

PLANNING REF : 241567
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Longwater Cross
: Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Berkshire
: RG40 3TS
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Graham Jukes
DATE SUBMITTED : 29/07/2024

COMMENTS:

I object to this proposal.

The proposal to build 40 homes on the above site is not appropriate, not sustainable and will be detrimental to the environment, the lives of those who may occupy the houses if they are built, to existing residents in the area and contrary to WBC planning policy - not to extend beyond existing settlement boundaries and build in the countryside. It is non-compliant with the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

I detail below information to support my objection:

Neighbourhood development plan.

The site itself provides an important green buffer between existing housing and the Cemex land to the South which is to be a designated nature conservation area.

When Finchampstead Future (a community group tasked with drawing up the Neighbourhood development plan), considered where housing in the Parish should be located, we identified this land as an important

green gap between the boundary of the Village settlement and that of the Conservation area in Eversley to the immediate South.

WBC planning officers persuaded the group that the designation of a green gap was not necessary and if any proposals were brought forward, it would be rejected in the same way as a similar proposal was

rejected in 2017 as increasing urbanisation, development beyond the settlement boundary and lack of sustainability and access to facilities, like shops, schools, post office, doctors, dentists etc. Those reasons for rejection in 2017 are the same as today if not more so!

The Parish Council is considering alterations to the neighbourhood plan in the light of the emerging LPU and it will most certainly seek protected status for this land to what is an extremely important

environmental buffer site which should not be violated by inappropriate and ill-considered ad hoc development.

It should be noted that the Neighbourhood plan is the primary planning document for development within Finchampstead. This development fails to meet the policy objectives contained within it.

Wider Planning Policy

I support WBC current policy in seeking to develop Strategic development locations in the Borough. It is only through such a strategy that essential infrastructure can be planned and provided without effecting existing crumbling rural road networks and utilities. Some of the arguments put forward by the developers are inaccurate and misleading. I cite for example paras. 2.2,3, 2.2.5, 2.3.6, 2.3.8. of the DHA report accompanying the application There are many more misleading statements that do not reflect the reality of the site and its location contained in the many documents that accompany this proposal. The Planning officer will I am sure consider the detail of these documents in depth and not take them at face value but challenge their independence and validity.

WBC policy

The following extract from the Wokingham borough landscape character assessment (WBC 2019) raises concerns about the pressure urban development is having on adjacent areas and the risks of piecemeal development:

"The extension of Wokingham, both north, east and south of the town (6,500 homes in North Wokingham SDL and South Wokingham SDL), the redevelopment of MOD land at Arborfield (3,500 homes as part of the Arborfield Garrison SDL), and the amalgamation and extension of the villages around Shinfield (3,000 new homes as part of the South of the M4 SDL), are greatly increasing the extent of urban development in the centre of the borough leading to loss of open agricultural land and woodland and challenging the rural character of landscapes

adjacent to these areas. The requirement for SANGS for larger scale development is also impacting on character of the local landscape, changing the land use from agricultural to recreational. Any further expansion or infill of existing settlements will represent a significant increase in residential growth in these areas. New or extended settlements risk the urbanisation of rural villages and growth over and above the housing expansion of 10,000 homes proposed by 2026 in the adopted Core Strategy (2010).

Away from the main settlements, the characteristic rural pattern of dispersed rural settlement, which often includes small villages and farmsteads located in direct relationship to the landform, is at risk from more piecemeal development."

This application is a classic example.

Biodiversity

The site is within 1 km of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) which is located to the west of the site. Additionally, this site is within the impact area of the Bramshill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As such it potentially overlaps with a SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for the type of residential development expected to be brought forward. Development at this site has the potential to have a significant impact on internationally and nationally designated sites for biodiversity and geodiversity. In addition, the habitat area review to which WBC subscribes currently being led by Windsor and Maidenhead has identified the Blackwater Valley including Moor Green Lakes and the future designation of the Fleet Hill and the Manor Farm CEMEX sites.

In terms of habitat type, this site and built-up areas and gardens in the developed area of Finchampstead is a mix of acid, calcareous and neutral grassland. The site is situated adjacent to and in the path of nesting birds to areas of deciduous woodland and scrubland. As such, development options have the potential to cause ecological impacts to the local habitat. Owls, Bats, Badgers rabbits and reptiles are present on the site.

Contrary to the developers application and supporting information. The proposals do not provide the opportunity to provide net gains in biodiversity. The development proposals being in proximity to internationally and nationally designated landscapes, as well as in proximity to Priority Habitats. Such a development is due to have a greater potential to impact negatively on biodiversity designations in the neighbourhood plan area and the Parish in general.

Buffer Zone

As can be seen from the historical document provided by the developers this site is the only area of traditional rural land left in the southern part of the Parish. Originally CEMEX wanted to preserve the space between their gravel extraction works and the local community. For flood protection and health and safety consideration a high earth bund was created. The bund and the wildlife that colonised it over a 20 year plus period have dispersed and found alternative habitats. No doubt, (from the evidence of adjacent residents) the proposed land development area has been extensively utilised by migrating reptiles, animals and birds. The adjacent Cemex land has been earmarked as a nature reserve and the fencing erected around the site is to encourage their free movement. As such the land in question is an important "buffer zone" which is defined as "areas peripheral to a specific protected area, where restrictions on resource use and special development measures are undertaken in order to enhance the conservation value of the protected area." This field should be protected as such a buffer, and I would suggest to the planning team that it is not too late to identify this land for designation in the emerging LPU.

