

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Tim Holton (Chairman), Chris Bowring (Vice-Chairman), Carl Doran, John Jarvis, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Andy Croy, Anthony Pollock and Shahid Younis

Councillors Present

Councillors: David Sleight

Officers Present

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Justin Turvey, Planning Specialist
Mark Cupit, Assistant Director, Delivery and Infrastructure
Chris Easton, Lead Specialist, Transport, Drainage & Compliance
Sean O'Connor, Lead Lawyer

Case Officers Present

Stefan Fludger
Katie Herrington
Senjuti Manna
Laura Callan

54. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

55. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

MEMBERS UPDATE

There are a number of references to the Members' Update within these minutes. The Members' Update was circulated to all present prior to the meeting. A copy is attached.

56. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Chris Bowring declared that he had listed application number 182236 (item 57) should it be recommended for approval. He stated that he wanted the opportunity for the application to be discussed in detail by members and was interested in hearing the views of other Committee Members. He added that he went in to the meeting with an open mind and would listen to all evidence and viewpoints before making a decision.

Wayne Smith declared an interest in item 58 on the grounds that the property was the house that he shared with his wife. He stated that he would leave the room during Member discussion and voting.

57. APPLICATION NO 182236 - 8 MEDWAY CLOSE

Proposal: Householder application for proposed erection of single storey front extension, first floor front and side extensions, conversion of existing garage to provide habitable accommodation and internal alterations.

Applicant: Mr and Mrs Hira.

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application set out in agenda pages 13 to 32.

The Committee were advised that there were no Members' Updates.

Richard Kind, Neighbour, spoke in objection to the application. Richard thanked the Committee for considering the application in further detail after their recent site visit to the property. He stated that a chartered surveyor had conducted a desktop study of the proposed application and was concerned that the surveyor had not conducted a site visit. Richard added that the surveyor acknowledged that a consequence of construction could include a reduction in natural light to the neighbouring lounge flank window, and Richard felt that this contravened Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) policy. Richard stated that the surveyor did not comment on the increase from 60 degrees to 75 degrees between the neighbouring properties as a result of the proposed development. Richard added that the Borough Design Guide stated that developments should have consistent gaps to avoid a terracing effect, and should be in keeping with the character of the area. Richard felt that the proposed front extension would increase the impact on the street scene adversely and the extension was an overdevelopment. Richard added that the proposed application would remove all of the soft landscaping to the front of the property.

Mr Pauljit Hira, Applicant, spoke in support of the application. Pauljit thanked the Committee for taking time to conduct a site visit and to consider this application. He stated that this application was a necessary increase in space for his growing family, and felt that his neighbour's objections had been addressed thoroughly within the Officer's report. Pauljit outlined examples of other nearby properties, such as 3 and 5 Medway Close, which had no soft landscaping to the front of their properties. He added that there were also examples of 1st floor extensions (similar in design to the proposed application) within the area, and felt that this made the proposed application in keeping with the street scene. Pauljit stated that in terms of amenity space, his garden was currently larger than his neighbour's and this would still be the case should the proposed application be approved. He felt that the existing trees in his neighbour's garden would have a larger impact on light loss than the proposed development would have.

Stefan Fludger, Case Officer, clarified several points raised by the speakers. He stated that the Surveyor's letter did not state whether a site visit had been conducted, but even if it was only a desktop study they were a qualified expert in their field and had come to a conclusion which supported the Officer recommendation for approval. Stefan stated that there would be a one metre separation distance to the boundary, which was in line with guidelines and would not create a terracing effect. Stefan added that the removal of soft landscaping to supply more car parking space for the applicant would not be harmful to or out of keeping with the character of the area.

Chris Bowing commented that his main concern with the application was the loss of light to the neighbouring dwelling. He added that the existing trees in the garden of the applicant's property already caused a significant loss of light, and felt that the proposed development

would not significantly change this. He felt that the Surveyor's conclusions were sound, and he stated that he was inclined to approve the application based on the above.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried what the neighbouring side room (adjacent to the proposed extension) was currently used for. Stefan Fludger stated that it was currently used as a utility room.

Carl Doran queried how much of the proposed application would come under the existing permitted development rights. Stefan Fludger stated that the rear extension would be covered by this, and possibly the driveway hard standing.

RESOLVED: That application 182236 be approved subject to the conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 16 to 18.

58. APPLICATION NO 182595 - KESTRELS, SCARLETTS LANE, HARE HATCH, RG10 9XD

Wayne Smith left the Committee and listened to the Officer presentation and the agent's speech, before leaving the room during Member discussion and voting.

