

PLANNING OBSERVATION SHEET - 235/09/07

FROM: CHARVIL PARISH COUNCIL

TO: Wokingham District Council

APPLICATION NUMBER O/2007/1690

PROPOSAL Outline for industrial/commercial buildings and retirement dwellings.

ADDRESS Land at Sandford Farm, Mohawk Way, Woodley

APPLICANT Sandford Farm Properties Ltd.

CASE OFFICER Jonathan Bishop

PARISH COUNCIL COMMENT

Council considers this application to be an unsuitable and inappropriate development for this location, which is in the narrow 'green strip' separating 'Rural' Charvil from 'Urban' Woodley. Council also has concerns about the effect which the proposed access onto a narrow country lane (Beggars Hill Road) will inevitably have on the rural nature of that part of the village. Finally, Council has more general concerns about the consequences which this kind of development will have on the area as a whole in terms of 'precedent' for the future, on an area which includes Charvil Country Park and Dinton Pastures.

Part A - CHARVIL SPECIFIC CONCERNS

1. Traffic

Council is concerned at the impact which the additional traffic to/from the proposed retirement village would have on Beggars Hill Road and Lands End Lane. These are quiet, narrow country lanes, with natural verges and without footpaths, which are primarily used by pedestrians and cyclists, many of whom are school children journeying to and from Waingels School. Only the occasional vehicle travelling to/from the 14 houses in this area uses these lanes.

There seems to be no local basis for the traffic statistics given in the application. Council believes that the estimated number of additional vehicles from the retirement village is a gross underestimate. A more realistic estimate would be many times more than the quoted figure; however, even using the developers figure it would still represent a ten fold or greater increase in daily traffic. Turning what is currently a country lane, safely used by walkers and cyclists, into a busy thoroughfare. Beggars Hill Road is classified as an "*off carriageway cycle route*".

The southern end of Beggars Hill Road was closed to through traffic in 1980's as a result of accidents because of the lane being used as a short cut to and from Woodley through Charvil and beyond. Similarly the part of Beggars Hill Road south of the entrance to Lands End House is restricted to "*non-motorised Traffic*".
For safety reasons these restrictions must not be lifted.

Applications to develop new properties in this part of Charvil have always been refused, some on appeal citing precisely these traffic concerns.. The most recent appeal dismissed was in respect of application O/2005/5852 which states among other reasons that:-

“Structure policy T1 requires Councils to use their powers to improve highway safety. Policy W17 of the Local Plan states that the road safety implications of all proposals will be examined and safety measures implemented where appropriate”

It follows that development decisions which detract from road safety, must not be made. Passing places will not prevent a dangerous mix of pedestrians, cycles and even more cars on a better made road surface with passing places which will encourage speed. Currently wherever there is any space along Beggars Hill Road it is often used by car owners parking for recreational walking.

There is an argument that if the increase in traffic is going to be so minimal as the developer claims then:

- a) Why is there a need for vehicles to access Beggars Hill Road at all? Why cannot the vehicle access be onto Mohawk Way?
- b) Why do the applicants believe that there is a need for additional traffic calming measures. The ones suggested are all flawed for different reasons :
 - i) Traffic lights at the railway bridge. - *Recent experience during roadworks has shown that this is not an effective way of controlling traffic. The problem is that the railway bridge is single file and cannot cope with any increase in traffic levels. An increase which this additional access onto Beggars Hill Road would create.*
 - ii) Another pinch point on Lands End Lane - *Would hinder the access to emergency services/ refuse lorries/ oil/ gas/ septic tank lorries to meet the needs of the current residents*

It is clear that allowing this access will have a significant negative impact on Beggars Hill Road and Lands End Lane without there being any demonstrated need for such a vehicular access onto Beggars Hill Road.

2. Green separation strip between settlements.

Beggars Hill Road – Lands End Lane area is part of the narrow green strip which separates Rural Charvil from Urban Woodley. Applications to develop new properties in this narrow green strip have repeatedly been refused, some on appeal citing the need to retain this separation strip. The dismissal of an appeal against refusal of Application 43268 in 1996 to develop on land west of Park Lane stated that in respect of the gap between Charvil and Woodley: -

“ Woodley is part of a continuously built up area extending through to Reading so it seems that the gap is of considerable importance in preserving the separate identity of Charvil. Local Plan policy LC1 indicates that development will not be permitted in this area where it would detract from the undeveloped appearance.”

