

PLANNING REF : 242066
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 238 Loddon Bridge Road
: Reading, Berkshire
: RG54BS
SUBMITTED BY : Mr William Smith
DATE SUBMITTED : 06/11/2024

COMMENTS:

Formal Objection to Planning Application - 242066
Submitted by William Smith, Prospective Purchaser of Flat 18, Ascot House, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 2NW

Sunlight Concerns

I am writing to formally object to the planning application and would like to highlight the need of a thorough rendering or assessment of sunlight in relation to Flat 18, Ascot House which is under the process of being purchased from current owner Lee Fegredo. I believe that the report does not fully list the impact of the projection of the proposed build to the right of flat 18 and property below and impact of sunlight into the space.

Non-Compliance with Daylight Standards: While the report indicates that 86% of rooms meet BRE's minimum illuminance recommendations, it does not address the significance of the 14% of rooms that fall short. This is especially concerning as it affects 4 out of 28 habitable rooms, suggesting that a substantial minority of units do not receive sufficient natural light. This could result in lower living quality for residents in these units, particularly in an urban setting where access to outdoor light is already limited.

Flexible Interpretation of Standards and Site Constraints: The report leans heavily on the flexible nature of BRE guidelines and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recommendations to justify lower daylight levels in certain units. However, flexibility should not equate to compromising basic living standards. The argument that lower light levels are permissible due to the urban context overlooks the well-established health and well-being benefits associated with adequate natural light.

Balcony Overshadowing Impact on Interior Lighting: The report acknowledges that some rooms have diminished daylight due to balconies overhead, but dismisses this as a necessary compromise. While private outdoor spaces are beneficial, the report does not explore alternative design solutions that could mitigate overshadowing while still allowing for balconies, such as positioning adjustments or semi-translucent balcony materials.

Insufficient Sunlight in Key Rooms: Although 9 of 10 units have at least one habitable room with sunlight exposure, the detailed data reveals a lack of sunlight exposure in many bedrooms, which receive less than the 1.5 hours of sunlight recommended on March 21. Bedrooms that do not receive adequate sunlight can impact residents' mental and physical well-being, especially in a climate where daylight is already seasonally limited.

Overshadowing of Gardens and Open Spaces: The report's overshadowing assessment indicates that Gardens 2 and 3 do not receive any sunlight on March 21, and Garden 6 barely achieves 49%, slightly

under the BRE guideline of 50%. These results suggest that outdoor amenity areas could be unappealing for occupants, limiting the use of green spaces that are essential for mental and social well-being in dense urban settings.

Reflectance and Interior Design Assumptions: The reflectance values for surfaces and materials used in the computer simulations appear optimistic, especially in accounting for furniture and potential surface wear over time. While bright white walls and ceilings may reflect light effectively in theory, they often diminish in actual residential use due to dirt, wear, and resident alterations. This could result in actual lighting conditions being poorer than simulated projections.

Questionable Justification for Reduced Lighting in Living/Dining/Kitchen Areas: By lowering the illuminance target from 200 lux to 150 lux in combined living/dining/kitchen areas, the report overlooks the multifunctional use of these spaces, where higher light levels are needed for tasks like reading, cooking, and socializing. This deviation from the standard suggests a possible compromise on the quality of living space, affecting residents' comfort and use of these common areas.

Potential Loss of Property Value

The proposed development, specifically the addition of new residential units, will significantly affect the property value of existing flats. The introduction of additional units on top of the existing structure will lead to a decrease in property value for current and future residents. This devaluation stems not only from the increased density and potential overcrowding of facilities but also from the extended period of construction-related disruption. This is particularly relevant to my prospective purchase, as the extension would alter the building's structure, appearance, and atmosphere, potentially reducing its market appeal and value. Additionally, from the feedback mentioned on already public comments it is likely that construction will take longer than a period of nine months given the scope of works and prior incomplete work.

