

PLANNING REF : 242654
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 28 Chaffinch Close
: 28 Chaffinch Cl Chaffinch Close, Wokingham, Berkshire
: RG41 3HN
SUBMITTED BY : Doctor David Youle
DATE SUBMITTED : 16/11/2024

COMMENTS:

I request the rejection of Application Number 242654 on the grounds of each of three independent reasons:

- Erosion of the rural gap between Barkham and Wokingham
- Safety of users of Barkham Road and Ye Olde Leathern Bottel
- Gross inconsistencies between the stated aims of the planning application and the actual content of the planning application.

1. Erosion of the rural gap between Barkham and Wokingham.

The application as presented is highly deleterious to the sense of a green break between Wokingham and Barkham, and is in conflict with Policy CC03.

The story here begins with the egregious felling in summer 2023 of two veteran oak trees bordering the Barkham Road. The impact of this vandalism has been to significantly open up the roadside view of Ye Olde Leathern Bottel and its environs, meaning that subsequent changes are even more highly noticeable from the Barkham Road, and have a more significant impact on the sense of green space separating the settlements of Wokingham and Barkham.

The following specific aspects of the current application have a further negative impact on this already compromised visual sense of a green space area:

- The grubbing out of further trees and shrubs to create access for the proposed new entrance road further opens up the area and reduces the sense of green space.
- The width of the proposed new entrance road significantly exceeds that of the existing access road to the premises, giving the area a more built up appearance.
- The extension of a further access road to the rear boundary of the property, adjoining the field, creates a further sense of development and hard landscaping, with no apparent benefit to anybody. I ask that the application is rejected on the grounds of fundamental negative impact on the green rural gap separating the distinct settlements of Wokingham and Barkham, bringing additional significant detrimental change to the character of the area.

2. Safety of users of Barkham Road and Ye Olde Leathern Bottel.

Document P230064 (Planning Statement 141024) makes reference to the failed application for new residential buildings in the fields behind the pub (Application Ref : 232621, validated 25/10/2023), and states that "That application for the new housing proposed an amended access from Barkham Road to facilitate improved visibility and highway

safety. The proposals that are the subject of this application will mirror the proposed access design".

Put simply, the intent is to move the existing access point to the pub from its current location to a new position that is 15 metres closer to a blind bend, where visibility to the right when exiting the pub is already heavily restricted by the presence of a large, protected, veteran oak located on the boundary between the Pub and the adjacent property on the Barkham Road.

It does not require a detailed analysis to conclude that moving a

junction 15 metres closer to a locally notorious blind bend is unlikely to be anything other than detrimental to road safety on the Barkham Road. Furthermore, why the relocation of this access road is of benefit to the intended improvement plans for the pub, around which this application is purportedly centred, is entirely unclear. The truth slips out, however, in document DAS P05, the Design and Access Statement from Matthew Allchurch Architects. They state, as part of their description of the proposal "relocation of access road to enable any future residential development of land to the north (not part of this application)". If it is not a part of the application, then why is it included in the application?

This application relies on the same traffic survey as that of Application 232621. I commented extensively on this topic in my objection to that proposal, so will restrict myself here to some headline observations:

- The application uses data based on 85th percentile measured traffic speeds to claim acceptably safe stopping distance of traffic gaining visual line of sight with the proposed new junction. This makes

absolutely no sense. The greatest risk of collision is presented by those cars travelling at the greatest speeds, and yet the fastest 15% of these are actively excluded from the analysis.

- The complete raw measured data (which are reproduced in this application) show that on an average day (based on a 5 day monitoring period), a total of 22 vehicles are travelling so quickly along the Barkham Road that, on achieving line of sight of the proposed

junction, they would have been physically unable to stop in time to avoid a stationary vehicle at the site of the proposed junction, even assuming perfect driving conditions, a fully alert and attentive driver, and a well maintained vehicle. This is despite the traffic speed mitigation measures already in place on the Barkham Road.

The prospect of compromising road safety of local resident users of the Barkham Road and Ye Olde Leathern Bottel for no purpose other than to inch forward with a 'stealth' plan to resurrect a failed housing development application disgusts me.

A further negative aspect of the impact of the proposed plan on local road safety is that of the potential for increased roadside parking in the local area, resulting from a significant reduction in available parking spaces in the pub car park. The Planning Application form

(redacted) states a reduction from the existing 60 parking spaces to a new maximum capacity of just 46 spaces.

