



EXTRAORDINARY MEETING FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE
22nd June 2021 - Supplementary Items

4.1 PLANNING APPLICATION 211686 – LAND OFF MELDRETH WAY

SUMMARY REPORT & RECOMMENDATION

This report is a summary of the more detailed document previously circulated to Members. This report sets out the salient points for consideration by Members when considering their recommendation to the Planning Authority, Wokingham Borough Council, on this application.

THE ISSUES:

This Application is for 43 dwellings and a Lidl food store, with a gross internal floor area of 1913m², on land that was previously identified for residential development in the original Lower Earley Development Brief of 1977, however, this designation was superseded by the Local Plan, subsequently adopted by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) for development purposes, which draws the settlement boundary to exclude this land, and designates the land as “countryside”. It is suggested that the settlement boundary and countryside designation which would form the basis of the principal objections to the development proposed in this Application.

The Application is accompanied by a number of technical reports, including an Ecological Assessment, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and a Transport Assessment, which were more fully identified in the previous report to Members.

With regards to the Local Plan, as the emerging Local Plan Update has been withdrawn to resolve housing allocations, little or no weight can be attributed to the document, so the existing Adopted Local Plan Policies will apply. In particular, as the applicant has not challenged the WBC 5-year Housing Land Supply (HLS) 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, including open space, of adjoining land users; 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; they 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.

The proposals are also in conflict with Policies concerning landscape and visual amenity. The proposals result in a loss of local amenity arising from the loss of the current continuous green wooded corridor along Lower Earley Way (B3270). The 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. ⁽¹⁾

The proposed food store would destroy the green corridor character with a visible commercial use in a prominent location, comprising 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. ⁽¹⁾

The proposals show a reduction in width of the green corridor as a result of both the food store and the residential development. This reduction in width of the corridor is excessive and would weaken its current character and visual function. ⁽¹⁾

The proposed development would fail to enhance the landscape, by not protecting or enhancing the green infrastructure; failing 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 would also fail to ensure that the proposed development is ecologically permeable through the protection of existing, and the provision of new, continuous wildlife corridors, which should be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network, contrary to Policy TB23(c). Also, the proposed development demonstrates a failure to enhance the natural environment and improve access to the countryside contrary to NPPF Paragraphs 8c and 118.

In addition, the proposals for a footpath connection linking the open space on either side of the site, which tracks through a retail car park, frequented by heavy goods vehicles, and alongside a suburban road, presents an urban aspect, failing to enhance the landscape, and footpath links in a manner that would enhance the connection between green spaces, contrary to Policy CC03.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

The following WBC Local Plan Policies are of particular relevance, CP1, CP3, CP6, CP7, CP11, CC02, CC03, CC04, CC05, TB16, TB21 and TB23; along with Paragraphs 2, 8, 87, 117, 118, 127, 130, 170 and Annexe 1 of the NPPF.

RECOMMENDATION:-

The below recommendation supersedes that of Appendix B.

1. In the absence of a challenge to the WBC 5-year HLS there is no 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; they 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. ⁽¹⁾

The proposed food store would destroy the green corridor character with a visible commercial use in a prominent location, comprising 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. ⁽¹⁾

The proposals show a reduction in width of the green corridor as a result 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. ⁽¹⁾

The proposed development would fail to enhance the landscape, by not protecting or enhancing the green infrastructure; failing 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 would also fail to ensure that the proposed development would be ecologically permeable through the protection of existing, and the provision of new, continuous wildlife corridors, which should be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network, contrary to Policy TB23(c). Also, the proposed development demonstrates a failure to enhance the natural environment and improve access to the countryside contrary to NPPF Paragraphs 8(c) 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 manner that would enhance 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, indeed 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. There is a failure to demonstrate that adequate and safe access to the proposed development, in particular the Chatteris Way junction, which has been designed without regard to best practice, which would normally result in such an access being straight for at least 10m from the bellmouth channel, and within 10 degrees either side of perpendicular. The purpose of this would be to ensure that larger vehicles could 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 proposed development fails to address the climate emergency by not incorporating appropriate technologies to future proof the proposed dwellings against the emerging National policies for net zero carbon.
7. The Energy Statement fails to make it clear that photo voltaic panels would be installed to all residential properties, to address Policy CC05.
8. 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.
9. The Ecological Statement fails to address the issue of badgers, a species alluded to in an un-redacted element of that report as originally presented on the WBC website, where reference was made to the criteria for assessing the occupancy of badger setts. As such, the Ecological Statement fails to adequately address wildlife and biodiversity issues raised in the report, contrary to Policies CP3(c), CP7 and TB23.

(1) With acknowledgment to D. Breeze

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

Earley Town Council's Planning Advisor
19th June 2021

LETTER RECEIVED ON BEHALF OF LOWER EARLEY PROPERTIES LTD

See attached