

## Extraordinary Planning Committee – 21 May 2020

### Written Public Submissions

#### Application No.193339 - Nirvana Spa Mole Road, Sindlesham, Wokingham, RG41 5DJ

**Town and Parish Council** – No submission(s) received

**Objectors** – No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Emily Temple, agent. “Thank you Chairman, and good evening. The application before you seeks ancillary overnight accommodation to serve the existing Nirvana Spa. The proposal comes as a result of a few factors; 1) combining on site gym facilities with the spa to ensure ongoing viability, as the existing ‘Pulse 8’ gym membership was not sufficient to sustain the enterprise. 2) Widening the market appeal of the very successful spa, especially the bespoke salt water treatments and rehabilitation programmes, and 3) retain and increase local employment opportunities.

The current proposals are the result of extensive pre-application discussions with planning officers, responding to their advice in both the design and suite of technical and environment reports submitted. This includes replacement gym floor area so there is no net reduction from ‘Pulse 8’; a two storey height (plus basement) to better reflect the lower ridge of the existing spa complex, and design detailing such as the arched windows, to reflect existing.

To be clear, this is not a stand-alone ‘hotel’ development. It is not for independent weddings or conferences, and the proposed floorplans should provide reassurance of this. The existing spa already provides ancillary dining to members, and the proposed café and restaurant are an extension of these facilities for those who book to stay overnight to use the spa facilities.

Parking layouts have been revised to accommodate increased numbers, whilst maintaining safe flow and pedestrian safety around the site. Deliveries are now accessed from an existing entrance off Harrow Way, eliminating turning and waiting in front of existing residential properties. This, combined with the movement of built development away from the boundary fence, and an enhanced building design when compared with the existing gym, offers an enhancement to local residential amenity.

A suite of technical and environmental reports address a range of policy requirements. A series of conditions as recommended by officers is agreed to, and will ensure the proper management of the site as well as health, safety and residential amenity during the demolition and construction phases. A legal agreement will secure the applicant’s commitment to an employment skills plan. I hope this is reassuring. We trust that the scheme presented reflects officer advice and guidance and addresses development plan policy requirements. It’s therefore respectfully requested your officer’s recommendation be supported today.

Thank you.”

**Ward Members** – Prue Bray. This application is a marked improvement over the previous one which was refused, especially with the reduction in height and the less monolithic design of the building. I see that officers are now satisfied that the application will not result in increased light or noise pollution for residents.

Given the information provided with the application and the changes made in response to the previous refusal, it is hard to see that there are grounds for refusal. However, I would like to raise 3 things.

- 1 Condition 17 governs the use of the rooftop garden and makes it clear that it cannot be accessed between 9 pm and 11 am. Is it possible to change the wording of the condition slightly so that it also prevents any lighting being on in the rooftop garden between those times?
- 2 There is reference to a Construction Plan. I am fairly confident the plan will not allow construction traffic to use Harrow Way for access, but please could I have reassurance that that lorries will not be parking in Harrow Way either.

Is it possible to get clarification on who will be able to use the gym facilities in the hotel? These are significantly bigger than what was proposed in the last application, when the gym appeared to be only for the use of hotel guests. This report says in paragraph 16 that the gym would not be open to the general public, but that it would be “private member facilities”. I have looked at the planning application but I can’t find an explanation of what that means. Please could we have some clarity: will local people be able to join that gym and use the facilities, as they did with Pulse8, whose loss is greatly mourned in the community, or will its use be confined to hotel guests and members of Nirvana?

**Application No.192852 - Sorbus House, Mulberry Business Park, Fishponds Road, Wokingham, RG41 2GY**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Paul Smith. Since the January planning committee meeting which granted outline planning permission for 38 units at Sorbus House subject to the signing of a legal agreement (S106), we have been working hard to fulfil our offer to provide on-site affordable housing. This followed the proactive and collaborative work we did with Simon Taylor before the January meeting to ensure the proposals we submitted were both compliant and acceptable.

We embarked on a series of protracted with Wokingham Council’s Registered Provider (RP) with a view to them taking on the site for Affordable Housing (AH). We also continued to work proactively with the planning case officer to agree the S106 agreement and funded the Council’s viability study to advise those discussions. As you can see from Simon’s report, the final conclusion of that agreement is that the S106 provision of 9 shared ownership dwellings should be approved.

