

- The road surface is wearing in many areas and would benefit from resurfacing (this includes the road along Gill Croft)
- The road has a 20mph speed restriction and several speed/calming bumps in situ. Because of the heavy traffic volumes and constant attrition these are showing significant signs of wear and all require refurbishment
- The road markings throughout are tired and in need of refreshment. This is especially true of the bus stop, where the stop sign is hard to see, and the road markings are virtually absent. The road markings for the junctions on the side roads and the entrances to the school are very faded and require repainting. The indications on the speed calming bumps are all worn and hard to see.
- The mini roundabout lane markings are also confusing as those on Long Street and Thirsk Road are double dashed and those on Church Hill and Raskelf Road are single dashed. Drivers struggle to understand whether and how this affects priority at the junction and how.

2. Speed & Parking Provisions

The area has a speed restriction of 20mph in place and the VAS data along with the NYCC traffic survey data show that it is essential to retain this and reinforce its observation by the traffic. There are inadequate parking restrictions in place along the road and into the corners of the side roads (Prospect Avenue and Gill Croft), such that it encourages congestion and blockage of the side roads. It would be beneficial to introduce a series of double yellow line and residents only restrictions to assure that traffic can flow in both directions as well as possible and that blockages are avoided. Some short stay parking zones to allow pick up and drop off only should be considered.

3. Footpaths, Cycle Tracks & Crossings

For the most part, there is no footpath in situ along the western side of Thirsk Road from its junction with Raskelf Road until the short portion between the proposed housing site and the entrance to Prospect Avenue; there it stops. An adequate width of verge appears to exist all along the road to allow a footpath to be installed. This would ensure that safe crossing points away from the mini roundabout could be introduced. Such a footpath should be continued after the Prospect Avenue entrance up to Husthwaite Road to further improve safety and accessibility.

The zebra crossing installed to support the pedestrian access to the Prospect Farm estate is now very tired and in need of refurbishment. Its flashing lights are particularly poor and difficult to see in inclement weather, they need to be replaced by modern LED lights.

There is no further crossing point available until the mini roundabout at the junction between Thirsk Road, Raskelf Road, Long Street and Church Hill. The crossing provisions here are very poor indeed. They are not easily useable and, in several places, have no dropped kerbs to facilitate wheelchair or pushchair use. They also take time to cross against a strong traffic pressure, not easy when walking children to school. This problem needs to be corrected. A proper study of how to facilitate effective and safe pedestrian use at this key crossing point in all directions needs to be carried out.

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NYCC used to provide a lollipop crossing attendant at this junction, but this provision has lapsed. Consideration needs to be given to its reinstatement for the peak pedestrian traffic times.

4. Warnings & Signage

The signage to indicate the presence of a school and the need for care by drivers is poor. The road markings are faded. The flashing lights to indicate the active drop off and pick up of pupils during the morning, lunch and evening key times are difficult to see. As you enter the town from the ring road they are often hidden behind parked vehicles and are placed after the school giving little warning.

5. Future Opportunities

The HDC new Local Plan provides for the building of a new housing estate of some 175 dwellings that will be entered from Husthwaite Road and will lie behind the school. Part of this development will provide additional land to the school that is intended for use as supplementary playing fields, allowing the school to expand. This gives two opportunities to improve this situation:

- Part of this land could be used to create a new staff car park lying behind the school – thus allowing the rearrangement of the drop off and pick up facilities in front of the school, which would no longer be needed for staff vehicles
- The additional land behind the school stretches down to the Parish Churchyard. Alongside the Parish Church there is a cart track. This will give access to the new playing fields and could be changed to provide a new footpath entrance to the school (as well as the proposed housing development). This would then open up the use of Church Hill, Church Avenue (and potentially the Parish Church's car park, with suitable permissions) for safer access and use in dropping off and picking up pupils and longer-term parking.

- ***Appendix 3: Survey & VAS Data from Thirsk Road***

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Easingwold Thirsk Rd outside the Primary School				
Weight Averaged Daily Values				
	Outbound		Inbound	
	NYCC results	VAS results	NYCC results	VAS results
Mean Speed (mph)	24.5	20.4	23.0	16.5
85%ile (mph)	28.8	24.7	27.8	20.7
Volume (Vehicles per day)	1726	2145	1785	1220
35+ mph (Vehicles per day)	30	26	22	2
Max speed	60-65	60-65	50-55	40

Part of this data comes from an NYCC survey (commissioned by ETC) outside the primary school completed with a view to siting a VAS unit there, and the rest from the period with the VAS unit in place. It shows the range of speeds and traffic being experienced along Thirsk Road outside the primary school with no VAS in place (the survey) and the effect of having the VAS. The survey occurred before the Covid 19 lockdown and the VAS data includes periods both within and outside the pandemic period.

When the VAS is operating it does have a significant effect on the road speeds; although the outbound traffic tends to be faster than the inbound traffic. This may be significantly because there are normally parked cars slightly blocking the inbound/Eastern side of the road, and that the school and zebra crossing are more visible from that direction. Nonetheless, the data shows that this area of Thirsk Road experiences a relatively high traffic density despite the pandemic conditions and that a significant number of vehicles travel along there at high speed (regularly over 60mph) despite the traffic calming and 20mph speed limits in place.