

Public Document Pack

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON THURSDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Val Bryant (Chair), Councillor Tom Tyson (Vice-Chair), Daniel Allen, Ian Moody, Morgan Derbyshire, Tony Hunter and Phil Weeder*

In Attendance:

Abigail Hamilton (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Louis Mutter (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Nurainatta Katevu (Legal Regulatory Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Anne McDonald (Principal Planning Officer) and Thomas Howe (Planning Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 8 members of the public, including registered speakers. Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg was also in attendance

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 0:12

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Simon Bloxham, Alistair Willoughby, Sean Nolan, David Levett, and Terry Tyler.

Having given due notice Councillor Michael Muir substituted for Councillor Simon Bloxham, Councillor Nigel Mason substituted for Councillor Sean Nolan, and Councillor Amy Allen substituted for Councillor Alistair Willoughby.

12 MINUTES - 15 SEPTEMBER 2022

Audio recording – 0:53

Councillor Val Bryan, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 September 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

13 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 1:39

There was no other business notified.

14 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 1:43

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest need to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair gave advice to the registered speakers on the speaking procedure and time limits
- (5) The Chair advised that there would be a comfort break if required

15 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 2:58

The Chair confirmed that the registered speakers were in attendance:

- Councillor Gerald Morris
- Reed Parish Councillor Ken Langley
- Mark Whitby
- David Lazenby
- Kate Sargent
- Claire Graham
- Councillor Lisa Nash

Councillor Sam North was not present

16 22/00910/FP Land Between Bush Wood And Rokey Wood, High Street, Reed, Hertfordshire

Audio recording – 3:40

Anne McDonald presented the report and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- There are three updates on this item. Councillor Hill has written in support of the objections set out by Councillor Morris in the report.
- Following the publication of the report Councillor Morris submitted some additional queries regarding the possible 20 cubic metres obstruction of water. These were put to the agent and a response received which has been emailed round. This response also provided drainage plans which are displayed in the presentation. Also there is an update to paragraph 4.3.6 in the last sentence to read that water would be pumped through mobile irrigation equipment to use on the surrounding agricultural land.
- The third update is that Councillor Tyson submitted 6 queries following the publication. A response was received and was emailed round earlier today
- Another update is that the description of development has been amended. The published report states retention of 5500 cubic metres of soils for an engineering operation to create an agricultural reservoir. This has been changed to retention of

- 11936 cubic metres of soil to create an agricultural reservoir with the capacity of 5500 cubic metres. The agent has confirmed agreement of that amended description.
- This is a full application seeking the retention of soil that has been previously imported on the site and for the soil to be regraded and for an agricultural reservoir to be created
 - The reservoir is to be filled primarily by rain water and surface runoff and this will be used to water existing crops.
 - The location of the reservoir is in an area of open countryside between Bush Wood and Rokey Wood.
 - The slides displayed showed a levels plan of the previously imported material which forms a rough U shape. As set out in the planning history, the previous importation of soil. Due to the reservoir not being able to be filled the works were no longer considered to be a viable project.
 - The banks must be a maximum of 45 metres high and the reservoir is to hold 5500 cubic metres. The remaining soil is to graduate down to the farm along the south side. The side of the banks are to be planted with wildflower mix and a landscaping condition for any additional tree planting and/or fencing is recommended.
 - There is concern locally about how viable it is for the reservoir to be filled and will this harm water levels remaining in the catchment area and will this harm water levels in local ponds and streams. The environment agency raised no objection to the application. The slides displayed shows the drainage routes set out in the farm and is forming a network. the supporting information sets out that the rain water collected from the roofs of the farm and farm yard are to primarily fill the reservoir, along with runoff from fields which would be collected through these drainage ditches.
 - In regard to extraction, the reply from the agent is that if extraction is necessary to fill the reservoir, this would not and cannot exceed more than 20 cubic metres per day. Therefore it is not proposed to apply for an environment agency licence.
 - The mobile drainage system will monitor the amount of water that is extracted
 - There is no planning objection to the proposed reservoir as it is development to support agriculture which is in accordance with national and local planning policies.
 - The resulting works are not considered to be harmful to locality. It is noted that there is concerned with regards to the water levels in the area however the application does not propose to extract and in the event extraction is necessary, it will be below the threshold where a licence is required and the environment agency have raised no objection
 - The application is therefore recommended for conditional permission.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Michael Muir

In response Anne McDonald advised:

- No the photos don't represent what it will look like when it's done. In the photos the banks aren't high enough and they are too close to the footpath. It is described in more details in the report. The banks will be a maximum of 45 metres high. The high point will be around 16-20 metres in from the farm track.
- The footpaths aren't affected as they are outside the red line within the plans. They may be affected in the future but short term they won't be. The public will be able to see a grassy hill.
- The amount of soil on the land is 11936 cubic metres. They have assessed imported material there is on the land and that is the amount they say there is. This is sufficient

to regrade for the purpose of this application and no additional material needs to be brought onto the site. In terms of the checks, I am unsure of the answer.