Unfortunately WBC's AH team couldn't progress and therefore we looked for an alternative HA to deliver the 38 units as fully affordable dwellings. We have worked hard to find that partner and are close to securing an agreement with another RP. The intention is for them to develop the whole site (38 units) for affordable housing. 38 is considerably more than the number requested under the local policies and, if our agreement is successfully concluded, means that Wokingham Borough Council will benefit from a significant uplift in affordable homes on this site. Better than the 9 units (which we can deliver and still commercially build and sell the remaining 29 units as private housing) or paying the commuted payment for offsite affordable housing provision (£714k) which the Housing team first requested. We have further agreed to a viability review at a stage when 70% of the homes are occupied so the Council can confirm they have best value in AH. Contracts have not yet been exchanged with the RP in question which is why the S106 is in its present form.

So, in summary, we have done what was asked of us at the January Committee meeting. This will result in a minimum of 9 AH dwellings on-site, but more likely 38 new AH units for the Borough. I hope you all agree that this is a fantastic outcome and I look forward to ratification of our outline planning proposal.

**Ward Members** – Sarah Kerr. You will remember at the planning committee meeting in January when I spoke against this development and the reasons why. There were many, not least, that this is a core employment area, and there are now hundreds of residential conversions taking place through permitted development laws – laws that desperately need revising. As such, the committee agreed that this development would be allowed as it at least provided CIL money, unlike the other units in the area which I hope will go some way to making this a nicer place to live than an employment area would. One of the other objections I had was due to the lack of onsite affordable housing (zero). I thank the committee for insisting that onsite affordable housing was included, but am subsequently disappointed that the applicant is now trying to lessen their commitment, hence the decision before you tonight. Affordable housing has many meanings, and Wokingham has a distinct lack of truly affordable housing. Please may I remind the committee that you are here tonight not to help developers increase their profit margins. Your commitment is to the people of Wokingham Borough, and as a local planning authority, it has been determined what level of affordable housing is required for developments. Your job tonight is to uphold that requirement.

**Application No.200475 - Wokingham Family Golf, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 3HG**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Mr and Mrs Williams, applicants. Since opening in April 2015, Wokingham Family Golf (WFG) has become extremely popular with local people and is undoubtedly one of the town's most valued recreational facilities. Our success derives from our wide customer base and the strong appeal we have to families with

young children, friends celebrating special occasions, grandparents with grandchildren and dedicated golfers of all ages.

In terms of outreach work we have an attachment with 8 local schools, providing 180 children from each school the opportunity to play golf whilst running after school clubs in each school and our academy currently coaches around 100 children a week. We are particularly proud of our work with disabled and special needs individuals from Ravenswood.

We have a loyalty to all our customers and knew there was strong demand for a food and beverage operation which is why we embarked on the new clubhouse project. We believe that this is the next step in making WFG the complete experience for our customers whilst simultaneously also creating 5 x full time and 7 x part time employment opportunities for local people.

As a small family-run business, the clubhouse operation has been a significant investment and its success is vital to the longevity of the business. This service comes at an increased cost to the business through additional staff wages, increased business rates and higher operational expenses. For these reasons, it is imperative our operating hours are extended so as to help us cover these costs but, as at present, we will ensure that our activities do not give rise to justified objections from our neighbours (the nearest house being more than 80m away from the clubhouse with intervening fencing and mature planting).

In summary, the extended opening hours will provide us with an extra 20% revenue according to our business plans. We believe this is of paramount importance to our ability to continue to provide our invaluable services (driving range, pitch and putt, adventure golf and footgolf) to Wokingham families.

Now more than ever we are seeing the unquestionable importance of outside spaces for the public to enjoy and the physical and mental health benefits of recreation. As Wokingham continues to expand, the need for businesses like ourselves has never been stronger. We look forward to growing and providing our community with our unique service for many years to come.

