

### **53. APPLICATION NO.212720 - LAND AT BRIDGE FARM, TWYFORD**

**Proposal:** Outline application (all matters reserved except access to the site) for the development of up to 200 dwellings, including 40% affordable housing and associated infrastructure, open space, biodiversity enhancements, landscaping and green infrastructure, following demolition of existing agricultural buildings. (Means of access into the site from New Bath Road to be considered.)

**Applicant:** Croudace Homes

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 179 to 258.

The Committee were advised that updates contained within the supplementary planning agenda included:

- Noting an additional neighbour objection;
- Replacement of plan number within condition 1;
- Replacement of paragraph 1 within condition 35;
- Amendment of paragraph 1 within condition 37;
- Minor amendment of condition 38;
- Replacement of paragraph 1 within condition 41.

Sophie Morris, case officer, advised the Committee that an additional condition in relation to air quality was proposed.

Chris Roberts, agent, spoke in support of the application. Chris stated that the applicant had worked hard to comply with and exceed planning policies where possible. The application would provide five hectares of parklands which exceeded requirements, in addition to the provision of 350 new trees, wildflower planting, bird and bat boxes, a thirty percent increase in biodiversity net gain, a fifteen percent increase in riverside biodiversity net gain, and all homes being provided with photovoltaic panels whilst being thermally efficient. Chris added that all properties would benefit from electric vehicle charging, whilst being located near to easily accessible amenities and rail links, and was in accordance with the 15 minute neighbourhood principle. A new toucan crossing would enable access to the site from the north, whilst the site would provide a suitable mix of home types and sizes. A forty percent affordable housing contribution would be provided, whilst the developer was a family-owned housebuilder who were committed to submit a reserved matters application within eighteen months subject to approval this evening. Chris stated that the Committee could be confident of a timely manner of delivery and a significant boost to housing supply within the Borough.

Sam Akhtar, adjoining Ward member, spoke in objection to the application. Sam felt that 200 dwellings was excessive for this area, and cited issues with access from a very busy A4, whereby the application would only add to issues

of traffic and congestion. Sam raised concern that part of the application site was situated on a flood plain, which would negatively impact local residents in the event of a flood. Sam commented that local school places and doctors' surgeries were already oversubscribed, and felt that this application would exacerbate these issues.

Stephen Conway thanked the case officer for a balanced report. Stephen commented that although the outline application only related to access, it would agree the principle of development to accommodate up to 200 houses on this site. As such, Stephen felt it legitimate to consider matters other than access. As a result of the lack of five-year housing land supply, the tilted balance was in effect which meant that applications should be approved unless the adverse impacts demonstrably outweighed the benefits. Stephen noted the benefits of the scheme, including affordable housing which was much needed. Stephen stated that each of Twyford, Wargrave, and Charvil Parish Councils had objected to the scheme in addition to over two hundred residents and local and adjoining ward members. Stephen felt that this application would add to the cumulative impact of development along the A4 corridor, and whilst the Committee may not be able to take this into account it was clearly weighing on the minds of local residents. Stephen stated that there were legitimate concerns regarding traffic and air quality, flooding both on and off site, whilst there needed to be an obligation to ensure that local infrastructure could cope for example the Piggott Senior School. Stephen was of the opinion that to seek refusal at this stage would be difficult as it was problematic to overturn the expert testimony whilst internal consultees had not objected to the application. However, a deferral could allow additional evidence to be provided to ensure issues were addressed now and not at the reserved matters stage.

Stephen Conway queried where the walking and cycling time had been measured from on the site. Sophie Morris confirmed that this had been measured from the midpoint of the site.

Stephen Conway outlined a number of potential reasons for deferral, including to seek improvements to pedestrian access to Piggott Senior School to ensure all paths were 4m in width (including the railway bridge which currently provided a width of only 1.5m and the proposed pelican crossing which would provide a width of only 3m), additional information in relation to air quality and contributions towards air quality improvements, projected school place data for the next five to ten years, highways modelling and traffic data on the A4 in both directions, and additional detail in relation to the potential conflict between pedestrian and cycle access to the Cedar Park Nursery to the south of the site and the vehicles accessing the nursery, currently via a single track railway bridge.

David Cornish commented that when the application was considered in greater detail, a number of issues arose. David queried whether officers had read and considered the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan when considering this application. Sophie Morris confirmed that she had considered the document, but not in full detail.

David Cornish felt that the neighbourhood plan now carried more weight as it progressed past a regulation 18 consultation, whilst two other potential developments locally could be prejudiced should this application be granted planning permission. In David's opinion, granting permission for 200 houses would prejudice the outcome of the review of the whole Local Plan Update, whilst proper weight may also not have been applied to the neighbourhood plan. David commented that he would support deferral of this application.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that he would support deferral of this application for the reasons suggested by Stephen Conway, in addition to information regarding the contribution of the site to offsite flooding concerns and the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and this application. Ian Church, Team Manager – Growth and Delivery, confirmed that the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan carried little weight whilst in the examination phase, prior to an outcome being decided.