The Chair invited Reed Parish Councillor Ken Langley to speak against the application.

Ken Langley thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- I am the Chair of the Reed Parish Council and I am authorised to speak on behalf of Reed and Barkway Parish Councils.
- The application proposes to build a reservoir and fill it by various means including catchment from the roof of a grain barn. This barn is half a mile away from the site.
- An extensive network of pipes and pumps will be needed and these are not described. We await the drainage plan, so today the application is not presenting you with a complete picture of the impact of this project on the environment
- We are also concerned of the negative effect of supplying the reservoir with the 20 cubic metres of daily water extraction allowed without a license.
- We worry this will affect natural water courses between Reed and Barkway.
- Our main objection is that we are not sure how much inert material has been deposited. The application asked for 5500 cubic metres but prompted by your case officer the applicant agent has told us that 11900 cubic metres are needed and that all this material is already on site.
- It is not disclosed that we believe there is a much greater volume of material that is on site. This material was imported in connection with an abandoned proposal to build a much larger reservoir covering the entire site. For this the applicant sought approval to bring 45000 cubic metres of material. As a result truckloads of material were delivered regularly between autumn 2018 and autumn 2020.
- The applicant's failure to acknowledge the greater amount of imported material is a material emission. We refer you to the existing site plan supplied by the applicant surveyor. This maps out where the site is higher than the lands natural elevation of 150 metres. Local observation reveals any flat areas remaining have all been raised by at least half a metre. We estimate that this alone involves at least 6000 cubic metres of added material. There is a mound that occupies around 2/3 of the 4.5-hectare site and on average this embankment alone consists of at least 20000 cubic metres of imported material.
- The applicant has failed to demonstrate that the large amount of material brought to the site is needed to create this reservoir. You cannot be assured that the proposed landscaping will absorb the surplus material. The area not occupied by the reservoir cannot be levelled while retaining thousands of tons of surplus of imported material.
- All surplus material should be removed and fulfils planning policies aim of protecting the natural environment.
- We believe you should not approve the retention of 30000 cubic metres of material imported without knowing what will happen to it as only 1/3 will be used for the reservoir and the rest should be removed.
- If you do approve this we ask you to impose a condition that the excess volume should be removed.

The following Members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to points of clarification, Ken Langley advised:

- Local observation is people that were familiar with the site before it was defaced over the period of 2 years. The calculation of the material in the mound we rely on figures from surveyors
- We don't have anyone to do this but we do a simple calculation based on the information on the report. We are informed by this planning authority supplied a certificate of lawfulness to authorise the applicant to import

The Chair invited Councillor Gerald Morris to speak against the application as a Member Advocate.

Councillor Morris thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- There was a previous reservoir application. Reed and Barkway Parish Councils and many others realised that this was primarily a material transfer commercial enterprise and not the construction of a reservoir
- In 2019 on two occasions I met the owner of the company who carried out the work and he confirmed it was a material transfer activity
- The original reservoir was never built and this one, if built, can never be usefully filled by rainwater alone without the applicant applying for a water extraction licence. Without this the landowner can only legally extract water at 20 cubic metres per day. If it rains for every day it would take 275 days to fill, assuming no evaporation or irrigation occurs.
- Licence water extraction here would be at the expense of water flowing east to the local village ponds and streams. The environment agency have already pointed out including the applicant, that the extraction licence is unlikely to be granted and hasn't been requested by the applicant.
- The environment agency says they are waiting for servers to respond to the concerns about whether the reservoir can actually be filled before exploring the possibility of any enforcement action in relation to the lawful development certificate
- The environment agency and our Council want what now looks like a Martian landscape problem resolved. The applicant can either remove toe thousands of square metres of dumped material or try and construct a reservoir that the environment agency can confirm can be filled naturally with rainwater without an extraction licence. The environment agency says this is unlikely as it is a sensitive location at the peak of a chalk aquifer.
- The applicant says the reservoir will be filled from local ditches, the environment agency says "these local ditches are likely to have minimal flows outside rainfall events and could be dry for long periods. The reservoir location is in an area where the issue of a licence is heavily restricted. The local extraction policy and limited flows is not likely to offer a reliable source of licensable water"
- We now have information as to how the water will come from the roof of the buildings with mobile pumps.
- While the officer states the environment agency has no concerns, the one line in the report doesn't do justice to the environment agency's letters I have handed the committee
- The applicant must include far more detail and a time scale for the landscaping that will be carried out with the remaining surplus site material. the applicant also must confirm that the structure will not be filled with anything other than natural water
- The applicant says they will not import any more material however there is no clay on site which the applicant says it will use to line the reservoir. Nor is there any top soil to landscape.