The analysis of parking demand (described in Covering Letter P230064TSLOCT24issue), is restricted to a snapshot of a SINGLE DAY, Saturday 13th July 2024 (Wimbledon Finals weekend), and so can hardly be considered as an adequate representational analysis. Nevertheless, even if we were to take their following analysis at face value, it doesn't pass the common sense credibility test. Based on their 24 hour analysis of existing demand, and taking into consideration the

anticipated additional parking needs created by the guests using the new accommodation included in the planning application, they anticipate demand to be "in the order of 40 spaces", and that "it is therefore considered that the provision of 46 spaces is appropriate". Remarkably, the applicant makes no allowance for any anticipated increase in customer numbers resulting from the extensive proposed refurbishment of the existing non-residential

areas of the pub and kitchen. It is very difficult to imagine that the business case supporting the proposed investment in refurbishment and enhancement of the existing pub is based on zero positive impact on customer footfall. Even more remarkably, the analysis of parking demand concludes that there will be no increase in parking requirement for additional staff necessary to clean and service the six proposed new rooms, even at full occupancy, anticipating that "the rooms will be operated by the existing staff associated with the Public House". I wonder if anybody has told them that? The analysis flies in the face of reasonable credibility.

It is obvious that the risk of overspill of car parking onto local roads is greatly increased by these proposed reductions in available car parking space while simultaneously seeking to increase business at the pub, and that, given the nature of the local roads, this overflow parking will have a significant deleterious impact on local road safety. And why are the numbers of parking spaces being reduced below their current level? Simply because their existing footprint has to be downsized in order to accommodate the new access road leading to the proposed entry point to an anticipated housing development that has yet to secure planning approval. It puts the cart before the horse, and represents an unnecessary and unjustified compromise of the current proposal in respect of customer parking. Based on the above arguments and the available evidence, I ask that the application is rejected on the grounds of the unacceptably increased risk posed to road traffic safety of local residents.

3. Gross inconsistencies between the stated aims of the planning application and the actual content of the planning application.

The planning application is purportedly focused on the improvement of the Public House building so as to provide local accommodation for bed and breakfast visitors, and to refurbish and enhance the existing facilities for eating and drinking. I have no objection, in principle, to these aims of enhancing the local economy, improving facilities for local people, and enhancing the business. I do however appreciate that others have a very different view on this matter, and I respect this.

What is unacceptable to me is that the proposed plans in the current application, so far as they pertain to the general environs of Ye Olde Leathern Bottel, are largely counterintuitive to these business aspirations. Examples are as follows:

- What is the value of going to the expense of relocating the access to the Public House to a position that is inherently more dangerous to customers and to users of the Barkham Road, when these changes yield no benefits to them or to the current business?
- Why would a business that is actively seeking to invest in order to increase numbers of customers take active steps to reduce the available parking for these clients to a level that, even by their own skewed analysis, is going to create problems for customers wishing to park at the premises?
- Why does an access road to nowhere feature prominently in the plan, when it compromises parking for customers, moves the access to

Barkham Road to a more dangerous position, and yields absolutely no benefits to the existing business or its customers?

In my opinion, the answer is staring us in the face, and is the

latest in a depressing sequence of incremental moves towards a goal of establishing a housing development on the field adjacent to the grounds of the Public House. Worse even than this, we have witnessed a series of pre-emptive actions to erode public access and to remove 'problems' such as mature trees, prior to the submission of planning applications. These behaviours can surely not go unnoticed and unpunished.

The area targeted for development for housing was free to public access when I moved into the area 25 years ago. As a first step, planning permission was sought and granted for equestrian use. Barbed wire and trespassing signs greeted local residents, horse riders created problems on the local footpaths, and the ecological status of the area was degraded beyond recognition through a combination of removal of extensive scrubland, replacement of uncut meadow with short-cropped grass, and animal waste pollution of the watercourse. In summer 2023, two healthy, veteran oaks adjacent to the Barkham Road were cut down for no apparent reason, their stumps ground below soil level, and the evidence covered over.

The above provides a reminder of what they looked like. They are now gone. Coincidentally, they were pretty much on the exact point where the proposed new access road is now suggested to join the Barkham Road. Were they mentioned in the August 2024 survey by DBA Arboricultural Consultants commissioned in this application? Of course not, because they aren't there, so they no longer present a problem.

Local residents may have noticed a new solid fence that has been erected this summer towards the far end of the car park. Coincidentally, this is the area in which the proposed leg of the access road to nowhere will terminate. Beyond this fence there used to be trees. Have you seen them lately? Here is a recent aerial photograph of the site, downloaded from Google Maps:

I wouldn't for a moment suggest that the trees have been pre-emptively felled in anticipation of a further phase of the project in the event that the initial redundant leg of the access road is approved, but it would be a rather convenient coincidence. None of these trees will be featuring in any future arboricultural survey.

Local people deserve better. Not only should the current planning application be rejected, but the current applicants should be made aware that future activities around this site will be carefully monitored, and that any evidence of wanton environmental damage will be acted upon by the appropriate authorities. Any preparatory work for the housing development proposed in Application Ref 23262, or similar, should be prevented until such time as a successful planning application is secured in its entirety. To do otherwise is to continue to actively degrade the quality of the local environment to the benefit of nobody and to the detriment of all.

I ask that the application be rejected on the grounds of gross inconsistencies between the stated aims of the planning application, and the actual content of the planning application.

David Youle, Chaffinch Close, 16th November 2024