**Ward Members** – Maria Gee. I wish to object to the application.

The application to vary condition 9 of PA172979 is to align the opening hours of the bar and terrace with the licensing hours. However, the licensing hours application was made in the knowledge that condition 9 did not allow for this alignment; therefore a more logical approach would have been to align the licensing application hours with the planning conditions. I cannot see why there is a need now to align opening hours, when in September 2019, the date of the premises licence application, there was no need for alignment.

The reason given for condition 9 is to protect residential amenity, and the draft decision notice, in respect of noise, stated that hours of operation were not changed. Arguing that there were no objections to the premises licensing hours is missing the point that residents were at that point protected by condition 9. The need to protect

residential amenity has not changed and thus the extended opening hours should be denied.

Extending the opening hours will also have effects on the environment, most specifically (a) vehicles traversing the drive late at night, with accompanying noise and (b) the lighting and noise on the extended terrace. Both will have some detrimental impact on wildlife, especially insects, birds and foraging bats. These effects were not considered in PA172979 with its restricted opening hours and therefore should be considered now, before the application proceeds. The draft decision notice for PA172979 stated that there were no ecological effects and that it was unlikely that there would be any effect on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. I would respectfully ask the committee to consider if, in the round, these statements are still likely to hold with respect the current application? If not, then how should this application proceed.

Undoubtedly, Wokingham Family Golf is an asset to Wokingham residents, providing outdoor and indoor family activities. However, the benefits to Wokingham residents, in general, have to be weighed against the impact that such a facility has on residents closest to it, and on the countryside location. Maintaining a family element does not require extended opening times to a bar and terrace; that extension would, in fact, go against the 'family' focus of the facility. Maria Gee, Borough Councillor, Wescott.

**Application No.200312 - Gravelly Bridge Farm, Grazeley Green Road, Grazeley, RG7 1LG**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Alison Crooks, agent.

Dear Mr Chairman

My name is Alison Crooks and I represent the applicant. I trust that you and the committee are keeping safe and well.

I would like to start by thanking the planning officer for his report and assistance throughout this application. This has been a positive process, even during these unusual working conditions.

Fleetwood Grab Services is a local company. They have been based at Gravelly Bridge Farm for many years and work in the local area. They specialize in the management of soils generated from construction projects which can include foundations from household extensions. Fleetwood Grab process clean soils to produce a British Standard quality soil. The soils are returned for landscaping projects and the stones are used in drainage or laying tracks. This helps to achieve 100% diversion from landfill and ensures that the soils are used for beneficial uses.

During this lockdown period, Fleetwood Grabs has continued to serve customers, in line with Government guidance, to help ensure that waste continues to be managed in an environmentally sound manner. No staff have been made redundant or furloughed. The continued use of the application site is paramount to the survival of this business.

We note in the officer's report that there are no local or statutory objections to the development. We fully support the officer's recommendations and thank you for your time.

**Ward Members** - No submission(s) received

**Application No.193248 - Land North of Church Lane, Church Lane, Three Mile Cross**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Rory Hollings, agent. Southern Electric Power Distribution (SEPD) is in the process of replacing its end of life Reading Main to Reading Town 132 kilovolt underground circuits running between the London Road and Vastern Road sub-stations, part of a multi-million pound investment to Reading's electricity infrastructure. To enable these works to be undertaken several temporary compounds have been established for the siting of materials, equipment, machinery and welfare facilities.

The planning application before you today is for one such compound located in land to the north of Church Lane near Shinfield, opposite the Pulleyn Transport depot. The compound was first established in July 2019 under the assumption that it constituted permitted development. It has since been highlighted that this may not be the case. Following dialogue with the planning team it was agreed that an application would be submitted in order to regularise the use of the site as a temporary compound.

Permission is sought to continue the use of the site as a temporary compound up until the end of Summer 2021. The compound enables SEPD and its contractors to continue working safely and help ensure that future electricity supplies are secured for those served by this key power line. The site has been successfully and safely operated to date with no known issues or complaints from local residents. Following the completion of these infrastructure works, the compound will be demobilised, and the site will be returned to its original state as a grazed pasture field.

SEPD is committed to undertaking the infrastructure works and operation of the compound site safely and as a 'responsible neighbour' and any issues that are raised will be dealt with quickly and appropriately and to the satisfaction of all affected parties.