This proposed development will extend the urban area of Woodley yet further into the narrow green strip which separates it from the rural parishes of Charvil and Hurst.

Note - It is important that planning decisions are consistent. Application O/2005/5852 (Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/A/06/2016692) referred to earlier, was refused for many reasons. Almost every one of which are equally relevant to this site. It failed to comply with the policy requirements WCC1, and WT7 of the District plan. Copies of the Appeal Decision and of the Planning Officers report are therefore attached to this report in support of our recommendation to refuse this application.

Part B - WIDER AREA CONCERNS

1. General

This site is a covered-over landfill site which is claimed to have included clinical toxic waste. Any kind of development should therefore require the removal of the toxic waste.

It is noted that there is a previous approval for development of a training centre with hotel accommodation still in existence. This should not be used as a precedent for this proposed extremely dense industrial/commercial development, which is totally out of character with the location.

It is also noted that this land has been included for housing development in the local plan.

2. Sensitive location

This proposed development is in a sensitive area between Charvil Country Park and Dinton Pastures Country Park. The views from locations within the parks will be blighted. The industrial buildings will be visible from many of the beauty spots within the Parks, and indeed from parts of the Parishes of Charvil and Hurst and from the residential area of Woodley.

Policy DP6 of the Structure Plan states"..... *that land outside settlements should only be used for purposes which contribute to the economy through activities which can only be undertaken in rural areas*"

The proposed development will industrialise a large area of the countryside.

3. Density of proposed development

The density of the proposed development is out of keeping with the location. It is denser than any previous proposal including the training centre, which had attractive well spaced-out buildings with appropriate landscaping.

This proposal is a high-density industrial estate with minimal space around buildings.

4.Flooding

This proposed development is close to areas of Charvil which are at risk of flooding. **Laying extensive areas of concrete can only add to the risk of flooding in adjacent areas.**

5. Toxic waste

Even though the removal of toxic waste is disruptive, dangerous, and extremely expensive and should not be undertaken without there being an essential need, it is important that no development of any kind (be it commercial or housing) should be allowed before the contamination is removed. In this respect it should be noted that the application has listed all the options available but has ruled

them all out. This should be a significant planning concern. **Given the dilemma between the need to remove the waste before any development can take place versus the danger from disturbing the toxic waste, it may in the end be considered that the only safe option is to leave the site untouched and to refuse any form of development.**

6. Ecology

This is an area of ecological interest being close to two Country Parks. The information provided by the developer raises a number of issues: -

- a. The application accepts that this is an area of significant biodiversity, but still they intend to build over it. Any interruption to the normal flows of migrating species along the Loddon Valley Corridor will cause severe losses including some on the Red-Data list.
- b. The 150 Veteran Trees on the application site and 50 on the development site with the many species reliant on these as habitats will be put at risk by the excessive construction proposed.
- c. There are clearly many species of Bats (sometimes resident), Barn Owls (specially championed by the biodiversity aims of Wokingham Borough Council), Kingfishers along the Old River, and the valued reptile population including Great Crested Newts. All these species would be affected; some lost from the area forever by the proposed massive industrial Estate.

The proposed development will create a large hole in the Loddon Valley corridor, which would result in adverse sustainability.

Part C - SUMMARY

It is the view of this Council that this proposed development is dangerous in respect of traffic/pedestrian mix, and damaging in respect of extending the urban area of Woodley (destroying even more of the green gap around parish settlements). Above all it is unnecessary and is clearly contrary to many policy requirements in respect of building in the green gap between settlements.

Because it conflicts with so many of the Borough Councils Planning Policy Requirements there would seem to be no alternative but to refuse this application. This Council believes that despite previous approvals this site should be retained as public open space.

However if in the future it is decided that there has to be development on this site because precedents have been set (albeit wrongly). Any future application for development must be much more sympathetic to its location at the heart of the Country Park and close to the parishes of Charvil and Hurst. Any future application must also deal with the problem of it being a contaminated waste tip and require an acceptable solution for dealing with the waste before any approval is given.

Irvine Cohen
Clerk to the Council

7th October 2007