



CROFT RESIDENTS
OBJECTION TO PEEL'S
DEVELOPMENT
PROPOSALS
Land off Lady Lane
Croft

Parcel CR4 - References R18/127, R18/115 & R18/155

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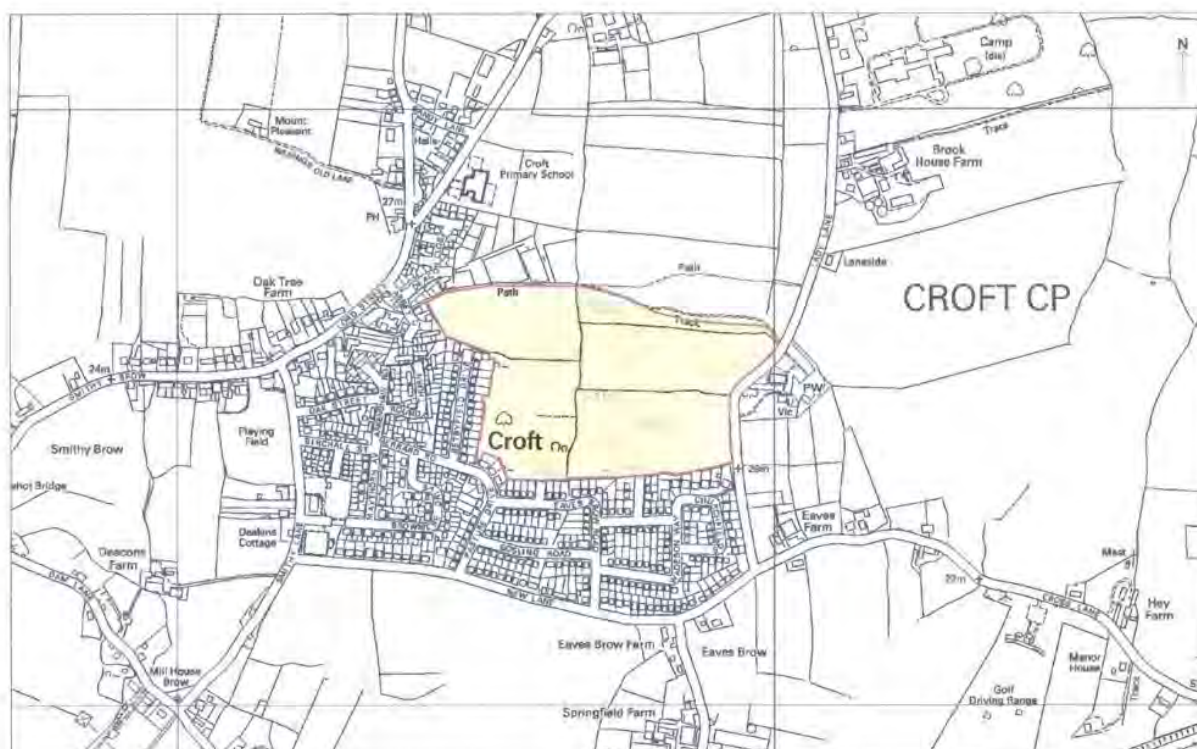
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1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present objections on behalf of Croft residents to proposals by Peel Holdings (Management) Ltd to develop land to the west of Lady Lane, Croft.

The land concerned forms part of Parcel CR4 and consists of 'Call for Sites' reference numbers R18/127, R18/115 & R18/155 and is highlighted in yellow on the map below.



The large scale development area off Lady Lane proposed by Peel

2. Executive Summary

This report demonstrates that development of the land west of Lady Lane, Croft to be unsuitable, unsustainable, detrimental to the existing community and wholly inappropriate in a rural village the size of Croft.

This report therefore demonstrates that the present Green Belt boundary to the north of the existing settlement should be maintained.

3. Character of Croft / Scale of Development

The beautiful village character of Croft will be ruined if Peel's proposals are approved. Croft's rural charm relies on the small size of the village and the open rural aspect it enjoys across open farmland, particularly over the land west of Lady Lane.

The greenbelt countryside immediately around the village inset is beautiful and must be treasured – not bulldozed over and built upon.

These green fields form the open area of countryside between Croft and Culcheth and are highly valued by local residents.