With Vistry Group and Cala Homes planning to build 600 new homes as part of a larger 1,500-home project nearby, the influx of new housing creates a more competitive real estate market, particularly for smaller units like those planned for Ascot House.

This large-scale development at Finchwood Park in Finchampstead not only increases housing supply but also promises comprehensive community facilities like sports pitches, allotments, and a neighbourhood center. These amenities will make the larger development more appealing to buyers, potentially drawing attention away from more piecemeal or congested infill developments like Ascot House.

With such significant housing growth, existing local properties may face reduced demand or be valued less competitively, especially if the market becomes saturated with new, high-quality options. This is particularly relevant for Ascot House, where additional density risks compromising the overall appeal of the neighbourhood with added congestion, potential parking overflow, and reduced green space.

While large developments can bring benefits, the cumulative effect of increased housing and traffic may lead to declines in the attractiveness and, consequently, the value of properties like those at Ascot House that do not offer the same level of integrated community planning and space.

Disturbance to Residents

The construction method statement indicates that this project will be executed over an estimated nine-month period, during which time the existing phase one apartments will be occupied. The prolonged construction activities, including noise, vibrations, and dust, are likely to cause severe inconvenience and disturbance to residents. Measures such as damping dust, monitoring noise, and controlling vibrations are noted, but they may not adequately mitigate the impact on residents' quality of life. Regularly scheduled work from 8 am to 6 pm (and Saturdays until 1 pm) could significantly disrupt the peace, quiet, and daily routines of residents in close proximity. This will have a significant impact on working professionals living within the block, including myself on purchase of noise pollution whilst working from home. I expect that this will be virtually impossible due to noise pollution and impact both personal and professional life as well as possible loss of earnings due to having to make alternative arrangements.

Safety and Accessibility Concerns

The construction plan requires heavy vehicles accessing the site through Kendrick Close, a shared access road. While measures are mentioned to control vehicle movement and minimize pedestrian risks, the influx of construction traffic could still present safety risks for residents, particularly children and elderly individuals. Additionally, with Kendrick Close being a no-through road, the movement of large vehicles and the potential blockage of access points could impede emergency vehicles and resident access, posing a safety hazard.

Environmental Concerns

While the statement mentions measures to control dust and noise and mitigate the environmental impact, prolonged construction activities often produce significant dust, debris, and waste. This project's approach to managing these environmental impacts may not fully address the potential harm to local air quality and the general environment surrounding Ascot House. Further, increased waste disposal, use of water resources, and fuel consumption for heavy machinery during the project may exacerbate these environmental concerns.

Parking Concerns

Insufficient Parking Provision Leading to Overspill

The addition of 10 units, particularly the 8 two-bedroom units, without a proportional increase in parking spaces raises concerns. While the plan proposes a total of 36 spaces for 34 units, this 1.06 ratio is minimal, particularly considering that the two-bedroom units may house couples or small families who likely own more than one vehicle. With only a modest increase from the current parking ratio, the risk of parking overflow onto surrounding streets is high, adding strain on an already limited parking landscape.

Existing Parking Pressures in Surrounding Streets

Residents and visitors to the surrounding roads already face significant parking challenges, particularly during peak times. Our experience during site visits highlighted the difficulty in finding available parking spaces nearby, as streets like Kendrick Close and Carey Road struggle with high occupancy. If additional residents and visitors associated with Ascot House are unable to find spaces within the site, this overflow will exacerbate parking scarcity and impact residents in neighbouring properties. Double-yellow lines on nearby streets further limit viable parking alternatives, meaning even minor parking overflow can cause significant inconvenience.

Risk of Increased Traffic Congestion

The addition of 10 more units will increase vehicle activity within Kendrick Close and the connecting Finchampstead Road area, particularly at peak commuting times. This area already experiences congestion, as it's close to Wokingham Town Centre and major traffic routes. Additional vehicle entries and exits from Kendrick Close may create bottlenecks, impacting not only the new residents but also those in neighbouring residential blocks who share this access road. The potential for queuing and congestion, especially during peak hours, threatens the smooth flow of traffic, potentially compromising safety and efficiency for all road users.

