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MAKING A STAND: Villagers march along Main Street, Barkby, with their banners in protest over plans for a 5,000-home estate on farmland

Villagers in protest over 5,000 homes scheme

Amid the quiet rolling hills and winding roads of a quaint picturesque village, there is something disturbing the peace.

Since the days of the Vikings, the settlements of Barkby and Barkby Thorpe have managed to retain their rural serenity, while five miles down the road the city of Leicester grew and grew.

However, last night the usual tranquil silence was broken by a disgruntled band of placard waving protesters.

Their fear becoming the last generation to enjoy the peace and simple pleasures of village life.

The villages have just 350 inhabitants, a church, four farms, two country pubs and the cricket green.

Their unrest is over plans to obliterate the area's farmland and drop an estate the size of Syston on it.

by **SIMON WARD**

A 100-strong group of villagers, from schoolchildren as young as five to grandparents in their 90s, marched the length of the Main Street, in Barkby.

They marched with protest banners to a chorus of "stop the 5,000 houses".

Ron and Lyn Adams have lived in Barkby for 21 years.

Ron, 80, said: "If we let this happen it will be dreadful.

"It is incredibly peaceful here and if this goes ahead it will change the character of the village forever."

The area was last year earmarked for development by Charnwood Borough Council, which needs to find space for 8,500 homes in the district between now and 2026 to meet Government targets.

The plan of building 5,000 of those houses on farmland between Barkby, Barkby Thorpe and Thur-

maston has drawn protests from all three areas.

Lynn Westwood, 48, was among those who came from Thurmaston to show their support.

She said: "This will destroy Thurmaston as a community too.

"Not only that, but the roads around here are already overcrowded as it is - at peak times they are completely packed and they are not wide enough to be able to take any more traffic."

The rally led by three people on horseback, was organised by Barkby and Barkby Thorpe Parishes Action Group.

The group has been dropping leaflets through letterboxes and will be putting up placards throughout the village.

It has also been lobbying the council who will vote on the plans in October.

Group chairman Owen Bentley said: "Our purpose is to leave no-one

in any doubt of the threat posed to the countryside."

Barkby and Barkby Thorpe Parish Council's chairwoman Pam Green called for a scaling down of the 5,000 home development.

She said: "No-one denies there is a need for some new housing in south Charnwood, but not on this grandiose scale.

"If it goes ahead, it will result in the loss of productive and beautiful countryside, huge traffic congestion and pollution. It will also be the end to the rural identity of Barkby and Barkby Thorpe."

The development would require a new secondary school, two primary schools, a shopping centre and park as well as transport measures, including a park-and-ride site to access the city centre.

Planning spokesman Councillor Hillary Fryer said no decisions had yet been taken on whether it would go ahead.