

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON THURSDAY, 6TH JULY, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Val Bryant (Chair), Tom Tyson (Vice-Chair), Simon Bloxham, Mick Debenham, David Levett, Nigel Mason, Michael Muir, Sean Nolan and Dave Winstanley*

In Attendance:

Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Regulatory Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Shaun Greaves (Development and Conservation Manager), Sarah Kasparian (Senior Planning Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and Callum Reeve (Business Administration Apprentice (Democratic Services))

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 19 members of the public, including registered speakers.

Councillors Elizabeth Dennis, Daniel Wright-Mason and Claire Strong were also present.

80 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1:38

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Louise Peace, Tom Tyson, Ian Moody, Terry Tyler and Daniel Allen.

Having given due notice, Councillor Michael Muir substituted for Councillor Ian Moody, and Councillor Dave Winstanley substituted for Councillor Daniel Allen.

Councillor Phil Weeder was absent.

81 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2:12

There was no other business notified.

82 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2:15

- (1) The Chair advised that in accordance with Council policy this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.

- (2) The Chair reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights is set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.
- (3) The Chair advised that Section 4.8.23(a) applied to this meeting.
- (4) The Chair clarified the speaking process for registered speakers.
- (5) The Chair advised that she had agreed to allocate 10 minutes each for the public speakers and Member Advocates to speak on Item 6 – '18/01154/OP Land North of Highover Farm to Stotfold Road, Highover Way, Hitchin, Herts'.

83 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3:50

The Chair confirmed that the registered speakers were in attendance.

84 21/00504/OP LAND TO THE EAST OF TALBOT WAY, KRISTIANSAND WAY AND FLINT ROAD ALLOTMENTS, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY , HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – 4:26

The Development and Conservation Manager provided the following update:

- The applicant was the Letchworth Heritage Foundation, and their representative was Mr. David Ames.
- The application was for up to 120 dwellings. When the Reserved Matters were considered, there could be fewer.
- The amount of affordable housing on this site would reduce pro-rata if fewer houses were developed as this was an outline application.
- Condition 24 in the report was a duplicate on Condition 22 and was deleted.

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report in respect of application 21/00504/OP supported by a visual presentation consisting of photographs and plans.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Dave Winstanley

In response to the questions, the Development and Conservation Manager advised:

- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) had determined that Section 106 contributions would go towards improvement of the recycling centre.
- The Revised Technical Report submitted by the applicant concluded that there would be no Highway Safety impact. The developer contributions would go towards improving capacity.
- It was for HCC and the Central Bedfordshire authority to agree on recycling arrangements.

The Chair invited Julia Sonander to speak in objection of the application. Ms. Sonander thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The application was portrayed as an extension to Norton Village, but it was Letchworth that was being extended.
- The Master Plan had not identified key services and the transport plan was inadequate.
- Norton St Nicholas School was key to this plan, however it was selective on faith and not related to the catchment area. This was not addressed in the Master Plan.
- There were limited access points to the site, and no safe transport connection to Letchworth.
- There was no provision for cycling or to improve footpaths for modal use, and the bus service was limited.

The Chair invited David Ames to speak in support of the application. Mr. Ames thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The application was supported through the examination of the Local Plan and followed Planning Policy with affordable housing.
- There was detailed engagement with the local community and key stakeholders such as the Allotment Association and schools.
- Traffic, parking, connections and impact were identified as issues in the public consultation.
- Lack of toilet provision at the current site and security concerns were also raised.
- Cycle use would be promoted, and footpath 26 would be improved. Footpath lighting was also being discussed.
- There was a biodiversity net gain for the site if this application was approved.
- There were conditions to improve the recycling centre in the report.

In response to the question from Councillor David Levett, Mr. Ames advised that principles in the Master Plan would develop the idea of carbon zero homes further, such as through the incorporation of PV panels.