Thursday, 13th October, 2022

- Have Hertfordshire County Council ecology been consulted? There is a public right of way, have Hertfordshire County Council rights of way been consulted? Have British Horse Society been consulted?

The Chair invited Anne McDonald to respond:

- We have been back to the agent when the questions were raised during the consultation phase. Set out in the report are their answers to all these. I have to take as fact all the information provided by the applicant
- The consultation is set out within the report. The British Horse Society wasn't consulted as plans would not impact any riding paths. Hertfordshire ecology were consulted on the 5th April 2022 but we have not had a response.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Tony Hunter

In response, Anne McDonald advised:

- Both the agent and applicant were both unable to attend this meeting
- When the report was written, the drainage details were lacking. They have since come in to say there is an existing drainage system in the farm, they already have the equipment and the agent didn't think they would need to build anything specific. Condition 5 Part B talks about any equipment or machinery that will be used in association with filling the reservoir and how it needs to be used.

Simon Ellis also responded:

- Condition 8 on page 26 of the report states that no additional materials are to be brought onto the site and only the material on the site already can be used. If you grant planning permission, we would have the authority to import other materials. Condition 7 also supports this.
- There could be another condition added to say that upon completion of the reservoir, any additional material can be used or there can be a removal scheme. These can be submitted and agreed by the local planning authority. We can have control of when they do it and make sure they do it
- The condition is going to require the applicant to submit a scheme about what they would do with any excess material, which we would then have to approve

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the application 22/00910/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission subject to the reasons set out in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager and the following additional condition:

“Condition 10

Prior to the completion of the development hereby permitted and prior to the first use of the development as a reservoir, or within 12 months of the date of this decision notice, whichever is the sooner, full details of a disposal/reprofiling plan of any excess imported material not required in connection with the development shall be submitted to and thereafter approved in

writing by the Local Planning Authority. Such details shall include a timetable of implementation for the proposed works. Such works shall thereafter be carried out in complete accordance with the approved details or particulars and in accordance with the agreed timetable unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any excess material imported onto the site is removed or dispersed appropriately following the completion of the development, in the interest of visual amenity.”

17 22/01657/FP The Rose Gardens, Cambridge Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 0JX

Audio recording – 40:36

Anne McDonald presented the report and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- There is one update which is the addition of condition 4 which states that prior to the erection of the canopy, the marquee is to be dismantled and removed from the site.
- This is a full application for a small section of canopy roofs just alongside the main pathway from the car park to the main building which is already covered by a canopy.
- The marquee is an unauthorised structure and will go, the proposed canopy will be open and is the same height as the existing canopy.
- The application has been called in the committee for determination by Councillor Dennis-Harburg and the applications recommended for conditional permission

There were no questions from Members.

The Chair invited Mark Whitby to speak against the application.

Mark Whitby thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- I represent a group of 5 neighbours who live immediately opposite the garden centre
- We have watched a slow intensification of the use of the garden centre and have had good relationships with the planners and seen that two applications have gone to appeal and been refused.
- With the new owners we have seen further intensification of the use of the garden centre.
- This is the fourth of five applications which have been made since March 2021.
- The first two were made during lockdown and we were not informed for the works and was passed by delegated powers despite the fact they created a 65% increase in covered areas on the site
- These areas which were formerly used for the display of plants and pots were now dedicated to things such as hot tubs and teddy bears.
- There are plant pots and bagged materials now occupy car parking space. The result of this is the car park spilling out onto the adjacent field.
- We want the owners of the site to come forward with a master plan rather than a series of small applications
- The impact of this growth and use of the site is significant on the site. We have increased traffic as a result and we have problems exiting our driveways due to the road layout.
- This is a green belt site.
- The marquee was put on the site demonstrates inappropriate use of the previous areas they were using for the display of plants and our argument is that they don't need this extension and they can use the existing areas.

