**Question to Little Thetford Parish Council**

**Self Build Development**

**10th May 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on the subject of the self build development in the village.

When this went through the planning process, the developers obtained ‘planning permission in principle’ on the basis of there being ten plots for the purpose of new houses that would be designed and constructed for people who would live in the village. Each plot purchaser then had a two year window from the grant of the planning permission to submit a detailed planning application. A key supporting document for each individual plot on purchase was a ‘planning passport’. Whilst these passports were, surprisingly in my view, not considered as key documents by ECDC Planning Department when coming to their decision, they did provide very important information on issues such as plot size, site limitations, design and legal obligations for self build properties. A couple of applications were received before the planning deadline and, in fact, building works started on at least one of the plots if I recall correctly.

As the two year deadline approached there was suddenly a burst of planning activity with the detailed individual plot applications being made. As a Parish Council, objections were raised in almost every case over things such as building design, construction materials, building scope, sight lines into Little Acorns and neighbouring properties - in other words each application received detailed consideration. On occasions this also included informal talks with the prospective purchasers as rumours were circulating at this stage that several of the plots had been purchased by developers and were therefore outside the scope of them being ‘self-build’. By way of example, the builders on Plot 1 that borders the road on the left as entering the development which had been the subject of special interest owing to its location backing onto the cemetery and the location of the underground culvert that had been shown incorrectly on some of the documentation, were spoken to. They assured the Parish Council that the property was being built for a family that would be living in the village.

The extensive objections from the Parish Council were submitted to ECDC Planning Department and site meetings were subsequently held with the Planning Officer to provide a full understanding of the concerns. All of this was recorded in PC Minutes and supporting documentation. After some negotiation with individual plot holders, ECDC Planning Department granted full planning permission to amended applications and works eventually started on some of the plots.

Councillors will be aware that two of the completed houses have been immediately put up for sale, being marketed as ‘New Houses’, at a premium price.

The legislation behind self build properties is complex and goes well beyond that part which deals with plot holders being able to seek a rebate for CIL payments if they live in the property for 3 years. Owing to the complexity of this legislation ECDC put out a Draft Supplementary Planning Document for ‘Custom and Self-Build Properties’ in Spring 2020 that the Parish Council responded to quite vigorously, in essence supporting the overall proposal but stating that the document did not provide sufficient clarity on the legislation and obligations. An amended version was subsequently adopted by ECDC as an SPD in September 2020.

It is clear that many of the developments now fall outside the definition of Self Build properties on a range of issues including the requirement for occupant purchasers to be involved in detailed discussions on the proposed plans. The SPD also includes guidance on the resale of plots and properties.

With only half of the ten plots having been completed and two of those being put up for immediate sale and two others having no work at all started on them, there is a real danger that this development is being used as a ‘smoke screen’ by unscrupulous developers seeking to get round the planning regulations for new properties within the red envelope of the village plans. It is also unclear whether the developers have fulfilled all of the Planning Conditions, especially on boundary treatment.

If these matters are not addressed there is a real potential for those purchasers who are complying with their obligations in particular, and the villagers more generally, will be disadvantaged by what is currently happening.

My proposal is for this matter to be considered by Councillors at the next PC meeting that could include inviting a senior member from ECDC Planning Department to attend so that he is aware of the concerns. This would also give Councillors the opportunity to refresh their knowledge of the SPD, discussions and decisions to date as well as making their own enquiries on the development.