



Long Wittenham Parish Council

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Planning Application P16/S1124/O Land Off Fieldside Track Up to 36 Dwellings.

Dear Sirs,

I am writing on behalf on Long Wittenham Parish Council.

We held a special meeting on Tuesday 31st May to consider the above application. The meeting was attended by Parish Councillors, our District Councillor and 24 members of the public. (One of the Parish Councillors declared an interest because he lives close to the development site and took no part in the meeting.)

The Parish Council heard views from Residents, none of whom spoke in favour of the development.

The PC then discussed the Application in detail and after a thorough discussion were unanimous in their decision to OBJECT to the Application.

The reasons we decided to Object are:-

The PC has been developing a **Neighbourhood Plan**(NP) for approx 18 months and have been given a great deal of support in this process by planning policy officers and our District Councillor. We wrote to the Head of Planning with a progress report early in the New Year so that planning officers knew about the work we have been doing.

In our emerging NP we have identified that the highest priority for the Village is to build a new Community "Hub". This would include a new Primary School with an adjacent Pre-School and a new Village Hall. There would be carparking and outside green space and play space. The Hub Development would need to be funded by a measured amount of market housing.

The Parish Council have spent a considerable amount of time and resources in order to negotiate and come to an agreement with a landowner to provide the land required to provide these important community facilities.

We have agreed with the landowner that the land will be made available at sensible, realistic, land values – sufficiently high to incentivise the provision, but low enough to ensure that only new residential dwellings that are actually required to fund the ‘Hub’ are developed, without a developer or a landowner taking away large amounts of profit. The Parish Council and the community are committed to delivering the new Hub, but balanced against the capacity of the village to sustain new housing.

When we consulted the Village in a housing needs survey, residents indicated they were behind these proposals providing we could manage the total number of new dwellings. An upper figure of about 40 units was acceptable to most respondents.

We have held several meetings between the current Applicants and representatives of the PC over the last year. They have made various offers to accommodate some of our NP priorities. However they have now decided to put in an application that does not support the needs of the village or the aims and priorities of the NP and will seriously jeopardise the emerging plan.

We have encouraged them to wait for the NP process to be completed and then put in an application in line with the NP but they have chosen to go ahead before the NP is complete which is very disappointing.

Their Application does not accord with, and is contrary to, the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

The draft NP will be submitted to SODC for consideration by the end of June 2016

In the latest version of the NP the site which is subject the of this application will be partly designated as a managed open green space along the south side of Fieldside. This 20m wide buffer zone has been put into the NP to provide a break between the **Long Wittenham Conservation Area** and several **listed buildings** close to the north side of this section of Fieldside. We were advised by Historic England that we should protect the character of the LW Conservation Area and we are also advised that SODC as the LPA has a statutory duty to preserve and protect the conservation area.

This buffer zone has the additional benefit of protecting views to and from the Wittenham Clumps, an AONB, which can be seen from several of the listed buildings around the Village Cross area. These views would be lost and the character of the area badly affected if this development were to be allowed.

This proposal will seriously impact on the character of this part of the Conservation Area.

Core Strategy and Local Plan. During numerous discussions with SODC planning officers they have explained that Long Wittenham is designated as a small village. Policy CSR1 specifically protects small villages from major developments such as proposed. The policy is to limit development to small infill areas of only a very few new homes. This proposal is in direct conflict with Policy CSR1 and SODC is requested to robustly apply its adopted policy.

The proposed development does not contribute to the Hub project and the development of these houses would jeopardise the delivery of the Hub. The Hub is the highest priority for the Village and the reason the NP includes some cross funding housing.

NPPF

The Application does not accord with Local Plan Policy, however even if the local policies were put to one side or deemed to be out of date, the Application does not meet the criteria of the NPPF in terms of sustainable development.

Long Wittenham is a small, local village with limited amenities and currently poor transport links. An Application which seeks to ignore the local plan policies through a suggestion that they are out of date should still be refused on the grounds that it is not sustainable as per the NPPF, and on the grounds that it conflicts with the emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

Traffic and Road Safety The PC is very concerned by the location of the vehicular and pedestrian accesses to this development.