There were no points of clarification.

The Chair invited David Lazenby to speak for the application.

David Lazenby thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- I am the applicant and I work at the garden centre company that owns Hitchin garden centre. I've worked and known the garden centre for about 7/8 years.
- This is a minor addition to the garden centre but will make a significant improvement to the garden centre
- The reason for the application is plant protection. In the cold months you need frost protection and in the summer, you need protection from the sun
- These structures are common and acceptable in garden centres
- The items in the car park are generally to help them so they don't have to carry large bags of compost. This is for the customer benefit but we can look into this if the residents are concerned by this but it doesn't form part of this application.
- If you look at the marquee and the intended use of the canopy we are selling plants and we have no intention of putting anything else underneath
- There have been 4 applications to date. This fourth one is because the third got refused and it was for a bigger scheme of canopies in the plant area that went throughout the external plant area.
- There has been no applications on the green belt sites so there should be no impact to those
- We have always sold things like hot tubs and teddy bears, gifts, complimentary goods. We have a big emphasis on plants and Christmas
- We do have other things such as a nursery on site and caravan storage, and the overflow car park has been used for many years and there hasn't been an issue

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Tony Hunter

In response, David Lazenby advised:

- The canopy will go where the marquee is currently. It won't be as big and will about half the size.

Anne McDonald also advised:

- The condition we are adding on asks for the marquee to be taken down. If there was another marquee put up they can put it up for 28 days until they need planning permission so we can't really add a further condition to this
- There is an open enforcement case regarding the open area car park but it is in the early stages so I can't comment on it

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Michael Muir seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the application 22/01657/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission subject to the reasons set out in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager

18 22/01448/FP Land At Turnpike Lane And Adjacent To 4 Manor Close, Turnpike Lane, Ickleford, Hertfordshire

Audio recording – 1:06:25

Anne McDonald presented the report and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- This is a full application for five detached houses
- Members will remember a five house scheme was approved as an appeal and then amended to allow brief accommodation under a section 70 approval. This appraisal follows the layout of these permissions
- The houses open space and visitor parking are all in the same locations
- The houses in plots 1-4 have the same ridge height as approved under the section 70 approval and the house in plot 5 is lower
- The side flank of the plot 5 is the same distance away from the neighbour as the scheme.
- These houses have got larger footprints and are of a contemporary design
- In numbers terms, the proposal represents an increase in the size of the footprints in comparison to the section 70 permission of 61% across all 5 plots. As most houses have increased in footprints. However there is no material change
- They have good sized gardens and excess the minimum standards and have ample parking in excess of the parking SPD are all proposed
- The increase in the footprint does not represent any harm or reason to refuse the scheme
- The design of the houses is more contemporary than the approved schemes with large sections of glazing. There is no objection to this
- The houses are set in from the road and the existing trees with screen these giving the development an attractive setting
- It is recommended for conditional permission

There were no questions from Members.

The Chair invited Kate Sargent to speak against the application.

Kate Sargent thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- I am representing residents of Manor Close and Lodge Court.
- There are many planning concerns associated with this development that have been repeatedly raised by a large number of local residents
- There are concerns related to the additional traffic and pedestrian risk that it would generate
- There are concerns of the ecological devastation of an area that is home to a wide variety of species.
- There are concerns of its proximity to a conservation in the heritage area
- There are concerns of the detrimental impact it will have on the parking in Lodge Court
- This development remains outside of the Emerging Local Plan which has yet to be approved
- There are concerns of the additional pressure on the villages sewerage system

