

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING FOR MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE – 22nd June 2021***Planning Application 211686 – Land of Meldreth Way for the proposed erection of a food store (Use Class E), 43 no. dwellings (Use Class C3) and associated access, servicing, parking and landscaping.******Recommendation:-***

Please note the policies referred to are those contained in Wokingham Borough Council's Development Plan.

1. In the absence of a challenge to the Wokingham Borough Council 5-year Housing Land Supply, there is no National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraphs 2 and 11 justification for a development outside the development boundary, on land designated as "countryside", which would be contrary to Policies CP11 and CC02, and neither is it a brownfield site as set out in NPPF Paragraph 117. As a result, the proposals fail to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and are of an inappropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form and character to the area, to the detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open space. The proposals result in the intrusion of a dense urban character into the countryside, with no graduation in response to the landscape character of the surroundings. The proposals do not enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora and do not integrate with the surrounding open space, contrary to Policies CP1 and CP3, and contrary to NPPF Paragraph 170.
2. There is a loss of local amenity arising from the loss of the current continuous green wooded corridor along Lower Earley Way. Existing open space and landscaping along most of Lower Earley Way creates a strong visual green corridor that is an essential part of the wider character, landscape setting and amenity of Lower Earley as a whole. This corridor also forms part of the wider open countryside to the south of Lower Earley. The green corridor is essential to the character of Lower Earley as a transition between built up and green areas and provides an environmental buffer to the M4 motorway to the south.

The proposed food store would destroy the green corridor character with a visible commercial use in a prominent location, comprising of a building, with significant hard paved areas to the frontage of this part of Lower Earley Way. The building and parking would be visible to traffic using Lower Earley Way and Meldreth Way, disrupting the continuous visual function and amenity of the existing green corridor. The opening up of views from the nearby roads would be considered essential for attracting customers, as indicated in the Design and Access Statement.

The proposals show a reduction in width of the green corridor, as a result of both the food store and residential development. This reduction in width of the corridor is excessive and would weaken its current character and visual function.

The development fails to enhance the landscape, by not protecting or enhancing the green infrastructure. It fails to promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors such as footpaths, by not integrating with adjoining open space and countryside, resulting in the unacceptable fragmentation and isolation of areas of green infrastructure, contrary to Policies CC03 and TB21. It also fails to ensure that the development is ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision

of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network, contrary to Policy TB23c). Also, the development demonstrates a failure to enhance the natural environment and improve access to the countryside contrary to NPPF Paragraphs 8c and 118.

3. The proposals for a footpath connection linking the open space on either side of the site, tracking through a retail car park and alongside a suburban road, presents an urban aspect, failing to enhance the landscape and footpath links in a manner that enhances the connection between green spaces, contrary to Policy CC03.
4. The retail element of the proposals is not well connected to the existing centres and is well beyond the edge of centre of the nearest retail area, contrary to NPPF Paragraph 87; it seems more targeted at passing trade than to serve the immediate community. In addition, the proposals do not demonstrate compliance with Policy TB16. In addition, the Town Council is concerned that the assumptions derived from pre-pandemic retail spending patterns may no longer apply due to people switching to on-line purchasing, and this does not appear to have been addressed in the Planning and Retail Statement.
5. Failure to demonstrate adequate and safe access to the development, in particular the Chatteris Way junction, that has been designed without regard to best practice, which would normally result in such an access being straight for at least 10m from the bell-mouth channel, and within 10 degrees either side of perpendicular, to ensure that larger vehicles can enter and leave without conflicting with other traffic, particularly between cars and service vehicles, giving rise to highway safety risks, contrary to Policy CP6.
6. The design of the access into the food store fails to address the potential for fast moving vehicles exiting the Lower Earley Way roundabout, as observed by local residents and evidenced by the historic number of accidents at this roundabout, giving rise to potential road safety concerns, contrary to Policy CP6.
7. The proposed development fails to address the climate emergency by not incorporating technologies to future proof the occupants of the dwellings, against the emerging national policies for net zero carbon.
8. The Energy Statement fails to make it clear that photo voltaic panels will be installed to all residential properties, to address Policy CC05.
9. The Ecological Statement fails to address the issue of badgers, alluded to in an un-redacted element of that report. As such, the Ecological Statement fails to adequately address wildlife and biodiversity issues raised in the report, contrary to Policies CP3c), CO5d), CP7 and TB23

Conclusion – That a recommendation for refusal be submitted to the Planning Authority, Wokingham Borough Council.