



PLANNING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting for the Members of the Planning Committee held remotely on Tuesday, 22nd June 2021 which commenced at 7.30pm.

Present:

Chair – Councillor G Littler

Councillors A Bassett, A Mickleburgh, R Sangster, M Shaw, C Smith and M Smith.

In attendance: E Carroll (Deputy Town Clerk), D Humphreys (Senior Office Administrator), W Luck (Advisor to Planning Committee), Councillors C Jones, D Hare, A Long and four members of the public.

The meeting was slightly delayed due to the Chairman losing connection, the meeting commenced at 7.38pm.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Neal.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mickleburgh declared an interest in that he had made his view on this application publically known, so would be abstaining from any discussion or recommendation made.

36. PUBLIC FORUM

No members of the public requested to speak and no comments had been submitted prior to the meeting.

37. PLANNING APPLICATION 211686 – LAND OFF MELDRETH WAY

37.1 Councillor Littler explained that Earley Town Council is a statutory consultee and can only make recommendations on a planning application to Wokingham Borough Council, who are the Planning Authority and who make the planning decisions.

Councillor Littler went on to add that the members of the Committee would give balanced consideration to the application, taking into account the benefits which had been put forward by the applicant. Councillor Littler confirmed that prior to the meeting, members of the Committee had seen all supporting documentation and assessments in relation to the application, submitted by the applicant to WBC.

Councillor Littler confirmed the application details as a full application for the proposed erection of a food store (Use Class E), 43no. dwellings (Use Class C3) and associated access, servicing, parking and landscaping. Members were then shown Plan 1, site/location map and Plan 2, presentation planning layout.

Earley Town Council’s Planning Advisor read out a summary of his more detailed report, which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting, as detailed in the Supplementary Agenda.

Councillors went on to discuss the application at length, taking into consideration the report submitted by Earley Town Council's Planning Advisor, the application details, comments submitted to WBC by local residents and a letter received from Lichfields on behalf of Lower Earley Properties Ltd. Councillors also considered the communication received from Quatro on behalf of Lower Earley Properties Ltd detailing the benefits of the development.

Members agreed that they believed that the development proposal was in contravention of the designation of the land as "countryside" in the Adopted Local Plan. Members pointed out that land clearance had already taken place which had resulted in the destruction of vegetation and trees impacting wildlife and animals.

Members questioned the need for a supermarket at the location and agreed that there were other nearby supermarkets and local convenience stores which sufficiently served the area. Members were concerned about the possibility that the proposed new supermarket might take trade away from smaller stores, forcing them out of business.

Members raised concerns around Meldreth Way and Chatteris Way, roads notorious for speeding vehicles, and that the location of the entrance/exit would raise further concerns in relation to road safety in that area.

Councillors highlighted that the energy assessments which had been submitted by the applicant were only drafts and there appeared to be misleading information in the noise assessment. Members also raised concerns that the Ecological Report had been redacted.

The Committee also felt that there was a lack of information around the allocated affordable housing and that the residential part of the development lacked sufficient parking allocation, which would force vehicles to park on surrounding residential roads.

Councillor Jones brought to the attention of the Committee that two petitions of over 1,000 people had been signed, in opposition to the development.

As the discussion drew to a close, the general consensus of members was that the proposal would result in:

- Loss of amenity space
- Loss of the continuous green corridor along Lower Earley Way
- Loss of habitat for wildlife and animals
- Increase in traffic flow
- Added dangers to road safety
- Noise impact on local residents from traffic, deliveries and air conditioning units
- Light impact on local residents from car park lighting
- Lack of parking allocation for the residential properties

One member of the public left the meeting

37.2 The Members of the Committee concluded that

RECOMMENDATION be made to Wokingham Borough Council that this application be refused on the following grounds:

1. In the absence of a challenge to the WBC 5-year HLS there is no NPPF Paragraphs 2 and 11 justification for a development outside the development boundary, on land designated as "countryside", which would be contrary to Policies CP11 and CC02, and neither is it a brownfield site as set out in NPPF Paragraph 117. As a result, the proposals fail to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and are of an inappropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form and character to the area, to the detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open space; the

proposals result in the intrusion of a dense urban character into the countryside, with no graduation in response to the landscape character of the surroundings; they do not enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora; and do not integrate with the surrounding open space, contrary to Policies CP1 and CP3, and contrary to NPPF Paragraph 170.

