

Runnymede Borough Council

Planning Committee

Wednesday, 26 July 2023 at 6.45 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors M Willingale (Chairman), P Snow (Vice-Chairman), R Bromley (In place of V Cunningham), T Gates, E Gill, C Howorth, S Jenkins, A King, C Mann, M Nuti, D Whyte (In place of T Burton), S Whyte and J Wilson.

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors A Balkan and M Singh.

In attendance: Councillors L Gillham.

11 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

12 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Singh and Cllr Balkan.

13 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Gill declared a non-registerable interest in application RU.22/0682 on the basis that her home is within a close proximity to the application site. Cllr Gill sought advice and stayed in the Chamber and voted on the item.

13a RU.22/0682 Land Off Rosemary Lane, Thorpe, Surrey, TW20 8PH

Proposal: Full Planning Permission for the comprehensive redevelopment to provide residential use (Class C3) for 24 units (8 Affordable), with landscaping, car parking and associated works.

Thorpe ward councillors addressed the Committee on the history of the site and the steps taken by the Thorpe Neighbourhood Forum following the removal of Thorpe Village from the green belt as part of the forthcoming Local Plan with the early adoption of a neighbourhood plan.

Members had previously expressed a preference for considering the site in its entirety rather than a proportion of it, however this application covered a significant proportion of the site and was the first application with an appropriate density and layout to be presented on the site.

Ward Member praised both the planning officers for their hard work, and the new developer for its ongoing dialogue with ward Councillors and residents to achieve the best outcome for the site.

It was added that whilst flats and maisonettes were not part of the original vision for the site, their design was in-keeping with the character of the surrounding area. The Head of Planning agreed to a Member request to add a condition to prevent additional accommodation within the roof space.

There was some concern from Members about rights of way and access to public footpaths

during the construction phase, and whilst officers acknowledged that part of the footpath was currently impassable, agreed to add an additional informative to ensure that footpaths would remain open throughout the construction phase wherever feasible.

Committee discussed the provision of affordable housing as part of the scheme, and the Head of Planning advised that the six affordable housing units would be clustered rather than pepper-potted as part of the scheme. This was relatively common on schemes of this limited scale for operational reasons as this made management of the affordable housing more practical. Additionally the units were to be similar in appearance to the rest of the development and as such this was considered the most appropriate option.

In response to a Member's query about accessibility, the Head of Planning confirmed that the scheme had met the minimum requirements to ensure accessibility, however disability access was predominantly a building control requirement, so in the event of the scheme being approved it would still have to meet with regulations to ensure the appropriate accessibility.

Members noted that a lot of work had gone in to this scheme and that it had now reached a suitable high quality broadly in line with the vision of the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan.

Resolved that –

The HoP was authorised to grant planning permission subject to:

- i. The completion of a Section 106 legal agreement**
- ii. Planning obligations 1-4**
- iii. Planning conditions 1-19**
- iv. Informatives 1-13**
- v. Further planning condition that ensures that no accommodation is allowed to be built into the roof space of the maisonettes.**
- vi. Additional informative to keep the footpaths open throughout the construction phase.**
- vii. Addendum notes.**

Mr Spencer Doran, an objector, and Mr Matthew Pigot, agent for the applicant, addressed the Committee on this application.

13b RU.23/0557 Land East of Highcross Place, Chertsey

Proposal: Reserved matters submission in relation to appearance and landscaping for RU.18/0443 - Erection of 48 dwellings

There was frustration from several Committee members about the application coming forward in two phases in the form of an outline planning application and subsequent reserved matters application. This had caused confusion for local residents, who had assumed there was an opportunity to comment on the overall development.

The Head of Planning sympathised with the position, and had previously written to government urging Government to consider revisions to the Outline/Reserved matters system, in particular ending the low fees for Outline applications that incentivised their submission over full applications and lead to significant delays in the delivery of housing and cause upset to residents.

The Council were powerless to prevent the submission of such outline applications owing to it being set out in legislation, and there was no real prospect the situation changing any time soon.

As this was a reserved matters application to determine the appearance of the development the layout and scale had already been fixed, as the principle of the building had already been established by the permission already granted with the previous application.

The Committee acknowledged that there was limited scope within their powers to amend any of the application, but was concerned from several Committee members about the appearance of the development from Burnham Road across the railway line, therefore additional landscaping was sought. The Head of Planning noted that this was an existing situation with separation by a railway line and there was significant distance to these properties.

The Head of Planning advised that whilst landscaping was scarce within the developer's proposal, it was in-keeping with its surroundings and characteristic of the area and the flats in the same style that surround it. Whilst he considered that the volume of landscaping was adequate to accompany a 2m fence, advised Committee that it was within their reasonable planning judgement to take the view that additional landscaping was necessary.

Committee therefore asked officers to follow up with the applicant with a view to providing additional landscaping on both sides of the acoustic barrier.

There was also a desire from the Committee to increase the landscaping plan from five to seven years, and it was agreed to amend planning condition four to reflect this.

Concern was also raised at the lack of a contact point for residents, and the Committee agreed to an additional or altered planning condition for the applicant to make available contact details for residents for the duration of the construction phase.