Of specific concern is that in advance of the application being made the landowner cleared long established bramble and thicket to the North of the site destroying established habitat and cover for wildlife. The ecological survey report from the developer shows image EDP A2.2 which is a picture of the bramble scrub before it was completely destroyed during the bird nesting season earlier this year. This deep thicket was over 3m high in places and 3m wide, encroaching onto the footpath but provided a natural barrier between the Housing on the edge of the settlement boundary and habitat for many species. An offence against the Hedgerows regulations 1997? He also removed the adjacent fencing which defined the boundary of the public footpath and is now open.

As referred to above and contrary to the submitted reports this development has great potential to impact on biodiversity in a negative way. It will certainly not add to biodiversity net gain and may severely interrupt the migration routes of protected species.

Utilities

Although not a key issue for consideration in determining a planning application I have grave concerns about the capacity of the current utility network in its ability to adequately support any development on this site.

Electricity - I moved to this area of Finchampstead 7 years ago and since then there have been frequent power outages some lasting a day or so at a time. Will the electric power suppliers upgrade their networks to accommodate increases in power usage of 40 new households?

As I understand there is unlikely to be a gas supplier so all energy will be from the grid.

Sewage treatment

You will no doubt be aware that the sewage treatment works on the Blackwater River to which the waste from these houses will flow is beyond its useful life and requires a major upgrade in capacity. I have not tested the water quality at the outflow, but I remain concerned about the quality of the effluent and more so, should a further 40 households flow into the system which may collapse under the increased load to the detriment of the whole village.

Drinking water

The same argument applies to the provision of potable water supplies. Since 2017 the Village has been subjected to constant road closures due to a decaying water pipe system. Most notably within the village settlement boundary. Will utility companies be prepared to invest millions in upgrading their systems to accommodate 40 new households - I doubt it..

Schools

You will have heard from others about the school places and their availability. The schools are currently oversubscribed. If there is (as proposed) to be a high proportion of affordable housing, families who occupy the housing will have to go outside the Parish - by car to receive an education. The statements made in support of the

development by the developer are misleading regarding access to and availability of facilities in the village for example there is no scout group utilising the facilities of the Parish owned buildings in Longwater Lane except for storage.

Pavements and access

If you have ever walked down Longwater Road towards Eversley and the Black water river you will note that the footpath width does not meet current highway standards. Indeed, the traffic speed and the size of vehicles that thunder down the road are potentially life threatening, particularly if you are walking dogs or pushing a pram. A new velopment on this site will make access and egress extremely hazardous.

Equally there is no pavement access for pedestrians beyond the War memorial junction - so no way to get from the development to any shops or facilities at California crossroads except by car or via footpath 9 which is impassible in the wintertime.

Noise and Light

There is one streetlight on Longwater Road. If this development goes ahead then a considerable area of darkness will disappear. Increased light pollution will have a detrimental effect on migrating birds. Noise from the occupants of housing developments is inevitable again to the detriment of the nature conservation area abutting the site and to the use of the land by migrating protected species.

Rights of Way

The footpath to the North of the site is a major walking route by many residents and visitors alike. Health walks extensively use this route as they circle Lower Sandhurst Road and the Blackwater Valley path. The proposal effectively creates a back-alley to the development with the increased potential for fly tipped rubbish and

other debris which will directly affect me and the many people who use this path on a regular basis.

Flooding

It is not by chance that this field abuts the settlement boundary and the Woodmore estate and it stopped there. The settlement boundary

marks the most southern point where traditionally flooding was unlikely to occur. If you look down the length of Longwater Road, the change in ground levels can clearly be seen. The field, together with the open Cemex land are relatively flat and part of the flood zone of the river. For the past 20 years an earth bund wall had protected the site, that no longer exists and the contour levels on the restored Cemex land is unclear with lakes and water courses running across it. The Blackwater Valley flood map reflects the existence of the bund wall protection as medium and high-risk flood areas are identified at the boundary of the field. Further indicators of ground water/

Blackwater flooding can be seen by the existence of water table measurement points surrounding the site.

The point of this being, that this site is not suitable for development due to the potential flood risk from ground water and the Blackwater Valley and the potential drain on public resources should such an event occur.

Affordable Housing

With the Gorse Ride housing redevelopment in the North of the Parish and the Finchwood Arborfield Housing development there are enough affordable homes for those who currently live in the Parish. Those two developments are close to relevant and new infrastructure, effective alternative transportation routes and employment opportunities. None of those factors are present at the proposed site and for the developer to state that there are is misleading.

Conclusion

This application should be rejected out of hand for the reasons I have outlined..

Disclaimer

This objection is written in a personal capacity and on behalf of my family. I am an elected Parish Councillor and was heavily involved in drawing up the FNDP. I am directly affected by this proposal given that I live on Longwater Road and value the rural non-urban environment and enjoy and respect the current environment and its network of footpaths and bridleways. This development will be a blot on the landscape.

These comments do not reflect the organisations that I represent.

Graham Jukes OBE