Proposal: Householder application for the proposed erection of two storey side/ rear extension, following demolition of single storey building.

Applicant: Mrs J Roxburgh-Smith.

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 33 to 54.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included a correction to the application number stated in the report, which should have read 182595.

Mark Leedale, Agent, spoke in support of the application. He stated that several amendments had been made to the scheme over time in collaboration with Officer recommendations. He added that the proposed development would result in a 35% increase in size to the original property, when combined with an existing extension. Mark stated that the proposed application would not impose on the green belt and that it was in line with Wokingham Borough Council's guidelines and policies.

Angus Ross asked for clarification on whether the 35% increase to the property was based on the original property, without the existing extension. Senjuti Manna, Case Officer, clarified that the 35% increase in size was based on the original property, and that the increase was a combination of the existing extension and the proposed development.

Tim Holton queried whether the Parish Council had made any comment with regards to this application, and asked whether there was a need for a condition regarding demolition. Justin Turvey, Planning Specialist, stated that the Parish Council had not commented on the amended scheme but had previously made responded on the original scheme, and that Officers were satisfied that no condition regarding demolition was necessary and that this was reasonable in planning terms.

RESOLVED: That application 182595 be approved subject to the conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 34 to 35.

59. APPLICATION NO 182892 - LAND BETWEEN THAMES VALLEY BUSINESS PARK AND NAPIER ROAD READING, SOUTH OF THE RIVER THAMES AND NORTH OF THE GREAT WESTERN MAIN LINE RAILWAY.

Proposal: Full application for the construction of a segregated fast-track public transport, pedestrian and cycle bridge and viaduct, comprising concrete bridge structure supported by concrete columns, steel beams and reinforced soil embankment, together with new footway links and existing footway alterations, junction improvements and landscaping.

Applicant: Reading Borough Council Highways and Transport Department.

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 55 to 130.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Additional comments of support from Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Reading Buses, Reading and Wokingham Chamber of Commerce, Reading Business Growth and Skills Committee, Thames Valley Park Management Ltd, Microsoft and the University of Reading;
- An additional comment from Network Rail;
- Additional comments of objection from Tesco, Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) and Cllr Bill Luck (Earley Town Council);
- Additional residential comments objecting to the application (3 from Wokingham, 7 from Reading and 2 from unknown locations);
- A clarification that 13 trees would be removed, rather than 14;
- Two formatting corrections relating to pages 88, 89 and 92 of the published agenda.

Michael Firmager, On Behalf of Earley Town Council, spoke in objection to the application. He stated that the Town Council had concerns related to the design of the bridge, which the Town Council felt was unsightly. He added that the plans did not conform to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 124, which stated that developments should be of a high quality design and provide good levels of amenity and should conserve and enhance the surrounding natural environment. Michael stated that the proposed development would be (in essence) a large concrete bridge, which was contrary to NPPF paragraph 130 which stated that permission should be refused for development of poor design that failed to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functioned. Michael added that the proposed development was contrary to NPPF paragraph 170, which stated that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, by protecting and enhancing valued landscaped. Michael stated that the proposed viaduct was too close to the river bank and felt that the proposals did not retain or enhance any features of the existing landscape. Michael stated that the proposed development was contrary to NPPF paragraph 194, which stated that developments should provide exceptional and convincing justification should they harm a designated heritage asset. Michael added that the proposals before the Committee did not make any substantive changes from the proposals which were rejected by the Committee in June 2018 and that they failed to enhance the character of the area or provide any enhancement to Earley. Michael commented on his appreciation for the Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) group with regards to their objection to this application.

Tamzin Morphy, Resident, spoke in objection to the application. She stated that the application before the Committee was the same as the application that was refused by the

Committee in June 2018 bar 3 changes. Tamzin added that one of the proposed changes was that the road would be wider (due to a gas valve) and would use up more green space. Tamzin stated that the proposed development would pose a danger to residents, by taking cyclists and pedestrians away from the safe riverside route and on to a bridge shared with buses. Tamzin added that cyclists would have to 'dodge' buses on the road. Tamzin was of the opinion that the additional buses using the proposed bus bridge would add to the overall congestion of the area. Tamzin felt that the proposed scheme was not a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme and that it was instead half of a bus lane. Tamzin stated that the proposed development was contrary to Core Strategy Policy 6 (CP6) of the Local Plan and that the proposed scheme would not improve the air quality of the area. Tamzin felt that the surrounding area would still be affected negatively and made worse off as a result of the proposed development. Tamzin stated that there would be a loss of hedgerows as a result of the proposed development, and added that any tree smaller than 75mm wide and 1.5 metres tall was not included in the Applicant's tree survey, which would result in more trees than stated being felled.

