

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 25 JUNE 2018 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.40 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 and Shahid Younis

Officers Present

Chris Easton, Service Manager, Highways Development

Mary Severin, Borough Solicitor

Justin Turvey, Operational Development Management Lead Officer (Interim)

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Daniel Ray

Alex Thwaites

Graham Vaughan

11. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

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. It also contains details of properties to be visited prior to the next Planning Meeting. A copy is attached.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Smith declared a personal interest in item 16 on the grounds that he had listed the application. He stated that he had an open mind and would not come to a decision until he had heard representations from Officers and Speakers.

13. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

14. APPLICATION NO 172048- LAND BETWEEN THAMES VALLEY BUSINESS PARK AND NAPIER ROAD (BULMERSHE AND WHITEGATES)

Proposal: Full application for proposed construction of a segregated fasttrack public transport, pedestrian and cycle bridge and viaduct, comprising concrete bridge structure with a river span of 59.5m and a land span of 316m, supported by concrete columns, steel beams and reinforced soil embankment, together with new footpath links and existing footpath alterations, replacement supermarket car parking provision, junction improvements and landscaping.

Applicant: Reading Borough Council Highways and Transport Department.

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 5 to 82.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- an update to the report regarding tree removal from other land users;
- clarification of alternative schemes, cables, accommodation bridge, marshland and journey time savings;
- an additional 16 objections.

Bill Luck, Earley Town Council, spoke in objection to the application. Bill stated that the design of the bridge was 'unsightly', and that it had not adhered to the required 'good design' as stated in the NPPF paragraph 17. He added that the proposed development would result in a loss to wildlife and that it would fail to protect the local biodiversity. Bill stated that flooding compensation would be provided but it would be located in woodland. Bill added that the viaduct would not be screened and at its closest point to the river it would only be 5 metres away from the bank. Bill stated that the proposed development would not retain the existing features and felt that it contravened paragraph 9 of the NPPF which stated that development should seek a positive improvement in the quality of the natural environment. Bill was of the opinion that there was no policy justification for the proposed development and asked that the Committee refuse the application on the grounds of severe impact on the setting, damage to the nearby grade II listed bridge and the flood risk that the development would propose.

Tamzin Morphy, Resident, spoke in objection to the application. She felt that the proposed development would ruin the visual amenity and green space provisions and would contravene local and national planning policy. Tamzin felt that the proposed development would negatively affect the most densely populated area of Reading and that less intrusive methods (of reducing traffic congestion and improving public transport services) had not been trialled Tamzin stated that the development would cost £24 million and felt that it would devastate the local wildlife population and result in at least 766 trees being felled as a result of the development (with only 77 trees to be planted as replacements). Tamzin was of the opinion that the local grass snake and slow worm populations at the proposed development site had not been accounted for and that there would be a net loss in biodiversity as a result of the proposed development. Tamzin added that traffic levels had been falling on the London Road in recent years and felt that this application (if approved) would increase the overall traffic on the London Road as a result of more people using the MRT.

Scott Witchalls, Agent, spoke in favour of the application. He stated that the proposed development was in line with the Borough's long standing commitment to improving transport facilities, by reducing existing problems and encouraging more people to use public transport services. He stated that the land had been safeguarded for the purpose of developing an MRT scheme and that overhead power lines would be removed at the development site. Scott noted that this was a revised scheme which had taken on board comments from a range of sources. He added that the revised scheme would include a new marginal shelf (as requested by the Environment Agency), low level lighting at the road level and a managed wetland structure. Scott stated that there would be 3.5 hectares of scrubland replaced and that no grade A trees would be felled as a result of the proposed development. He added that there would be no loss in flood storage and that there would be an increase in biodiversity.

Shahid Younis, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. He stated that as a resident and local Councillor of the area he was concerned with the environmental impact

that the proposed development would cause. He added that the area of land proposed for development was a beautiful part of the borough which was used and enjoyed by many local residents. Shahid stated this if the Committee were minded to approve the application that they seek to mitigate any environmental damage that would be caused by the development.

Andy Croy, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. He felt that the 2010 Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) Core Strategy had no provision for a major road to be built in the area of the proposed development. He was of the opinion that the proposed development was not a MRT service and was simply another major road. He added that an MRT service was typically a light railway service and felt that the term MRT had been appropriated to fit the proposed development in to the WBC's core strategy.