The Development and Conservation Manager responded to issues raised and advised:

- Conditions would provide improvements to Flint Road and Blackhorse Lane.
- Carbon zero homes would require an Energy Sustainability Statement to address credentials, generation and usage in proposed dwellings.

Councillor Sean Nolan commented that there was provision for walking and cycling improvements in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), however no improvements were marked for Blackhorse Lane. The transport seemed cut off from the rest of town and asked if this could be further considered as part of the Sustainability Plan.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the financial contributions for those improvements would go to HCC, which would go to existing plans. Improvements to Blackhorse Lane could be discussed further as a reserved matter.

Councillor Nigel Mason commented on the concerns raised about sustainable transport and lack of cycling facilities on the site and felt more needed to be done to encourage cycling on this site.

Councillor Simon Bloxham commented that he had reservations around site access, and other modes of transport to the site needed to be considered.

Councillor David Levett proposed and Councillor Michael Muir seconded, and

RESOLVED: That application 21/00504/OP be **GRANTED** planning permission due to the reasons outlined in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager.

85 18/01154/OP LAND NORTH OF HIGHOVER FARM TO STOTFOLD ROAD, HIGHOVER WAY, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – 40:34

The Senior Planning Officer advised that one further late representation had been received from a resident, which questioned the access to the site.

The Senior Planning Officer presented the report in respect of application 18/01154/OP supported by a visual presentation consisting of photographs and plans.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Dave Winstanley

In response to the questions, the Senior Planning Officer and Oliver Sowerby, representative from HCC Highways Authority advised:

- The Highways Authority considered the Traffic Assessment provided as acceptable. The proposed application would not have a significant impact on the roads and the junction capacity was acceptable.
- A full length of palisade fencing would be included by the railway line to prevent trespassing as a reserved matter.
- £3.3million in developer contributions would go towards sustainable transport and priorities that the Highways Authority had identified in Hitchin.
- The Transport Plan included the pinch points on Woolgrove Road, with the possibility to introduce a shuttle working system underneath the railway bridge.
- The 30mph speed limit on Stotfold Road would be extended to a suitable distance, and there was an in-principle commitment to reducing speed.
- The Highways Authority had assessed the capacity and the development would not have a severe impact on the roundabout at Cambridge Road.

The Chair invited Neil Dodds and Richard Wilcox to speak in objection of the application. Mr. Dodds and Mr. Wilcox thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The land allocated for the site was taken out of the Greenbelt, which would mean countryside and wildlife habitat loss.
- There was a large amount of vehicle traffic around the site, and the proposals would increase air pollution further and decrease air quality.
- The road infrastructure was not suitable to support the proposed site and pavements under the railway bridge are narrow and not sufficient for cyclists and mobility scooter users.
- The proposed primary school would deliver extra capacity for pressures generated by other housing development areas, not this site.

- There were no key services on the Walsworth side of Hitchin, with a considerable distance to the nearest amenities.
- This would result in the residents of the proposed development being heavily car-dependent, in conflict with sustainable transport goals.
- The increased Hitchin population would put pressure on Lister Hospital and local GP services.
- The Traffic Assessment provided was outdated, with most data collected five years ago.
- Proper infrastructure needed to be in place to support the proposed development and current residents of Hitchin.

Councillor Val Bryant commented that the Section 106 education money for Pound Farm meant the catchment areas would be moved over, which meant pupils would go to the nearest schools in Hitchin.

The Chair invited Councillors Elizabeth Dennis and Daniel Wright-Mason to speak in objection as Ward Members for Hitchin Walsworth. Their verbal presentation included:

- There had not been much community engagement with the current residents and the new developer, which was a concern.
- Collison Close had many elderly, vulnerable residents who had not been contacted about the proposals. The proposed condition and footpath access would cause harm to current residents.
- There was potential for over 1300 cars at the site, which would generate additional traffic in the area.
- The current road infrastructure was not built to handle these additional trips, and the £3.3million set aside for improvements was not enough.
- The site was almost 2 miles away from local and critical services. The £30k set aside for GP support was not enough.
- The bottleneck at Cambridge Road led to long queues to Letchworth.
- The affordable homes would not be generally affordable for residents of Hitchin, and the developer should work with social housing providers to provide true affordability.