The road access will require the re-location of the existing traffic calming measures in Didcot Road. This road already has many vehicles exceeding the speed limit as evidenced in our traffic survey for the NP.

It has recently been subject to monitoring by the Police due to the excessive speeds.

Relocating the traffic calming is likely to increase speeds still further as it would create an excessive straight section of road between traffic calming features.

We are also very concerned that the accesses will be close to the tight and blind bend just north of Fieldside and this lack of visibility will become a serious hazard for both pedestrians using the crossing nearest to the bend, and vehicles entering and particularly leaving the site.

The proposed development will also increase the volume of traffic on a road which is very likely to see a major increase in the volume of traffic due to the planned 1800+ new homes on the NE of Didcot development. Many of these new residents are bound to travel through our Village to Oxford and the M40.

Historic Hedge Row We believe the hedgerow on the Didcot Road boundary of the site is a historic hedgerow and should be protected. We have historic photos showing the existence of this feature and it contains a number of species indicating it should be protected. The two accesses through the hedgerow will seriously damage it. The impact on the hedge will be even greater when adequate vision splays are shown on the drawings. These have been omitted at present.

This significant impact on the hedge seems to have been completely ignored in the Landscape report submitted with the application.

Ecology Survey report We are very concerned by some key errors and omissions in the report. In its introduction it is conceded that the survey was undertaken too early in the season to undertake a comprehensive and professional survey. This has led to some key omissions.

This year we can see nesting House Martins on the site. These are an **Amber** protected species and their habitat would be seriously affected by these proposals.

Also several residents have drawn our attention to the existence of giant snails. **Roman Snail *Helix pomatia*** is a **Red** protected species and is valuable in cancer research. One

of our recently retired residents is an expert in this field and has been studying them on this site over many years.

Neither of these species have been identified in the ecological survey which calls the whole study into question. What else has been missed?

Errors in the Submission The PC and residents have identified several errors in the supporting documents.

They refer to a bus service through the village. The Applicants Agent was advised sometime ago that unfortunately this service will cease in July 2016 due to budget cuts by OCC. This will leave the village with no public transport.

The applicant also claims the development will increase patronage of village businesses. Our village shop closed over 10 year ago.

Several figures taken from our own Residents Survey have been misrepresented. The Applicant states '16% survey respondents stated that they had left Long Wittenham in the last 5 years due to lack of suitable housing'.

We asked ' Have any members of your household left Long Wittenham in the last 5 years and if so, why did they leave? 7 people were known to have left due to unsuitable housing out of a total of 194 surveys returned. (However we don't know if more than one came from the same household.) This equates to only approx 3.6% of respondents or well under 1% of adults living in the village.

They stated there has been an increase in those over 65 and a decrease in those under 15 from 2001 to 2011 censuses. However the village still has fewer over 65s than England (15.5% v 16.3%) and more under 15s than England (21.9% v 18.9%).

These figures are wrong and call into question the accuracy of all the supporting documents.

S106 Contributions The Applicant has suggested that they would be willing to enter into a S106 agreement to partly fund some of our NP aspirations if they were relieved of their obligation to provide some or all of the usual 40% affordable housing.

The PC has been advised by SODC planning officers, on several occasions, that it is most unlikely that a robust S106 Agreement, that would bind future owners of the site, could be put in place at this stage of development of our NP.

If the Applicant were willing to delay their application until the NP has been adopted then a robust S106 agreement may be possible.

In order to fulfil any S106 commitments to the Community Hub facilities the Applicant would need the cooperation of the adjoining Landowner. The owner has indicated to the PC that they would be unwilling to enter into any such agreement.

The only Community facility offered as part of this application is a small area of green space. In a village surrounded by open space this was called "derisory" by public at the PC meeting.

Private Right of Way This site is crossed by a private right of way. Although this is not usually a material consideration the PC understands the owner of this right of way has not been properly notified by the Applicant.

Does this invalidate the application?

For these extensive reasons The Parish Council strongly objects to the Application.

Should this Application progress to Planning Committee for a decision the Parish Council would like the opportunity to address the Committee.

Signed ***Stephen Brown*** Chair Long Wittenham Parish Council