Graham Vaughan, Case Officer, answered a number of Member queries. He stated that fragmentation of the habitat would occur should the proposed development go ahead, but added that a Council ecologist had assessed the site and had not objected on these grounds.

Graham stated that the site had been reserved for this use (an MRT) and it had therefore been deemed an accepted loss. He added that the development would result in 14 trees being felled in the Wokingham Borough with 37 trees being planted as replacements. Graham continued by stating that bat boxes would be installed at the site and there would be a landscape ecological mitigation plan in place. He added that the slowworms at the site would be translocated.

Graham stated that an independent design panel had assessed the plans and provided comments to aid the design of the scheme in reducing its impact on the area. He added that the Planning Officers had to weigh up the planning balance by weighing the harm that the proposed development would cause compared to the benefits that the proposed development would bring, which in this case the Officers had deemed the benefits to outweigh the harm.

In response to a Member query regarding suitable alternatives to the proposed scheme, Graham Vaughan stated that other alternatives were not sustainable. Regarding flooding, Graham confirmed that the Environment Agency no longer objected on the grounds of flooding risk.

Chris Easton, Highways and Development Manager, responded to a number of Member queries. He stated that WBC's core strategy secured provision for the proposed infrastructure in this area which would carry passengers. He clarified that the proposed scheme would fulfil that criteria and would assist in increasing the usage of public transport and reducing journey times of the buses that would use the route. Chris stated that the proposed scheme would assist with the Borough wide commitment to journey sustainability and sustainable travel.

Carl Doran queried the usage of the term MRT to describe the proposed scheme, stating that there were no proposals for light rail provisions. Chris Easton stated that the proposed scheme would deliver the feature of decreased journey time and a high quality express bus service, which was set out in WBC's core strategy and clarified that the term MRT did not solely include light rail provisions. He added that the buses would be of sustainable quality and would be fitted with modern appliances and conveniences including Wi-Fi and air conditioning, many of which would also run on alternative fuels.

Graham Vaughan responded to a query from Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey regarding the proposed marshland at the site. Graham clarified that the exact details of the marshland would be agreed upon in time but the provision of a marshland would be reserved by a condition.

Chris Easton responded to a query from John Jarvis regarding traffic relief on the A4. Chris clarified that the proposed scheme would provide general traffic relief on the surrounding roads and as a result this would aid reducing traffic congestion on the A4 corridor.

Wayne Smith commented on the proposed scheme. He felt that the proposed scheme would be unsightly and that it would come at a great financial cost to WBC and its residents. He added that at its peak height (whilst a bus was using the MRT) it would be 8 metres high from the river bank below. Justin Turvey, Operational Development Management Lead Officer (Interim), stated that the proposed development had been independently assessed and reviewed and had been found to be acceptable in terms of design and appearance.

Members raised concerns over the environmental impact that the proposed development would have on the area. Chris Bowring felt that the Committee had to carefully weigh up the harm caused (to the surrounding environment) by the proposed development against the positive benefits that it would create.

In response to Member queries regarding falling vehicle numbers on the roads, Chris Easton confirmed that although the number of vehicles on the road in question had slightly reduced between 2007 and 2010, the level had remained flat between 2010 and the current day. The identified delays at junctions within the vicinity indicated that the road was working at capacity which would cause redistribution of traffic and change in flows. The proposed scheme would provide the infrastructure for future growth and would allow for a sustainable transport improvement that would assist in encouraging further increased use of public transport.

The Committee voted on the recommendation of conditional approval subject to legal agreement and upon being put to the vote the motion to approve the application failed.

The Committee went on to discuss and review the possible reasons for refusal of the application, and upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That application 172048 be refused due to concern over harm to the character and appearance of the area and that the application would be contrary to CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Local Plan.

15. APPLICATION NO 180846 - ARBORFIELD GARRISON AND ADJOINING LAND (BARKHAM; FINCHAMPSTEAD SOUTH; SWALLOWFIELD; ARBORFIELD)

Proposal: Application for the approval of Reserved Matters, including layout, scale, appearance and landscaping in relation to the erection of a new primary school including nursery to be undertaken on a phased basis – Phase 1 (2FE Primary School) and Phase 2 (3FE Primary School), including the provision of hard court play area, all-weather pitch, ancillary club house block and associated access, parking and landscaping.

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council.

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 83 to 116.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included three additional conditions.

