

THE KEY CONSIDERATIONS

There can be no denying the well researched and documented case, made by the Applicants, McCarthy & Stone (Ortus), for the need for more 'retirement living' homes in the Wokingham Borough, stands up to close examination. But, this need for such additional retirement stock is not relevant, locally.

Fortunately, for the residents of Ruscombe, there is an above~average range of options, open to those seeking a specialist 'retirement living' home in the local vicinity. Indeed, our residents are well served already, with new retirement dwellings being offered now ... and already planned into the future. The addition of yet more 'retirement living' options is unnecessary and will further imbalance the housing mix to the detriment of the Parish as a whole.

Conversely, the Parish of Ruscombe falls far short in providing Affordable Homes or those suitable for first time buyers. The Applicants suggest that the availability of their retirement living dwellings will help mitigate this situation. However, with higher than average house prices in Ruscombe, where "*homes ... can reach up to £1m*" (Ortus publicity), they offer little such tangible benefit.

A final consideration is the total lack of any infrastructure support to accommodate the increased demand in meeting the special needs of more elderly residents. In particular, this applies to the pressured medical surgery and fully stretched voluntary services.

Therefore, in view of these key considerations, this Planning Application must be judged, not on the needs it seeks to satisfy, but solely on whether it satisfies the planning guidelines, as set out in the Ruscombe Village Design Statement (RVDS). Since 2011, this Statement has been acknowledged as a key Supplementary Planning Document by Wokingham Borough Council.

THE RUSCOMBE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

At the informal meeting between the Applicants and Ruscombe Parish Council on Wednesday 1st June 2016, some immediate concerns were raised by Councillors in respect of '*character of the area*' and '*density*' ~ both key components of the RVDS.

To help clarify these concerns, a copy of the relevant section of the RVDS was presented to the Applicants. However, it will be seen from concerns, expressed below, that little attention appears to have been paid by the Applicants to satisfying the guidelines set out in the RVDS.

CHARACTER: the development of a large, monolithic block on this site would be in direct contrast to the open and leafy character of the area. This is reflected in the street scene of detached, individually styled dwellings, with extensive gardens, located in a desirable, semi~rural village setting. Ruscombe Parish Council continues to fight hard to protect the character of this idyllic and highly desirable place to live and bring up a family.

DENSITY: it is totally unrealistic to equate the provision of 16 individual homes on this site, each with their own private garden (already approved in Outline) with even the reduced 31 apartments proposed within a single, dense mass.

STYLE: the style of the proposed development is more attune to an urban, rather than this semi-rural location. To be acceptable, it needs to be positioned in an area with similar sized/designed developments. Whilst the Applicants have been careful to present illustrations of the likely street scene from an angle, thus suggesting individual blocks, this is not reflected when the site is viewed by residents living directly across the road. There, the full impact of the mass will be highly visible ~ in contrast to all other London Road dwellings. Furthermore, the extensive use of balconies for each block is not in keeping.

PARKING & ACCESS: Both these issues are of considerable concern to RPC. The proposed provision of just 33 PARKING spaces for 31 dwellings is totally inadequate, even though it meets parking standards. This is because the proposed site, unlike all the other local 'retirement living' options, is not central to any of the main amenities. Such claims by the Applicants are misleading. For example, there is no bus stop "*just out the front of the development*" (Ortus publicity). A car will prove to be essential for many of the residents on this site. For those without, it will take at least 20 minutes to walk to the central shops, including the Post Office, Waitrose and the many cafes, pubs and restaurants.

Furthermore, 33 parking spaces makes very little provision for visitor parking; for the support services (eg; health workers), not forgetting the on-line delivery vehicles. Any overflow parking, situated on London Road, would be unacceptable, because of the significant traffic dangers this will create. The majority of vehicles on site must ACCESS the busy London Road only via a single driveway, which narrows in the middle (*why?*). Returning, they must face the dangers of crossing over, in front of in-coming traffic. Ruscombe PC would ask WBC Highways to satisfy themselves, both as to the number of proposed parking spaces for the proposed number of dwellings and the safety of access for these vehicles, both onto and off the London Road.

SUSTAINABILTY: the Applicants have presented a strong case to support their sustainability credentials. The truth, however, is that this mass concreted area will block all natural drainage and so have a major impact on a location already known for its flooding problems. Ruscombe PC would ask WBC Environmental Services to satisfy themselves that the Applicants case, to provide linear infiltration ditches along London Road, will address this issue. Furthermore, the *Landscape Plan* would appear to suggest these infiltration ditches will be left open, thus raising safety concerns. Clarification is required.

FULLY IN KEEPING: it has already been argued this proposed development can, in no way, be considered as being in keeping with the area. There is nothing else in style and mass like this within the Parish ~ or even close by.

SUBSIDENCE: this area is prone to building subsidence. Some properties in Walnut Tree Close (directly above the application site) and in lower Northbury

Avenue have been affected. All the properties in Russett Gardens, built by Shanly Homes, stand on platform stilts, pile-driven into the heavy clay. This was deemed necessary by WBC Planning in order to avoid any subsidence. In view of this, WBC should assure itself that the foundation plans for this proposed development, situated on a similar, sloping clay base, will address any potential subsidence issues.

BOUNDARIES: the boundary plans, in particular those shown adjacent to Walnut Tree Close, need clarification (*Typographical Survey*). Should the Land Registry Deeds for the site not clearly register ownership of the existing hedge, then, under the Land Registry Act 2002, the boundary between the site and Walnut Tree Close lies in the middle of the hedge. The same diligence should also be applied to the other two hedges, running up each side of the site, when determining the correct boundaries.

VISUAL IMPACT: the true visual and overwhelming impact of this proposed development can be seen from the South West and South East Elevations (drawing PL1311).

From the South West, standing in the communal garden, the predominant view will be of a single, 2/3 storey high building, almost to the full width of the site. *From the South East*, standing in the gardens of Walnut Tree Close, the predominant view will be of a dominant, almost windowless building in red/buff brick and with a 'grey slate-type roof' (clarification is needed on the roof). The visual impact, generated by each of this elevation views, is, most certainly, not in keeping with the character of the immediate semi-rural area, where individual dwellings dominate. Nor, indeed of the Parish, itself, as a whole. Furthermore, it is not in sympathy with the Design Criteria and guidelines, as set out in the Ruscombe Village Design Statement.

RUSCOMBE PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE:

Ruscombe PC cannot find any justification to give its support to this Planning Application. Its character and density is totally out of place in the Parish and its presence will not provide any additional, tangible benefits to our Community.

On this basis, Ruscombe PC strongly recommends REFUSAL.

djh/Ruscombe PC august 2016

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