Policies QE 7 and CC 2 of the adopted Local Plan state that 'landscape character should be respected and maintained.' Ref:- Warrington Landscape Character Assessment (2007).



Land to the west of Lady Lane

The current Green Belt both within and around the site is of high landscape value with a Local Wildlife Site at its core surrounded by small fields broken up by established hedgerows and watercourses. Developments should maintain and, where possible, improve the standard of the environment by harmonising with their surroundings, particularly in scale. The proposal to build 220 houses (33% of the current housing stock) on Green Belt land is far in excess of the guide figure of 60 houses (10% of the current housing stock) in the preferred Local Plan option. This would be completely out of scale with the current size of the village where facilities are minimal. This development would severely impact on the character of the village and destroy its small rural village charm.

4. Green Belt Principles

Peel state that the 're-draw' of Green Belt boundaries should be undertaken because it questions the contribution this site makes to the Green Belt as it adjoins the wider Green Belt on its east boundary at Lady Lane. The identity of the Green Belt is that it is constructed not only of large patches of land enclosed by roads but also through smaller parcels which help break up urbanised areas. Although the site may be in part seen as enclosed by roads, this is insufficient in distinguishing it from the greater surrounding Green Belt.

Peel refer to 'generally desirable' Green Belt boundaries but this argument has no substance as boundaries are informal and natural in their layout. Parcels of land such as this define the Green Belt and rural settlements.

Taking the five NPPF stated purposes of including land within the Green Belt:-

- **Purpose 1 – To check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**
The existing estate to the south of the site is already large for a rural area. Development of this site would result in the estate spreading further into the countryside.
- **Purpose 2 – To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another**
Any development within parcel CR4 contributes towards Croft and Culcheth merging into one another, irrespective of whether any revised boundary is durable or not.
- **Purpose 3 – To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment**
This is the crucial purpose of the Green Belt that Peel have conveniently omitted to mention. They have even omitted Purpose 3 completely from their main representation to the Local Plan (Section 5) yet they discuss in depth Purposes 1,2,4 & 5.

Development of this site would, without doubt, be encroaching on the countryside – not only that but beautiful countryside which provides valuable 'openness' to the existing settlement and its residents.
- **Purpose 4 – To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns**
Whilst Croft is not officially classed as a 'historic town' it does have its own historical features – the principal one being Croft Parish Church in its delightful setting overlooking open countryside. Peel's proposals would totally obliterate this important strategic outlook and their gesture to provide 'a green' opposite the church, that is hardly wider than a grass verge, is nothing short of disrespectful.
- **Purpose 5 – To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.**
Not applicable.

5. Green Belt Assessment

The Peel report attempts to make a case for classing this site as making a 'weak' contribution to the Green Belt.

Ove Arup's independent assessment concludes that this site makes a 'moderate' contribution to the Green Belt.

The existing residents believe this site makes a 'strong' contribution to the Green Belt for the following reasons:-

- Ove Arup's interpretation of 'existing settlement boundaries consisting of garden edges would not be durable enough to prevent encroachment into the parcel' is in Peel's words 'a fundamental misunderstanding by Ove Arup'.
On the contrary – we believe it is a fundamental misunderstanding by Peel and a deliberate attempt to swing any further assessment of sites in the developer's favour.
Of course garden edges are not a durable boundary to prevent further encroachment into the countryside (NPPF Purpose 3) – that is exactly why the Green Belt boundary has been drawn where it is now – to prevent this very type of encroaching development.
- 'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, and consequently the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness' – Ref:- Wikipedia (definition of Green Belt).
This is totally at odds with Peel's proposals.
The existing 'openness' which makes a strong contribution to the Green Belt would be completely destroyed by Peel's proposals for this site.

6. Facilities in Croft

The Peel report states that Croft has 'a range of shops, services and facilities'.

This statement could not be further from the truth.

In actual fact Croft has no shops other than 'Croft Gallery' which is a picture framing shop. Croft village has no food stores, no medical facility, no cash machine, no petrol station, and no police presence. Other than the playing fields, the Youth Centre and Croft Memorial Hall there are no facilities or amenities in Croft whatsoever, and even the Youth Centre is under threat from developers.