Thursday, 13th October, 2022

- There are concerns of the loss of privacy and light that the residents of Manor Close will be forced to accept
- We will be raising the repeated failure of the District Council to appropriately recognise or address these concerns
- An earlier iteration of this was approved on appeal by the planning inspector when it consisted of two 2 bed properties, two 3 bed properties and one 4 bed property. It was approved for the reason that it was believed to meet a local need for housing that constituted the special circumstances for building on the green belt. This is despite the development not being proposed in the Emerging Local Plan which only recommends a redesignation of the land to white land which is land without any specific proposal for allocation in a development plan where it is intended that existing uses shall remain undisturbed and unaltered
- This development proposal now consists of three 5 bed and two 4 bed houses.
- The results of the 2021 Ickleford housing needs assessment state that the most significant finding is the need for affordable home ownership.
- Started prices for 4 bed detached houses in Hitchin are now £700,000 and prices for 4-5 bed houses in the local area stretch well over £1M. These are not affordable
- The same assessment demonstrates that an appropriate response to the need would be to prioritise the supply of smaller to mid-sized dwelling of 1, 2 and 3 bed houses.
- This has given rise to policy SD2 in the emerging Ickleford neighbourhood plan that states that on all developments of 3 or more bed dwelling including the allocating sites in the Emerging Local Plans, the sizes of dwellings should be mixed with at least 34% of smaller less expensive homes from 1-2 bedrooms to allow younger or older people to access appropriate housing. At least 50% should be 3-bedroom dwelling unless there is local up to date evidence that local dwellings are needed

There were no points of clarification from Members.

The Chair invited Ann McDonald to respond:

- The Ickleford local plan isn't a made plan and therefore holds no weight in decision making tonight
- The section 73 was used in comparison of floor space and where additional bedrooms were already allowed.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Tom Tyson

Points raised in the debate included:

- In terms of need there is probably a greater need for 3 bed houses rather than 5 bed houses.
- The argument of it being on the green belt has been taken away as we can see by the appeal decision, so we don't have any grounds to refuse this on planning grounds
- Even if we refused this based on the need for smaller housing it would go to appeal
- The section 73 application of upsizing was approved by us

In response Anne McDonald advised:

- The appeal was granted and following the appeal there was a second application where consent was granted to allow accommodation in the roofs and that is when the houses were upsized. The site has been sold and they have now come in with their own design. There is no policy reason to not allow additional bedrooms. The houses are larger but the numbers of bedrooms on the site isn't significantly increasing.

Some Members expressed that if a Councillor calls in an item they should attend to give their reasoning. If they cannot attend then it should be taken off the agenda.

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed and Councillor Michael Muir seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the application 22/01448/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission subject to the reasons set out in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager

19 22/01173/FP 131 London Road, Knebworth, Hertfordshire, SG3 6EX

Audio recording – 1:24:20

Thomas Howe presented the report and gave a verbal presentation, which included:

- The plot is a first-floor unit within the London Road high street area. It is designated as a local centre in the Emerging Local Plan and there is a retail area in the Knebworth neighbourhood plan.
- There are two updates for the application. In the principal development section policy KBL3 from the Knebworth neighbourhood plan should be referenced. However the principal development is still supported as its not the loss of retail space and its not the loss of a service.
- The unit was most recently used as a tattoo studio which can be seen in the photos displayed in the presentation
- The flat would be laid out as two bedrooms and a large dining/living room/kitchen area. It will also have an ensuite and a main bathroom
- Another update on the site history of the report has an application which says pending. This is the change of use from a tattoo parlour to a massage parlour. This was granted conditional permission on 4th October.
- The flat would benefit from large internal areas exceeding space standards set nationally with built in storage on the first-floor level and within the stairwell. It would benefit from various amenities from the high street such as shops, leisure, employment opportunities and transport links. Buses and the railway station which is in walking distance. Whilst there is no parking provided, this is a sustainable location that does not necessarily require a vehicle.
- The surrounding area does benefit from various retail uses within the class E use class

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir
- Councillor Tom Tyson

In response Thomas Howe advised:

- When you look at the street view it looks like it was in use by the tattoo parlour in April 2021, but there was no information received when it was vacated

Nurainatta Katevu also clarified that the tattoo parlour and the application for it to change to a massage parlour is a different application to the one we are considering today of residential use

The Chair invited Claire Graham to speak against the application.