In response to the question from Councillor Sean Nolan, Councillor Dennis advised that many housing sites added to the congestion on Cambridge Road, and this proposed site would further add to this.

The Chair invited Sarah Smith to speak in support of the application. Ms. Smith thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The application had been through the appropriate and recognised planning process and accorded with the Local Plan policy requirements.
- The Inspector was satisfied with the allocation of the site.
- There had been considerable consultation with stakeholders, the Highways Authority and local community, with revisions being made.
- The site would include 40% affordable housing, land for a primary school, allotments and a circa 13% biodiversity net gain.
- The Traffic Impact work was approved and there were no objections to the development subject to the mitigation through financial contributions.
- Another application had been submitted, as well as financial contributions to extend the Greenway, which would improve walking and cycling connectivity.
- The site proposal would be a major contributor to the Councils Five-Year housing land supply within the Local Plan.

- The developer contributions were agreed awaiting approval and would total circa £28million.

The Senior Planning Officer responded to issues raised and advised:

- The capacity of the junctions had been assessed by the Highways Authority and were deemed suitable, along with the mitigation measures package and financial contributions.
- From a Planning perspective, it was desirable to have a footpath at Collison Close for walkability and access to services and schools.
- The S106 required access to be delivered to the site with reasonable endeavours, and the design code would give more information on the footpath.
- An Environment Statement was submitted with the application with a traffic assessment submitted as part of the statement.
- 35% of the affordable housing would be shared ownership, and 65% would be affordable rent. The affordable housing prices would be 80% of market value, which complied with Council policy.

The representative from the Highways Authority further advised that traffic post-Covid had reduced by 10%, and the Authority was content the 2018 Transport Assessment was robust.

Councillor David Levett proposed that the application be refused based on Paragraphs 111 and 104 of the 2021 National Planning Policy Framework. Access was a concern, and the transport assessment provided was out of date and did not consider the cumulative impact of the site. Councillor Simon Bloxham seconded the proposal to refuse.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Michael Muir

Points that were raised included:

- The Transport Assessment provided was out of date and lacked information.
- The amount of developer contributions proposed was not enough to improve the road infrastructure.
- Roadworks cause congestion through the whole of Hitchin, and the extra works needed for this site would increase traffic.

The Legal Regulatory Team Leader advised that this was an outline application, and information regarding transport contributions and traffic assessment would come out in reserved matters. The Highways Authority had no objections to the assessment, and the issues raised had been considered.

The Development and Conservation Manager advised that the Highways Authority had deemed the Traffic Assessment robust, and there had been a reduction in traffic since the pandemic in Hitchin.

Having been proposed by Councillor David Levett and seconded by Councillor Simon Bloxham, the motion to refuse was put to the vote and was lost.

Councillor Sean Nolan proposed to defer the application to allow a review and update of the submitted Transport Assessment to address the cumulative impact of recent housing development in Hitchin on the road network and provide more detail of transport mitigation measures. This was seconded by Councillor Dave Winstanley.

Councillor Sean Nolan proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 18/01154/OP be **DEFERRED** outline planning to allow a review and update of the submitted Transport Assessment in order to address the cumulative impact of recent housing development in Hitchin on the road network and provide more detail of transport mitigation measures.

86 22/00303/FP LAND FOR FOOTPATH BETWEEN THE GREENWAY AND, STOTFOLD ROAD, HITCHIN, HERTFORDSHIRE

Audio recording – 2:19:20

The Chair advised the funding for this proposal was dependent upon application 18/01154/OP being granted. As application 18/01554/OP had been deferred, she proposed to defer this application.

This was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That application 22/00303/FP be **DEFERRED** as the funding for the delivery of this proposal is dependent upon application 18/01154/OP being granted.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Chair