

PLANNING REF : 242193
PROPERTY ADDRESS : The Old Vicarage
: Beech Hill Road, Beech Hill, Berkshire
: RG7 2BB
SUBMITTED BY : Mrs Sarah Firth
DATE SUBMITTED : 17/09/2024

COMMENTS:

The planning history on the site is long and demonstrates what a difficult site it is to resolve. As near neighbours we would love to see the site developed well, but this application should be rejected by WBC. We appreciate this is a prior approval application and our ability to comment is extremely limited but would be grateful if the following could be taken into consideration by WBC.

Transport and road safety

The application is inaccurate in several respects. The applicant states that Part Lane is straight. It is not; there are several places along it where one has to drive with great caution as you cannot see what is coming round the next corner. The applicant also asserts that walkers can rely on walking on the verges; this is not a realistic option. The verge is very narrow in places and in others it is non-existent or entirely covered in brambles so inaccessible.

Additionally Point 3.13 in the Transport Statement mentions that Part Lane has a 'low speed limit'; this is factually incorrect as Part Lane has a speed limit of 60 mph.

The applicant's assertion that there would be no detrimental effect relating to traffic is incorrect. The site sits on a single-track rural lane. The only travel choices from the site are by car, by bicycle or by foot. It is unrealistic to suggest that people will use public transport (walk to the nearest bus stops) as the bus service in both Riseley and Swallowfield is extremely limited and bus stops are some distance away. There will therefore be a large increase in the use of cars on Part Lane.

The many further vehicle movements that would result from this application would add dangerously to already busy, rural roads. The recent approval on appeal of the 81 houses further up Trowes Lane is going to add a further burden to our overstretched road network which currently has no plans for enhancement by WBC. We also consider the number of vehicle movements relating to a hotel of the size proposed would be much higher than stated in the application, considering there would be staff coming and going as well as guests, potential visitors, deliveries and other supporting services.

We would appreciate the Planning Officers taking into consideration that Part Lane is very well used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Increasing traffic flow without substantially improving the infrastructure of the lane is highly likely to lead to an accident involving one of these more vulnerable road-users.

Historic use as farm buildings and nature of buildings

Page 5 of the Planning Statement is inaccurate. It states that the barn for conversion to an Apart-Hotel has walls on all four sides - it categorically does not as there are no walls on either short end

of the barn; there are only walls on two sides which will necessitate the construction of new walls, which could be argued as falling foul of Class Q development.

The application is inaccurate to state that the barns are 'farm' buildings. The barns and farm house (currently being rebuilt having been demolished by the applicant without planning permission) have not in the last 40 years been used as 'a farm'.

Instead the house was rented and the barns used for housing cattle, at best 15 years ago, but in the more recent past have been redundant, apart from the odd barn owl that took up residence. Even application 152333 which states they were previously in use refers to them being (in 2015) 'only redundant poultry houses which have been modified and last used for cattle sheds and storage. They are now mainly redundant occasionally used for straw and machinery storage'. The current application states that 'The holding to which Glasspool Farm relates formerly extended to 182 hectares (450 Acres) as set out in the report by across rural property services, page 3, and they confirm that the then owners farmed the property for agriculture on or before 20th March 2013'. We would argue however that Glasspool Farm was never in even close proximity to the rest of the farm, being an isolated property on its own. It is therefore misleading when reading this statement.

We also note that barns to be converted should be 'capable of conversion' and in this instance we believe that the current fabric of these barns do not lend themselves to be capable of conversion to a hotel and are in disagreement with the Structural Survey commissioned by the applicant. The breeze-block walls are full of huge cracks and the we would welcome Planning Officers visiting the site to look for themselves.

Drainage and Flooding

While the application is accurate in stating that the site is not in a flood zone, but it is well-known that properties in the immediate vicinity of the site have flooded in the recent past.

There is no mains drainage anywhere along Part Lane and including on the site. The site will therefore be required to have its own sewage treatment system and will be discharging its water into the local ditches which are wholly unsuitable to take the increased amount of water such a large development will create. If the sewage treatment system should fail it will also lead to pollution entering these waterways and shortly entering the Broadwater River.

The junction of Trowes Lane and Part Lane, adjacent to the site sits under water all winter and has done so for many years. There is clearly a collapsed culvert under the road at this junction which WBC have never made an attempt to rectify. The current drainage infrastructure for our local area is insufficient, an issue many local residents have raised with WBC. By increasing the volume of run-off and discharged water needing to navigate the local ditches the application will only add to these problems, heightening the likelihood of both flooding and a road traffic accident in the water that sits on the road, unless WBC are prepared to take significant

remedial work as well as additional work to facilitate drainage from the site.

Urbanisation of a rural area

This application, together with 242193, will require many parking spaces to be provided. This will further urbanise the site and goes against the very thoroughly researched Riseley Village Design Statement which specifically states that residents have concerns about encroaching urbanisation and industrialisation of agricultural sites within the area. Indeed, residents feel that it is important that any change of use in buildings are in keeping with the area and with the character of the building itself. This application is neither in keeping nor will it retain its character. In addition,

residents of Riseley and its environs, feel that the environment is of paramount importance, as well as all the plant and wildlife in the area. An Apart-Hotel in this location would do nothing to protect and encourage the wildlife and the wildlife corridors that exist in this rural part of the Borough, with a local Nature Reserve already close by and another, almost opposite, in the pipeline. We contest therefore that this application will provide 'an overall improvement to the site' as stated.