2. There is a loss of local amenity arising from the loss of the current continuous green wooded corridor along Lower Earley Way. Existing open space and landscaping along most of Lower Earley Way creates a strong visual green corridor that is an essential part of the wider character, landscape setting and amenity of Lower Earley as a whole. This corridor also forms part of the wider open countryside to the south of Lower Earley. The green corridor is essential to the character of Lower Earley as a transition between built up and green areas and provides an environmental buffer to the M4 motorway to the south.

The proposed food store would destroy the green corridor character with a visible commercial use in a prominent location, comprising a building, with significant hard paved areas to the frontage of this part of Lower Earley Way. The building and parking would be visible to traffic using Lower Earley Way and Meldreth Way, disrupting the continuous visual function and amenity of the existing green corridor. The opening up of views from the nearby roads would be considered essential for attracting customers, as indicated in the Design and Access Statement. (1)

The proposals show a reduction in width of the green corridor as a result both the food store and residential development. This reduction in width of the corridor is excessive and would weaken its current character and visual function.

The proposed development would fail to enhance the landscape, by not protecting or enhancing the green infrastructure; failing to promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors such as footpaths; by not integrating with adjoining open space and countryside; resulting in the unacceptable fragmentation and isolation of areas of green infrastructure; contrary to Policies CC03 and TB21. It would also fail to ensure that the proposed development would be ecologically permeable through the protection of existing, and the provision of new, continuous wildlife corridors, which should be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network, contrary to Policy TB23(c). Also, the proposed development demonstrates a failure to enhance the natural environment and improve access to the countryside contrary to NPPF Paragraphs 8(c) and 118.

3. The proposals for a footpath connection linking the open space on either side of the site, tracking through a retail car park, frequented by heavy goods delivery vehicles, and alongside a suburban road presents an urban aspect, failing to enhance the landscape, and footpath links in a manner that would enhance the connection between green spaces, contrary to Policy CC03.
4. The retail element of the proposals is not well connected to the existing centres and is well beyond the edge of the nearest retail area, contrary to NPPF Paragraph 87, indeed seems more targeted at passing trade than to serve the immediate community. In addition, the proposals do not demonstrate compliance with Policy TB16. In addition, the Town Council is concerned that the assumptions derived from pre-pandemic retail spending patterns may no longer apply due to people switching to on-line purchasing, and this does not appear to have been addressed in the Planning and Retail Statement.
5. There is a failure to demonstrate adequate and safe access to the proposed development, in particular the Chatteris Way junction, which has been designed without regard to best practice, which would normally result in such an access being straight for at least 10m from the bellmouth channel, and within 10 degrees either side of the perpendicular. The purpose of this would be to ensure that larger vehicles

could enter and leave without conflicting with other traffic, particularly between cars and service vehicles, giving rise to highway safety risks, contrary to Policy CP6.

6. The proposed development fails to address the climate emergency by not incorporating appropriate technologies to future proof the proposed dwellings, and the operation of the proposed food store, against the emerging National policies for net zero carbon.
7. The Energy Statement fails to make it clear that photo voltaic panels would be installed to all residential properties, to address Policy CC05.
8. The design of the access into the food store fails to address the potential for fast moving vehicles exiting the Lower Earley Way roundabout, as observed by local residents, and evidenced by the historic number of accidents at this roundabout, giving rise to potential road safety concerns, contrary to Policy CP6.
9. The Ecological Statement fails to address the issue of badgers, a species alluded to in a non-redacted element of that report as originally presented on the WBC website, where reference was made to the criteria for assessing the occupancy of badger setts. As such, the Ecological Statement fails to adequately address wildlife and biodiversity issues raised in the report, contrary to Policies CP3(c), CP7 and TB23. It is concerning that the applicant has directed the Town Council to sections of the Ecological Statement in answer to its questions on this, some of which Statement is redacted.
10. Due to the potential adverse environmental impact on adjacent dwellings. The acoustic report fails to identify the impact of the noise from delivery vehicles and plant on the properties behind the store which will benefit from reduced background noise levels, arising from the bulk of the proposed food store, making the disturbance from plant and delivery vehicles likely more prominent. In addition, the lighting report fails to give any indication of the qualitative impact of service lighting on adjacent properties, addressing only the operational needs of the lighting; also it fails to address the implications for bats, which the Ecology Statement identifies as being present in the area. Contrary to policies CP3, CC06 and TB20.

38. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 9.07pm.

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Chair, Planning