Jonathan Adams, Resident, spoke in objection to the application. He stated that he lived locally to the site of the proposed development and had noticed an increase in traffic on London Road. Jonathan added that he used to commute by bike, and had noticed that a lot of parents and children used the road. Jonathan was of the opinion that the proposed development would further increase the traffic on the London Road, worsening the existing issues. Jonathan stated that Reading had little green open space and felt that what space there was should be protected so that the community could benefit from it.

Tim Marsh, On Behalf of the Whitegates Residents' Association (ACER), spoke in objection to the application. He stated that Whitegates was used as the 'gateway' to East Reading and stated that the area already had bad traffic congestion issues. Tim was of the opinion that the proposed development would add to the existing traffic issues and would blight the scenery of the Thames path. Tim felt that the proposed scheme would not solve the existing traffic issues and had not addressed the overbearing issues from the scheme refused by the Committee in June 2018 and asked that the application be refused.

Scott Witchalls, Agent, spoke in support of the application. He stated that MRT was an integral part of the high quality public transport improvements planned across the Wokingham Borough. He added that the proposed scheme would have links to local park and rides and would accommodate approximately 19 buses an hour on its opening day. Scott stated that this area was to only piece of land that could deliver this scheme. Scott added that the height and scale of the scheme was needed to cross the River Kennet and commented that the land was safeguarded for a development of this nature. Scott stated that the scheme had undergone revisions since it was refused by the Committee in June 2018, and these changes included narrowing of the design, a single column design, low level lighting, further soft landscaping and an improved wetland under the viaduct. Scott stated that 37 new trees would be planted in Wokingham to replace the 13 trees to be felled and that the scheme would provide a net improvement in biodiversity to the surrounding area.

Tony Pettitt, Chief Finance and Information Officer at Reading Buses, spoke in support of the application. He stated that Reading Buses provided for over 26 million passenger journeys during the last 12 months, with a quarter of all journeys made to and from central Reading being made by bus. Tony added that there were a variety of benefits related to bus usage, including less congestion on the roads and improved health as a result of the better air quality. Tony stated that Reading Buses were operating one of the youngest

fleets of buses in the UK. Tony added that the high usage of buses and public transport in the area was a result of long term support and advocacy for sustainable public transport by Local Authorities through their local transport plans.

Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Highways and Transport, spoke in support of the application. He stated that the proposed development would enhance the provision of local bus services and would enhance the local park and ride services. Anthony added that the scheme would be funded through the LEP and would be a benefit to the local residents in Earley and Woodley. Anthony stated that if the proposed development was not built it would have an adverse effect congestion and traffic flow in and around Earley and Woodley. Anthony added that the local park and ride services in the area would be able to use the proposed development which would substantially reduce the journey times, thereby encouraging residents to use the bus services in the future.

Andy Croy, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. He stated that the application before the Committee was fundamentally the same application that was refused by the Committee in June 2018, and felt that the application could be refused for the same reasons. Andy stated that the height and scale of the proposed development was unjustified as it was too close to both the River Thames and the River Kennett. Andy was of the opinion that the proposed application was harmful to the character of the area as it was a 'concrete jungle', which the addition of ivy would not change. Andy added that the applicant had not presented an improved application. Andy felt that in many instances unwanted developments could not be stopped in the Borough, but stated that this was one instance where it could be stopped and could be used to show residents that Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) Councillors would stand up for the Borough. Andy was of the opinion that Reading Borough Council would not refuse the application, and urged the Committee to refuse the application.

Shahid Younis, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. He commented that the scheme should not be referred to as an MRT as it was a bus bridge. Shahid asked the Committee to reflect on why the scheme was originally rejected in June 2018, citing the height and scale of the proposed development and the impact that it would have on the character of the area. Shahid felt that the above issues had not been addressed by this resubmitted scheme and commented on the vast difference in letters of support (7) compared to letter of objection (over 300). Shahid stated that this area was a beautiful part of the Borough which could not be replaced and needed to be protected for the next generation. Shahid felt that the proposed application may not provide the proposed benefits with regards to a reduction in traffic congestion, but that the scheme would provide all of the negatives associated with it should it be approved. Shahid urged the Committee to refuse the application on the same grounds as per the June 2018 Committee's refusal decision.