During the course of the application SEPD has liaised with the case officer to provide the required information to assist in reaching the recommendation before you today. Where the possibility of harm has been identified, every effort has been made to mitigate this through design and collaboration with the Council. SEPD has worked to reach a suitable outcome to the satisfaction of all.

We respectfully request that the planning committee, in accordance with the case officer's recommendation, approve the continued use of this site as a temporary compound to allow these essential infrastructure works to be completed in a safe, timely and economic manner.

**Ward Members** - No submission(s) received

**Application No.200863 - 75 London Road, Wokingham, RG40 1YA**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** - No submission(s) received

**Ward Members** – Maria Gee. I wish to object to the application in its current form (revised). I objected initially to the extent of the new build on site, the parking and access to London Road, and to the building in the garden, while acknowledging the need for local accommodation for care leavers. It is also good that measures have been taken for sustainability and that the building will be brought back into use.

In my original objection I observed that three parking spaces did not allow safe access to and from the site on a bend in a very busy road. I suggested that reducing the size of the accommodation proposed would solve this problem because fewer parking spaces would be required. I am very pleased to see that the number of parking spaces has been reduced and reserved for residents or visitors with disability permits. However, reducing the car parking spaces does not overcome the problem that led to the need for the original proposal to have three spaces. That problem is that the application is overdevelopment of the site. The application almost doubles the footprint of the main dwelling and the percentage of the site occupied by buildings has more than doubled from 25% to 53%.

I cannot see the need for a very sizeable meeting room separated from the main building. The meeting room would be better placed within the footprint of the main building; this would also avoid any problems with noise, especially at night, from residents travelling to and fro between the meeting room and the main building. Perhaps the sitting room/staff sleep-in area could be reconfigured to put the meeting room on the ground floor and the staff sleep-in on the first floor? Relocation of the meeting room would also preserve the green corridor of back gardens. If that is not possible, then some form of restriction on hours of usage would seem appropriate.

I therefore recommend to the committee that they reject this application. If that is the outcome, then the council, as developer, could engage more with the local community. So far there has been no community involvement other than an informal chat with the residents at number 77. It is better that the council take residents with them when developing its own sites. Maria Gee, Borough Councillor, Wescott

**Application No.200753 - 2 Walnut Tree Close, Ruscombe, RG10 9PF**

**Town and Parish Council** - No submission(s) received

**Objectors** - No submission(s) received

**Supporters** – Anne Owen, agent. The design of the renovations has been carefully considered and developed in keeping with the character of the existing buildings in the Close. The pre-application consultation with Wokingham Planning Department enabled us to establish an acceptable approach, in size and style. The Department's preapplication report highlighted the unique nature of the corner plot, which is relatively secluded, minimizing impact on the street scene.

The corner plot is unique in the Close, being set back from the street scene. It does not set a precedent for future development of any other dwellings in the Close, because they are all sited closer to the roadway.

The extended house will have 5 bedrooms plus kitchen-diner, living room, playroom and study. This is reasonable and proportionate provision for a family home in the area.

The new roof design complements the existing building, using exactly the same form with a ridge height increase of only 1.9m – less than a full second storey.

The study window of Number 3 is already visible from the existing ground floor windows of the playroom at Number 2 and is the only window of a habitable room on this side of Number 3. The new first floor windows are positioned directly above the existing ground floor windows. The top sections of these windows are rooflights, set obliquely in relation to the neighbour's windows. They follow the profile of the roof, being set at the same angle. This design reflects the character of the existing house and neighbouring buildings.

There is a distance of 13.1m between the extension and Number 3, exceeding the minimum recommendation of the Borough Design Guide.

The single storey garage is retained, creating a step down in form from the first floor extension. There is a 15.8m visible gap to the next house from the first floor extension. It does not create additional enclosure.

The first floor extension meets all Building Research Establishment (BRE) guidelines on daylight provision, with 45 degree and 25 degree daylight lines shown correctly on the drawings.

My clients fully appreciate the spacious and pleasant character of the Close and its community, which they enjoy. Their brief was to design a sympathetic extension in

this context, to meet the needs of their growing family. We have enacted this with great care.

**Ward Members** - No submission(s) received

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