

PLANNING REF : 242066
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SUBMITTED BY : Councillor Rob Comber
DATE SUBMITTED : 17/11/2024

COMMENTS:

As a local councillor, having talked with a number of residents, I have a number of objections I wish to make to application 242066, Ascot House.

In no particular order:

The creation of 10 new dwellings includes both one and two bedroom units. It is likely that the two bedroom flats will appeal to either shared occupancy (both bedroom being used by different individuals, or couples or a combination thereof), or young families. Particularly in the case of the latter, there is no provision for a lift, effectively discriminating against young families having access to these dwellings. This lack also discriminates against use by elderly or disabled residents.

The expectation would be for two affordable units to be included within this development, yet there are none. I discount the financial viability assessment, as the developers should have taken this requirement into account when beginning the design. In a central town centre location such as this, the provision of affordable homes should carry extra weight.

The parking provision seems both inadequate and problematic. In particular, bays 1-15, being right against the building will present potential noise, light and pollution problems to the residents. The unallocated nature of the parking makes no provision for visitors to any of the residents, whether social or trade visitors, who will therefore undoubtedly use some of these spaces. Equally, the unallocated nature means there will be no way of ascertaining if the parking is actually being used by the residents. No resident will be able to police the use of their own space, and therefore will be unable to police the use of the entirety of the parking spaces, which effectively makes them a free-for-all. This may cause residents to have to try and park on nearby streets, such as Carey Road or Norton Road, both of which already have parking problems. I would urge officers to visit these roads at peak parking times to see for themselves.

In addition to the parking issues, there seems to only be one active EV charging point to be shared across all residents and parking spaces. Whilst I appreciate that there is some passive EV charging being proposed, that is no use without more active points.

The plans as shown make for a considerably overbearing presence to properties in the area, particularly those already on Kendrick Close, and to those on Norton Road & also Carey Road. Kendrick Close and Norton Road in particular will be very badly affected.

In terms of being overlooked, the rear gardens & all the rear windows of properties on Norton Road will be fully overlooked by the extent of this development. Properties on the north of Carey Road will also now be substantially overlooked. It is hard to imagine just how intrusive this will be without visiting it, and I urge officers to do what I did, and visit at least Norton Road & stand in the back garden of one of the properties there.

According to the developer's own Daylight & Sunlight Report, "24 of the 28 rooms fall short of their Daylight Factor Targets", and whilst I don't believe this, there are a number of rooms which do fall short of requirements. I find it particularly bad that the majority of the rooms with substandard daylight provision are identified in their report as the "Living/Dining/Kitchen" rooms, or in other words the main room of the property, where residents would expect to spend the majority of their time. Even worse, the report attempts to justify this by saying that the developers are building balconies, which will probably make the properties easier to sell at higher prices, but which are actually creating part of this problem, and are therefore the opposite of a justification.

The applicant maintains that the plans are partially justified by saying that WBC's adopted development plan documents are out of date. To the best of my knowledge this is simply not true, and they are within date, as the current plan is valid until 2026. It is true that a new Local Plan has been prepared and is currently out for final consultation, but this does not negate the current plan's validity. The advanced state of the new Local Plan also means that some weight should be given to its approach.

I understand that as part of the requirement for granting the application to convert the original Ascot House office block into residential use, was to reduce the planned height of the building from that on its original application to its current level. It would seem perverse to now allow an even larger construction.

There has been no significant community involvement with this application. The Statement of Community Involvement included with this application is three years out of date. In that statement it says that "The Applicant is committed to ongoing engagement with local politicians, residents, and businesses" yet to the best of my knowledge, being one of the three Borough Councillors with responsibility for this area, there has been absolutely no engagement at all.

I remain opposed to this application as it stands.