Claire Graham thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- I am objecting on behalf of Knebworth Parish Council due to the lack of parking provision required by parking policy and impact on local business
- This property is part of the local centre which is small as we are a village
- The property was a tanning salon prior to being a tattoo parlour and has recently received planning approval to become a massage parlour.
- Loss of business premises regardless of category will have a negative impact on the vitality of the village centre because business brings in potential customers for other shops
- In recent years two pharmacies, a better shop, a builder's merchant and a bank have all been lost from the high street. The builder's merchant has been replaced by 47 assisted living flats and three small empty retail units. This has sterilised a large part of the high street
- A previous sand yard is currently in construction and will have a retail unit plus four flats with only three parking spaces
- Knebworth has serious parking and traffic problems with many streets used as unofficial car parks by rail commuters. It also has one of the highest car ownership statistics for the district.
- The officers suggest the North Herts parking policy can be ignored because there is on street parking available within a 4-minute walk. However in reality this isn't true. The majority of roads in the vicinity have some form of restriction such as one hour parking, controlled parking zones, or double yellow lines.
- The few roads with long term parking are already fully occupied. There is no surplus parking provision within walking distance.
- Herts County Council is currently consulting on North Herts LCWIP which proposes a segregated cycle way along the B197 and Station Road. This would remove all on street parking on Stevenage Road, London Road and Station Road which would put added pressure on on-street parking because no alternative provision is proposed
- The officers report states that the proximity of transport nodes alongside shopping, leisure and employment opportunities overcome the shortfall of parking provision, but this does not.
- The Local Plan has not identified any employment area in Knebworth and larger employers within the village have sold up and their sites redeveloped for housing mainly in the form of flats.
- The waste response requires space for the bin lorry to stop and collect so parking restrictions may be required, which means a loss of parking space on the high street.
- The loss of parking space has a negative impact on the village centre. This was seen when Herts County Council imposed its covid town measures and the loss of parking along the high street resulted in a loss of trade for all shops.
- To permit buildings to be converted without at least one parking space per dwelling is contrary to North Herts parking policy.

There were no points of clarification from Members

The Chair invited Councillor Lisa Nash to speak against the application as a Member Advocate.

Councillor Lisa Nash thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave presentation, including:

- This application impacts the neighbourhood with the removal of the economic opportunity, the lack of parking provisions and an already large number of empty flats in the area.
- The reduced economic opportunity also coincide with an excess number of empty flats. We have also lost the bank which has become a church. There are very few employment opportunities within the village with no room for economic growth
- The majority of working age villagers have to travel outside the village for employment
- 22 out of 47 two bed flats are unoccupied for older people. 11 two bed and 1 one bed flats out of a total of 12 flats are occupied. Many other flats are unoccupied
- We don't have a need for flats in the village. We do need economic growth. We have lost one half of the high street which could have been used as businesses and employment opportunities
- The LCWIP indicates there is no employment in Knebworth.
- Contrary to the officers report, the village has limited entertainment venues with one medium sized pub, two small cafes which are only open during the day, the Royal British Legion, and one Indian restaurant. For a population of 4496 in the 2011 census, there is very little entertainment and local residents report travelling to local towns for leisure purposes.
- Contrary to the officers report, Knebworth has very poor travel and transport links. Knebworth is the nearest railway station for the residents in nearby villages who have to drive to the railway station. There are huge parking issues within the village as there are no other alternative safe transport provision available for them.
- Knebworth provides the railway station for the outlying residents but other shops and services for them.
- These reasons also impact on the restricted parking issues within the village. There are no long-term car parks. Commuters park on the streets to use the trains.
- This application is in direct conflict with the NHDC parking policy
- We know from the RAC 2021 report that people are dependent on their cars
- Knebworth has one of the highest car ownership levels of North Hertfordshire because the transport and travel links are so restricted.

The following Members asked points of clarification:

- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to points of clarification, Councillor Lisa Nash advised:

- There are some unoccupied retail units but there are no advertisements for them

The Chair invited Thomas Howe to respond:

- The unit directly below the flat was vacant
- There is no objection due to policies relating to the loss of retail as it is a first floor flat
- There was a consideration that the close transport links would reduce the need for the access to a private vehicle for the residents within the flat and there are shops nearby.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Michael Muir

In response Simon Ellis advised:

- I don't think that other empty flats in the village is a sustainable ground for refusal. In terms of car parking, if this was a retail unit it would still generate a need for car parking so it being residential wouldn't impact this as much.

Nurainatta Katevu also added that we refused another application because there wasn't parking on site and that got overturned when it went to appeal because it was in a sustainable area.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Michael Muir seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the application 22/01173/FP be **GRANTED** planning permission subject to the reasons set out in the report of the Development and Conservation Manager

20 PLANNING APPEALS

Audio recording – 1:49:34

Simon Ellis advised that he has nothing to update Members on and opened for any questions.

There were no questions.

Councillor Val Bryant thanked Simon Ellis for all his work as he is leaving North Herts and this is possibly his last meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.22 pm

Chair