The Peel report is therefore inaccurate and very misleading.

7. Social Impact Assessment (SIA)

Social Impact Assessment is rising in rank alongside Environmental Impact Assessment and we note that Peel make no reference to the social impact on a small rural village of a 33% increase in the number of houses and the corresponding increase in population. Croft has a thriving integrated and cohesive community and the scale of this development would present a considerable threat to the fabric of social life.

Social impact topics to be considered regarding the existing residents of Croft include:-

- people's way of life
- their community
- their environment
- their health and wellbeing
- their personal and property rights
- their fears and aspirations

Peel's development proposals would detrimentally affect all of the above topics and overall have a negative impact on the existing community of Croft.

Considering this topic further, it is worth bearing in mind some of the fundamental principles of SIA regarding development, which include:-

- development projects should be broadly acceptable to the members of those communities likely to be affected by the planned intervention
- decision making should be just, fair and transparent with decision makers held accountable for their decisions
- the opinions and views of experts should not be the sole consideration in decisions about planned interventions

8. Disproportionality of Power

The disproportionality of power between a corporate giant such as Peel and a small village community such as Croft must not be allowed to influence matters.

We live in a democracy and the opinions of the existing residents of Croft should carry as much weight as giant corporate developers and Council representatives.

9. Road Safety

Lady Lane is a small rural route linking 2 capillary rural routes – Mustard Lane and New Lane/Cross Lane.

Equestrian activity, with the emergence of many stables and paddocks across Croft, has meant that these rural routes have become popular for horse riding as well as cycling; neither of which mix well with traffic and pedestrians on narrow country roads which lack footpaths.



Horses, pedestrians and lack of footpaths on Lady Lane

There are therefore a number of traffic and road safety issues in Croft which further housing will only exacerbate, namely:-

9.1 Volume of traffic

The number of cars using Croft's narrow country roads is already excessive, particularly during rush hours.

Many mornings the queue of traffic at the junction of Cross Lane and Warrington Road stretches half a mile back towards Lady Lane.

More houses means even more cars which Croft's narrow, minor roads simply cannot handle.

9.2 HS2

Selection of sites must take account the impact of major developments across the borough. The preferred Local Plan option clearly states that infrastructure should be in place before any development proceeds. The infrastructure in the Croft area will actually reduce as a result of HS2 construction with the possible closure of Wigshaw Lane.

In addition the certain loss of Glaziers Lane to HS2 will result in Lady Lane becoming the main thoroughfare between Wigshaw/Mustard Lane and New/Cross Lane. This, combined with traffic from any additional housing in Croft, will exacerbate an already unacceptable situation on Cross Lane.



A typical morning at the junction of Cross Lane and Warrington Road

9.3 Pedestrian Safety

The proposed entrance road opposite the Parish Church is on a blind bend which is an unsafe location.

There are no footpaths on either side of Lady Lane between the Rectory and the junction with Cross Lane, nor is there room to construct any.

In addition there is only a very narrow footpath on one side of Lady Lane, between the Parish Church and Mustard Lane, which is not wide enough in places to even accommodate a push chair.

At the north end of Lady Lane, near its junction with Mustard Lane, there is another hazard particularly on school days – cars parking along a significant length of Lady Lane to drop off and pick up school children at St. Lewis’s school.

Traffic turning into Lady Lane from Mustard Lane can suddenly be facing traffic head-on that is overtaking the line of parked cars.

Clearly this situation will be made even more hazardous with more cars using Lady Lane.

This renders the proposed housing location unsafe for pedestrians.

9.4 Traffic Monitoring

Peel employed a company to install traffic monitoring in October 2017. This covert operation took place in the middle of the night, which angered residents, with cameras secretly installed without consultation at a number of points within residential areas. This took place during school holidays and at a time when traffic was light due to road closures while road and watercourse repairs were ongoing. Any record of traffic movement during this period will therefore be an inaccurate representation of normal traffic levels in Croft’s residential streets and Lady Lane.

This brings into question the accuracy and authenticity of any Peel report which may contain this inaccurate and misleading information.



Cameras erected on Wadeson Way



Traffic Monitoring on Lady Lane during half term holidays

It should also be noted that no traffic monitoring was installed on New Lane/Cross Lane where the traffic is extremely heavy in the mornings and evenings.