John Kaiser queried whether there was any value in deferring this application, sought clarity of Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) chances at appeal should the applicant file for non-determination, and queried why some of the issues raised had not been considered in the officer report. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery, stated that some questions including long-term school place projections could not be answered on the night. With regards to the value in deferral, this was dependant on whether the Committee were satisfied with the proposed conditions, informatives, and information provided. Connor stated that the report gave the professional opinions of officers, and going against that opinion always attracted an element of risk should the applicant go to appeal.

Chris Bowring raised concern that members were asking valid questions and seeking deferral rather than trying to get answers and coming to a conclusion. Chris queried whether the application was for up to two hundred homes, queried why the main entrance was on the other side to where most of the housing was located, and queried whether school capacity issues were a planning matter. Sophie Morris confirmed that application was for up to 200 homes, with further detail provided at the reserved matters stage.

Kamran Akhter, Principal Highways Development Management Officer, stated that most of the housing would be accessed from the roundabout whilst forty to fifty units would be provided access from the T-junction. Kamran confirmed that the capacity of the roundabout was assessed and considered acceptable. Sophie Morris stated that education officers had been consulted and had acknowledged the issue with secondary school places. All catchment pupils had been offered Piggott Senior School this year, whilst officers felt that this application would help to fill places in local primary schools.

Wayne Smith commented that Piggott Senior School had previously required additional funding to facilitate additional school places. The application site was located very close to the Piggott Senior School, and would create issues in other parts of Twyford, unless the catchment stayed the same or sports

facilities were removed to allow the school to expand. Wayne commented that approximately sixty percent of respondents to the previous Local Plan Update consultation disagreed with the allocation of this site, and to date WBC had not gone back to residents to seek further opinions following the results of the survey. Wayne commented that this application was only being recommended for approval due to the lack of a five-year housing land supply, and Wayne felt that the Borough was being punished for over delivery of housing. Wayne stated that if a deferral would allow a consultation with residents, then he would support a deferral.

Rebecca Margetts queried whether the applicant could appeal on the grounds of non- determination should the application be deferred. Connor Corrigan stated than any deferral risked an appeal, as the applicant had to balance the cost and risk of an appeal against the time taken to provide additional information to members.

David Cornish sought clarity regarding the relationship between this application and the two other sites proposed within the Local Plan Update. Connor Corrigan stated that future applications could not be considered as part of this application, whilst public opinion had been taken into consideration within the officer report. Connor added that there was no indication of when the Local Plan Update would be finalised.

Stephen Conway commented that his queries were in no way critical of officers, and the questions raised were legitimate whilst a deferral would provide the Committee with information to make a more informed decision.

John Kaiser queried how long the application would need to be deferred for. Connor Corrigan stated that it would require a conversation with the applicant to ascertain how long they required to provide the necessary clarifications.

In relation to a proposed reason for deferral based on air pollution concerns, David Bridle, Environmental Health Officer, clarified that this scheme would not result in a significant impact on air quality and that there could be further increases in the projected vehicle movements through the town before the pollution levels would reach the prescribed levels. On this basis, Stephen Conway was content to withdraw this proposed reason for deferral.

Stephen Conway proposed that the application be deferred for the following reasons:

- 1) to seek consideration regarding pedestrian access to the Piggott School, in particular the widening of the pinch point at the railway bridge to 4m and the widening of the proposed southern footway to 4m;
- 2) to receive data on school place projections for the following five to ten years;
- 3) to receive traffic modelling on highways movements on the A4 in both directions;

- 4) to seek details of the form of the proposed contributions to air quality improvements;
- 5) to seek how the applicant proposes to manage the potential conflict at the southern entrance of the site, designated for pedestrian and cyclist access only, against the vehicular traffic coming to and from the Cedar Park Nursery over a single-track railway bridge;
- 6) to receive information on how the applicant could achieve zero-carbon homes.

The proposal for deferral was seconded by Andrew Mickleburgh.

**RESOLVED** That application number 212720 be deferred for the following reasons:

- 1) to seek consideration regarding pedestrian access to the Piggott School, in particular the widening of the pinch point at the railway bridge to 4m and the widening of the proposed southern footway to 4m;
- 2) to receive data on school place projections for the following five to ten years;
- 3) to receive traffic modelling on highways movements on the A4 in both directions;
- 4) to seek details of the form of the proposed contributions to air quality improvements;
- 5) to seek how the applicant proposes to manage the potential conflict at the southern entrance of the site, designated for pedestrian and cyclist access only, against the vehicular traffic coming to and from the Cedar Park Nursery over a single-track railway bridge;
- 6) to receive information on how the applicant could achieve zero-carbon homes.

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