Piers Bunning, on behalf of the Applicant, spoke in favour of the application. He stated that the scheme would deliver key components of the Arborfield SDL and would be the first of two new primary schools to be built as part of the scheme. He added that the school would be developed in two phases, with the first phase offering 420 places for pupils. Piers continued by stating that phase two would be initiated if the demand increased, with this phase offering up to 630 places for pupils. Piers stated that the school would provide a good teaching environment with a good range of teaching spaces and age appropriate areas. He stated that an all-weather sports pitch would be built on the site which would be worth double the area of a grass pitch as it could be used far in excess of a grass pitch. Piers added that the all-weather sports pitch would be available for community use when appropriate at the weekends. It was noted that there would be a dedicated community and school drop off point to supplement the staff car park.

Members commented positively on the provision of a sprinkler system at the school. Alex Thwaites, Case Officer, stated that although sprinkler provision was not a planning consideration the planning department had worked closely with the developer to ensure that the school would be sprinkler protected.

Members queried the allocation of 11 parking spaces (excluding the 37 staff spaces provided) for Phase 1 and asked whether there was any scope to increase this number. Chris Easton, Highways Development Manager, stated that the proposed parking had provisions for more than one space per staff member and therefore exceeded the Council's policy in respect of parking. He added that a parking management strategy had been secured and would be enforced should the need arise.

RESOLVED: That application 180846 be approved subject to the conditions set out in agenda pages 84 to 89 and the additional 3 conditions as set out in the Members' Update.

16. APPLICATION NO 180072 - LAND ADJACENT TO CARTEF FARM, ISLANDSTONE LANE (HURST)

Proposal: Application to vary conditions 4 (approved plans) and 5 (number of caravans on site) of planning consent 153360 to increase the number of caravans on site from 2 caravans to 4 (no more than 2 being static caravans), thereby increasing the number of gypsy pitches from 1 to 2.

Applicant: Mr and Mrs Henry and Samantha Giles.

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out on agenda pages 117-134.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- an update to the name of the applicant;
- a correction to paragraph 24;
- a representation from Hurst Parish Council.

Howard Larkin, Hurst Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. He felt that the application would result in major intensification of the site and failed to address CP11. He added that the site was an unsustainable location, with the nearest shop and school being too far away for pedestrian access. He stated that the roads leading to the site were single track and that the area had experienced six instances of flooding since 1947. Howard stated the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) had an 11.54 year traveller land supply. He asked that the Committee refuse the application for the reasons stated.

Lou Robinson, Spokesperson on behalf of the Hurst Village Society, spoke in objection to the application. She stated that WBC had an 11.54 year traveller pitch land supply and it was therefore not appropriate to intensify the existing site. She added that the existing dwelling on the site was very large and the Council should limit traveller sites being excessively far away from existing developments. Lou felt that the Council needed to do more to check that occupants of GRT sites indeed met the definition of a traveller and asked that the Committee refuse the application for the reasons stated.

Matthew Green, Agent, spoke in favour of the application. He stated that this application would not be for a new development and that the use of the land had already been permitted. He added that there would be intensification on the site but this would not constitute a material change of use. Matthew stated that Officers had agreed that the site was sustainable and that Landscape Officers had agreed that this application to vary conditions would result in the betterment of the local scene.

Daniel Ray, Case Officer, responded to a number of Member queries regarding intensification, land supply, flooding and change in character of the area. He stated that the site had no named consent and that the occupants would have to meet the criteria of the conditions. Regarding land supply, Daniel stated that the site was acceptable in all other matters. Daniel stated that at appeal (for the original planning application) the site was deemed an accessible location, which was a strong material consideration. Daniel stated that the inspector had deemed that there were other options available should the road become inaccessible due to flooding and had found the site acceptable on these grounds. Daniel stated that there would be betterment of the site compared to the current dwelling and this would help to negate the change in character of the area.

Members had concerns over the proposal of a new stable (in a different position on the site) which would be approximately twice the size of the existing stable. Daniel Ray stated that the new stable would be part of the variation of conditions and was not materially different in principal. He added that the previous planning permission allowed for the provision of a stable.

Wayne Smith proposed that the application be refused as it would result in intensification of the site through increased number of pitches and increased size of barn which would result in harm to the character and appearance of countryside and area. This was seconded by John Jarvis.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That application 180072 be refused as it would result in intensification of the site through increased number of pitches and increased size of barn which would result in harm to the character and appearance of countryside and area.