Laura Callan, Case Officer, responded to a number of points raised by speakers. She stated that there would be a net increase in biodiversity as a result of the proposed scheme and that there were 'backup' plans in place should this not be the case. Laura added that English Heritage had made no objection to the scheme. Laura stated that the 13 trees due to be felled in the Borough as a result of the proposed scheme would be replaced by the planting of 37 new trees. Laura clarified that improved air quality was only one aspect of the benefits that the scheme would aim to provide, and that this would be achieved by promoting sustainable public transport which could improve the air quality as a result. Laura stated that the construction of the proposed scheme would not significantly impact on the air quality. Laura clarified that the bridge would be 5.7 metres away from the

river bank at its closest point, and that this was necessary to avoid a gas main. Laura added that soft landscaping would be used to enhance the proposed development.

Chris Easton, Lead Specialist -Transport, Drainage and Compliance, stated that Napier Road was already used by cyclists and buses with a clear cycleway off road posing no concerns for users. Chris added that pedestrians could use the footpath. Chris stated that Napier road accommodated approximately 35,000 vehicles per day resulting in buses being stuck in traffic. Chris stated that Napier road was at capacity for traffic, and that the proposed scheme would help buses avoid the majority of the traffic congestion in this area.

Carl Doran stated that the Committee had previously refused this application and that it would have required significant improvements to be deemed acceptable. He asked what significant improvements had been made to the scheme that had addressed the refusal reasons; what the distance was between the viaduct and the river bank; and queried who wrote the report. In response, Laura Callan stated that the land was safeguarded by CP10 for an MRT scheme and soft landscaping and screening had been improved with this application; the closest point between the river and the viaduct was 5.7 metres; and that the report was written by WBC's Planning Officers.

Mark Cupit, Assistant Director - Delivery and Infrastructure, stated that the application had taken on board the Committee's comments and the applicant had undertaken additional consultation with the community. Mark added that as a result of the consultation and comments additional soft landscaping had been added to the deck of the proposed structure. Mark stated that the Committee must weigh up all of the outlined benefits and negatives of the scheme when coming to their decision. He added that the area of land had been identified as a corridor to deliver a scheme of this nature.

Carl Doran commented on the fact that the addition of ivy to the deck of the proposed structure was one of the only changes to the previously refused scheme. Carl added that there were 20 more pages of text in the new report, with 12 instances of the site being reserved for an MRT being mentioned. Carl stated that there was only one instance of the above being mentioned in the previous report, and this was by the applicant. Carl was of the opinion that the safeguarded nature of the land was not relevant for this specific application. Carl felt that some of the language used to describe the negative impacts in the report were sanitised when compared to the previous report.

Chris Easton referred to the minutes of the Extraordinary Planning Committee meeting in June 2018, where there was discussion as to the definition of an MRT scheme between himself and Carl Doran. Chris added that the commitment to this scheme was outlined in both Reading and Wokingham Council's Local Plan's as the land was safeguarded for this purpose.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey was of the opinion that members of the public would prefer to cycle and walk along the riverside rather than on a bus bridge. Rachelle queried the marshland under the bridge being 4 metres above the river. In response, Laura Callan stated that the marshland was being developed to stop anti-social behaviour taking place, and that there was a high water table in the area which would be sufficient to maintain the marshland.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey queried whether the 4 or X4 Reading buses would make use of the proposed development. In response, Tony Pettitt stated that those services were in

high demand and he would expect an enhanced frequency using the proposed development.

Wayne Smith commented that the Borough had a good bus service running from the Winnersh Park and Ride. Wayne queried whether this service would change to a 'looped' service, to the detriment of the residents. In response, Tony Pettitt stated that Reading Buses were a demand driven service and they would make a commercially based decision. Tony added that reliability and punctuality of this service and others like it would benefit from the proposed rapid route.

Malcolm Richards commented on the application. He stated that despite the improvements to the scheme he felt that there were not enough substantive changes made to the scheme. Malcolm felt that the proposed scheme could increase the waiting time for bus routes to the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) and the Reading College due to changes to these routes. Malcolm stated that adverse changes to the 4 and X4 bus routes could cause problems for RBH visitors, college students and other residents of the Borough. Malcolm stated that he was not against a transport development solution that reduced pollution and traffic levels, but felt that this scheme did not provide significant benefits in those regards.

Mark Cupit stated that the Committee was there to review the aspects of the bridge construction, and not potential changes to bus schedules. Tim Holton stated that the Committee was also being asked to weigh up the benefits of the proposed scheme, and reminded the Committee that these benefits would include changes to bus services.