Lack of Public Parking Options and Increased Demand on Nearby Facilities

While the transport statement points to nearby public transport and amenities, the reality is that many residents, especially those with families, will still rely on private vehicles for certain essential activities. The Carnival Hub's multi-story car park may offer some public parking, but it is a shared resource that is already under pressure due to nearby businesses, the library, and the leisure center. Increased demand for parking in this facility due to Ascot House residents and their visitors will reduce availability for the broader community, affecting those using the library, gym, and other local services. The Carnival Hub multi-story car park is also a paid season ticket, priced at 950 per annum which in a world where the cost of living is currently pinching is not a viable option.

Questionable Relevance of Outdated Census Data for Car Ownership Trends

The transport statement relies on car ownership data from the 2011 Census to justify parking allocations, which may not reflect current realities. In recent years, Wokingham has experienced a population increase and demographic shifts that have likely influenced car ownership and usage patterns. Furthermore, the average car ownership figure of 0.71 cars per household cited in the transport statement doesn't account for the added space requirements of two-bedroom units likely to attract families or shared occupancy, which often correlates with higher vehicle ownership. Relying on outdated data fails to capture the current and future demand that this development will place on local parking.

Limited Accessibility of Cycle Infrastructure

Although the development plans to include cycle parking, relying on this as a primary solution to mitigate car usage may be overly optimistic. While Wokingham has some cycling routes, the infrastructure is not as extensive or accessible as in larger

cities, where cycling can serve as a reliable alternative to car travel. Limited safe cycling routes near the site and challenging weather conditions for part of the year may deter consistent cycling use. As a result, many residents may opt for cars as their main mode of transportation, increasing the risk of parking and traffic issues.

Potential Safety Hazards for Pedestrians and Cyclists

Increased vehicle movements in a residential area also present potential safety risks, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Ascot House's close proximity to the new Wokingham Leisure Centre and Elms Field, frequented by families, children, and the elderly, makes it vital to limit additional traffic congestion that could compromise pedestrian safety. With more vehicles using Kendrick Close, the risks to these vulnerable groups increase, as they navigate the busy streets around Ascot House and Finchampstead Road.

Impact on Community and Local Character

The cumulative impact of additional flats at Ascot House without adequate parking provision risks changing the character of the area. Overspill parking on surrounding residential streets could lead to frustration among existing residents, deteriorating neighborhood relations and lowering the overall quality of life. The potential for increased congestion, safety risks, and aesthetic impact from additional parked vehicles may reduce the area's appeal and create a less cohesive community environment.

Conclusion

William Smith formally objects to the proposed development at Ascot House, citing significant concerns over sunlight reduction, potential property devaluation, residential disturbance, safety, environmental impact, and parking inadequacies. The planned extension risks reducing sunlight for existing residents, including Flat 18, potentially lowering property values due to the added density and prolonged construction disruptions. With large-scale housing developments nearby, such as Finchwood Park, increased housing supply and superior amenities could further devalue Ascot House properties.

The development's construction, expected to span nine months, would disrupt residents' peace with noise, dust, and restricted accessibility, complicating day-to-day life and particularly affecting those working from home. Heavy construction traffic on Kendrick Close raises safety concerns for residents, while insufficient parking and increased vehicle activity threaten to exacerbate local traffic congestion, affecting neighbouring properties. Environmental impacts from dust, noise, and resource usage could harm local air quality and waste management.

The proposed parking ratio is inadequate for the additional units, potentially causing overflow onto neighbouring streets already facing high parking demand. Outdated car ownership data underestimates current vehicle needs, especially for two-bedroom units likely to house families. Furthermore, reliance on limited cycling infrastructure overlooks local barriers to consistent cycling, meaning residents may still prioritize car use.

The objection stresses that the cumulative impact of overcrowded parking, increased traffic, and safety risks would alter the local character, diminishing the neighbourhood's appeal and cohesiveness.