

HETHERSETT

Villagers in fresh fight over 4,000 new homes

By DAN GRIMMER

Controversial proposals which could see up to 4,000 new homes built in a Norfolk village have been revived by a group of landowners – to the fury of residents who thought they had seen off development on such a large scale.

Norwich-based property company Bidwells has been asked by a company working with a consortium of landowners in Hethersett to pave the way for a forthcoming planning application.

Hethersett Land Ltd, which has a registered office in Knightsbridge, London, is planning to submit a planning application for 315 hectares of farmland to the north and west of the village and makes clear a later planning application could be for as many as 4,000 homes.

But the move has reignited concern among villagers who, just over a year ago, headed off proposals for up to 4,000 new homes to be built by 2026.

Opponents fear the development could turn the village into a county town or a city suburb.

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership rejected suggestions for that many homes in the village and decided instead to plan for around a thousand in its Joint Core Strategy.

However, with a future application for up to 4,000 homes in mind, Bidwells has asked South Norfolk Council to give an opinion on whether an environment impact assessment would need to be carried out.

Hethersett Parish Council this week indicated it would certainly require such an assessment and said a presentation by Bidwells in December had made no reference to the scale of the development its clients had in mind.

The 20-page supporting document prepared by Bidwells says the main objective was “to create a development which links seamlessly to the existing village of Hethersett to create a vibrant ‘sustainable settlement’ which has a thriving, cohesive community.”



CONCERNED: South Norfolk councillor David Bills.

The document says modern construction and technology would be used to minimise energy and carbon usage, with a mix of types of home.

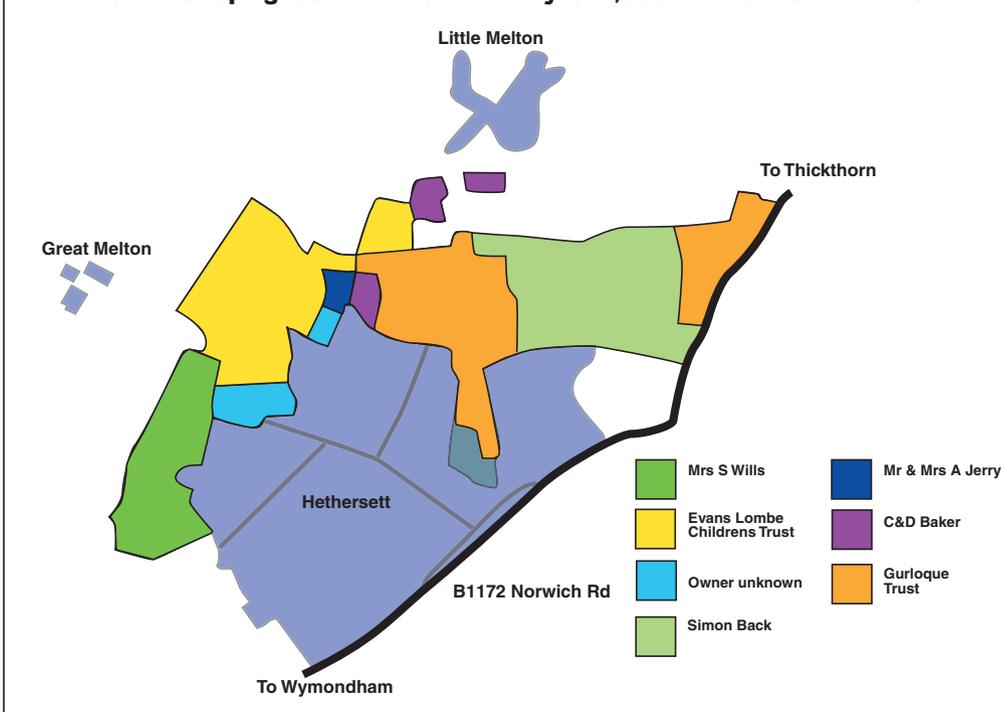
It also says a new east-to-west road would be built to the north of Hethersett, new education facilities would be provided and some form of “polyclinic” could be provided to ease pressure on local surgeries.

Ian Weetman, clerk of the parish council, said: “It is at a very early stage, but we are interested in how this proposal fits in with the Greater Norwich Development Partnership strategy which was agreed for 1,000 homes in Hethersett.

“We would make the point that as part of our consultation response to the GNPD, 4,000 homes were suggested and we said it would be better to have that between Hethersett and the Thickethorne roundabout to create a new settlement, rather than adding to what we have in Hethersett.”

Mr Weetman said of Bidwells’ presentation to the parish council in December: “That was really an information-gathering exercise, but it is significant that there was no

The landowners hoping to sell land to make way for 4,000 new homes in Hethersett



mention then that there might be up to 4,000 homes.

“If this does go further we will be very active in making representations. They themselves say that this would turn Hethersett from a village into a county town and that might not be what the people in Hethersett want.”

Rebecca Rejzek, partner at Bidwells, stressed the “proposed sustainable urban extension” was at a very early stage.

She said: “We are looking at the potential for development in Hethersett but we are months and months away from a potential planning application.

“The environmental impact assessment screening request is to check with South Norfolk Council whether we would need to carry out that assessment.

“It’s to enable us to carry out background checks and research which would potentially support a planning application in the future.”

She said Hethersett Land Ltd was not the landowner, but said a group of landowners were aware that the land was being promoted by the company for potential development.

She said “community engagement exercises” would be carried out in Hethersett in April.

David Bills, who represents Hethersett on South Norfolk Council, said: “We are somewhat concerned that we could become a suburb of Norwich.

“As cabinet member for the environment I think an extra 4,000 homes on top of the 3,000 or so we have got simply isn’t sustainable.

“They’re thinking about some sort of link road to the north of Hethersett and with the traffic issues we already have it just seems to go against everything we are trying to do.”



They themselves say that this would turn Hethersett from a village into a county town and that might not be what the people in Hethersett want.

Parish council clerk Ian Weetman

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NORWICH

Aviva freezes its with-profits bonuses

Aviva announced yesterday that it was keeping the majority of the bonuses it pays its 2.1 million with-profits customers on hold.

The insurer said the regular bonuses paid on unutilised life and pension policies taken out since 2003 would be maintained at 2.75pc. But Aviva was quick to compare the returns of with-profit investors with

those from high-street savings accounts.

“The vast majority of customers who have invested in the Aviva with-profit funds have received higher returns than if they had invested in an average bank or building society account and have been protected against the full impact of volatile investment markets,” said chief

operating officer David Barral.

“Customers who invested £10,000 in our investment bond 10 years ago would today receive £14,956, compared with a return from a typical savings account of £12,905.

“This is equivalent to 4.1pc a year compared with 2.6pc from a typical savings account over the same period.”