Angus Ross stated that this application was accepted as a scheme within WBC's Local Plan, and was thankful to have more detailed information on the benefits that the scheme would provide including reliability of journey times. Angus stated that the Committee was responsible for the Wokingham Borough, and stated that within the Wokingham Borough the proposed development would obscure the railway line which he felt was more unsightly. Angus was of the opinion that the scheme was of a good design and the addition of screening to the decking would help to obscure the surrounding railway lines.

Sean O'Connor, Lead Lawyer, stated that the Committee should adhere to consistent decision making. He added that the single but wide ranging reason for refusal of the application in June 2018 was the harm to the character of the area due to the height and scale of the proposed development (etc.). He stated that if the Committee was minded to refuse the application, that it would be irrational unfair to give different reasons for refusal unless they were based upon different facts being considered tonight. Sean stated that as the scheme seemed substantially the same as in June the task for the Committee was to again decide whether the further evidence of the strategic infrastructure benefits of the changes made to the scheme mitigated outweighed the harm caused to the character of the area and therefore made the scheme acceptable.

Chris Bowring asked how the design review panel were utilised in this application. In response, Laura Callan stated that they were used to inform on the design of the scheme, the siting of the scheme, the type of bridge link and ensuring that core design principles were followed.

Chris Bowring asked if all covering points including environmental and practical aspects were considered by the panel, and whether they would have suggested better

improvements to the scheme if they were available. In response, Laura Callan stated that the panel would have suggested improvements to the scheme if they were available.

Chris Bowring asked whether this scheme was central to WBC's transport policy. In response, Laura Callan stated that the scheme was central to WBC's transport policy and stated that the 27 highways improvement projects in the Borough were all linked.

Chris Bowring was of the opinion that, based on the above clarifications and the information contained in the report, that the scheme should be approved.

Bill Soane felt that the addition of ivy to the decking of the proposed development was not a substantial enough change to address the concerns raised by the Committee in June 2018. Bill was of the opinion that it was not certain that the outlined benefits of the scheme would be seen, and cited possible reasons for this being that more people were working from home and with the changing face of the retail sector.

Chris Easton stated that congestion within the Borough had been identified as a key issue facing residents through consultations and surveys conducted in recent years by WBC. Chris added that residents had also asked for public transport to be improved within the Borough. Chris stated that traffic was likely to increase over time in the South East of England. Chris commented that big businesses in the local area supported faster transport solutions and that the proposed development could make buses more commercially viable by adding a rapid service.

John Jarvis stated that he was disappointed that the Committee's concerns had not been addressed and felt that the applicant could have come back with a modern and innovative bridge design.

Carl Doran was of the opinion that some of the artists' impressions of the proposed developments were 'disingenuous'. Carl added that there were 2 paragraphs in the report which outlined why the proposed development would be a better alternative for pedestrians than London Road, whereas he felt that these pedestrians would use the towpath instead. Carl was of the opinion that the applicant had not addressed the concerns of the Committee or its reasons for refusal. In response, Chris Easton stated that the proposed development would provide a well-lit (year round) route, which would be a significant improvement for pedestrians and cyclists and that improvements to the highways networks were key priorities for the Borough's residents. Carl Doran commented that there were no letters of support from local residents.

Carl Doran proposed a motion to refuse the application based on the previous refusal reason of the Extraordinary June 2018 Committee ('The proposed MRT link, including bridge structure, due to its height and scale and its prominent and sensitive location, particularly its proximity to the River Thames and River Kennet, would be harmful to the landscape character of the area including its riparian appearance. This would be contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy').

Tim Holton reminded the Committee that once a vote had taken place, reasons for refusal could not be added, and therefore the Committee had to be clear on its reasons for refusal before a vote.

Wayne Smith was of the opinion that the application had not been thought through correctly by the applicant, and felt that it could potentially lead to a worse bus service for

residents in years to come. Wayne queried whether an amended application which addressed the Committee's concerns and provided significant improvements to traffic congestion and public transport could be taken to the Committee.

Chris Bowring felt that if a better application could have been made, then the applicant would have brought it before the Committee.

Tim Holton stated that he was unsure if enough changes could be made to the application which would satisfy the concerns of Members of the Committee.

Carl Doran proposed that the application be refused as the proposed MRT link, including bridge structure, due to its height and scale and its prominent and sensitive location, particularly its proximity to the River Thames and River Kennet, would be harmful to the landscape character of the area including its riparian appearance and that this would be contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy. This was seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

RESOLVED: That application 182892 be refused as the proposed MRT link, including bridge structure, due to its height and scale and its prominent and sensitive location, particularly its proximity to the River Thames and River Kennet, would be harmful to the landscape character of the area including its riparian appearance and that this would be contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy

60. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

There were no applications recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.