9.5 Flooding

Lady Lane is often subject to flooding, particularly in the area of Peel's proposed development.

Surface water runs off the higher fields to the east of Lady Lane, floods the road and continues on to the land of the proposed development west of Lady Lane.

The water can often be over a foot deep rendering it impassable by pedestrians and even cars have had to turn around.

This alone renders Peel's proposed location west of Lady Lane unsuitable for development.



Floods on Lady Lane opposite Croft Parish Church – October 2017



Floods on Lady Lane – November 2017



Severe flooding on Lady Lane where Peel propose to develop – November 2017



A car turning round rather than drive through the floods on Lady Lane – November 2017

10. Attractive Views

Regarding the proposed development Peel's report states on Page 13 that '..... the housing is orientated to maximise attractive views over the surrounding countryside an attractive outlook for residents'.

What about the existing Croft residents whose attractive views over the surrounding countryside will be ruined? Existing residents in properties that overlook these fields bought those properties, at a premium, primarily for that reason. Croft residents have also contributed significantly to WBC by paying one of the highest council tax rates in the county. It is only fair therefore, that the opinions of these existing residents be taken into account and the current green belt boundary at the rear of Churchfields, Wadeson Way, Chadwick Avenue, Eaves Brow Road, Pasture Drive, Betsyfield Drive and Abbey Close be maintained.

11. Mental Health

Mental Health is a subject high on the Government's agenda and rightly so.

Regarding the proposed development the Peel report ambitiously states 'These facilities will contribute to physical and mental health wellbeing for future residents and others in Croft'.

How on earth can that be substantiated? More importantly, what about the mental health of the existing residents, particularly the elderly, who are having to endure the stress and anxiety that this proposed development is causing?

Peel's proposals are most certainly having a detrimental effect on the mental health of the existing community.

12. Credibility and Honesty

The credibility and honesty of Peel and its consultants must be brought into question.

The development report prepared by Turley on Peel's behalf contains numerous errors, inaccuracies and misleading statements; in addition to those stated previously.

These not only attempt to paint a picture in the developer's favour but also brings into question the accuracy and authenticity of the report itself.

The following items are incorrect:-

12.1 Incorrect Photographs

The photographs on pages 9 & 17 are not even of the land off Lady Lane.

This is a fundamental error and undermines confidence in the contents of the report.

12.2 East and West

Another fundamental error is that in the introduction on page 4 of the Peel report, reference is made to the land *east* of Lady Lane when in fact the land in question is located to the *west* of Lady Lane.

12.3 Accessibility

Peel's report states '....will enable future residents to access a range of facilities and services present in the village without the need to travel by car'.

Public transport connections in Croft are poor. The No. 19 bus service operates half hourly at peak times reducing to hourly outside of these times with none after 7pm. As stated earlier Croft has virtually no facilities therefore any additional residential development would require the new population to be wholly reliant upon private vehicles for access to the neighbouring towns of Warrington and Leigh, plus the larger village of Culcheth, for these services; as well as for commuting to places of employment.

The bus service to Birchwood is not a commuter service – it only operates very infrequently outside of peak hours.

Peel's report is therefore incorrect and misleading and the above demonstrates that Peel's proposal is not only unsuitable but unsustainable.

12.4 Wildlife Site

On a positive note, the reference to the Local Wildlife Site behind Betsyfield Drive/Pasture Drive/Eaves Brow Road is noted. As a minimum this must be protected and at best enhanced. This environmental feature provides valuable habitats supporting a wealth of wildlife and additionally provides a much used and valued amenity for residents.

However the Peel report is again very misleading because it creates the impression that Peel are being eco-friendly by preserving this woodland - when in actual fact they have no choice in the matter because they do not own the land.

13. Conclusion

Taking all the above into account, this proposed large-scale development by Peel to the west of Lady Lane has hereby been demonstrated to be unsuitable, unsustainable, detrimental to the existing community and wholly inappropriate in a small rural village the size of Croft.

Therefore we request that both Croft Parish Council and Warrington Borough Council respect existing residents' views and dismiss any possible development on this site in both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan respectively ie: maintain the present Green Belt boundary on the north side of the existing settlement.