Resolved that –

The HoP was authorised to grant planning permission subject to:

- i. Planning condition 1-5.**
- ii. Informatives 1-9.**
- iii. Additional condition for the agent to provide residents with contact information during the construction phase.**
- iv. Amendment to planning condition four to extend the landscaping plan from five to seven years.**

Ms Paula Reece, an objector, and Mr Tom Rumble, agent for the applicant, addressed the Committee on this application.

13c **RU.22/1846 Coombelands, Animal Sciences Unit (ASU), Woodham Lane, Surrey, KT15 3NB**

Proposal: Hybrid planning application, with outline planning permission for the provision of x2 buildings, site levelling, creation of hardstanding, plant areas, sub stations, landscaping and associated works with detailed consideration of reserved matters relating to the means of access, layout and landscaping.

There was some unease from several Committee members about the outcome of the Arboricultural Officer's report, which highlighted concern about the prospect of the removal of four high quality trees as part of the application.

The Head of Planning explained that the Arboricultural Officer's job was to make arboricultural representations, which was one of a multitude of factors that the Committee had to balance against in exercising its planning powers deciding whether or not the

planning balance weighed in favour of a scheme being acceptable.

Whilst the removal of the trees was regrettable, their loss was mitigated by the planting of over twenty semi-mature trees in their place, and that they were unable to be seen from the public domain meant that they were not providing significant amenity value. Officers would seek to discuss with the applicant that the replacements were of a suitably substantial size, although conceded that as the applicant was a publicly-funded body would have a duty to ensure it was spending taxpayers' money in the most appropriate way.

There was also substantial weight given to the operations on site being of national importance and in receipt of significant government funding in the wake of the pandemic for work to prevent animal and plant related diseases becoming transmissible to other animals and humans.

Responding to queries from Members about the suitability of siting the buildings elsewhere, the Assistant Development Manager advised that the proposed location was the most appropriate site as it was the only location in the urban area owned by the applicant and would prevent the spread of construction into the wider green belt, there were also operational benefits in clustering the buildings together.

Resolved that –

The HoP was authorised to grant planning permission subject to:

- i. The submission of additional ecological information to his satisfaction.**
- ii. Compliance conditions 1-16.**
- iii. Addendum notes.**

13d RU.23/0066 Augustine House, Gogmore Lane, Chertsey, Surrey, KT16 9AP

The application was withdrawn from the agenda by the agent. As such it was not considered by the committee.

13e RU.22/0109 Willow Farm, Chobham Road, Ottershaw, KT16 0QE

Proposal: Change of use of the land to create 4 pitches for an extended Traveller family

Several Committee members voiced frustration at the lack of allocated Traveller sites available in Surrey, the Borough and the rest of the South East and that the Council did not currently have a 5 year supply of Traveller plots. It was noted that Runnymede had an up-to-date local plan that had sort to meet some of this need and was one of the few authorities in Surrey to make progress in this area. However it was recognised that more pitches would be required in the future, and that this would need more engagement with the Traveller community and local residents to reach a favourable outcome for all parties.

The Head of Planning advised that the future planning policy would need to give due regard to overall need and how/if it could be met. The current local plan had been a significant milestone in identifying provision, and whilst the updated local plan would build on this work it was possible that need could continue to remain unmet as demand for pitches nationally continue to grow, and due to the significant constraints of the Borough including Flood Plain and Green Belt. How future need would be met would be informed by National Policy including the Emerging NPPF and future iterations of the Borough Local Plan, decisions must currently be made in accordance with both current policy and current material circumstances.

In response to questions about the removal of trees, whilst it would be possible to compel the applicant to provide trees for screening and amenity purposes, it would effectively be

accepting the retaining wall as a permanent feature if the trees were to remain in perpetuity.

There was concern for the future prospects of the applicants in the event of planning refusal, and the Head of Planning advised that there could be no guarantee that temporary pitches could be found elsewhere in the borough that would be more suitable than this site, any Council alternative might well be “Bricks and Mortar” which is generally not considered ideal by the Travelling community.

A Member felt that provision was being exacerbated by existing pitches not currently being utilised by the correct groups of people, and asked that the site was closely monitored in the event the application was approved. The Head of Planning emphasised that with monitoring was a fine line between upholding the planning system and not intruding on the applicant’s right to live peacefully and enjoy their home. Given these considerations and the significant local attention to the site, reactive enforcement would most likely remain the most appropriate course of action.

A member sought clarity on the options for the site, and suggested the option for temporary use of the land was increased from three years to five years, this would help align the permission with review of the Local Plan and therefore the picture with regards how the Borough would meet its Traveller provision need was likely to be clearer in five rather than three years’ time, this would also avoid an unnecessary Planning Application to renew the temporary permission where nothing was likely to have significantly changed with regards the circumstances of the applicant or the adoption of new policy.

Following debate, granting a permanent permission was discounted by the Committee on the basis that such a decision would be made without considering whether or not the decision was consistent with other decisions and without suitable information that such a site is amongst the best options for meeting need.

The committee voted on the proposal to amend condition one to increase the time period from three to five years. Following the amendment of this time period the recommendation was agreed by committee.

Resolved that –

The HoP was authorised to grant planning permission subject to:

- i. Planning conditions 1-7, with an amendment to condition one to extend the time period from three years to five years.**
- ii. Addendum notes.**

Mr Nigel Eastment, an objector, and Mrs Kelly Rooney, the applicant, addressed the Committee on this application.

14 Caxton Avenue Conservation Area Appraisal

Following Committee approval in November 2022 for officers to commence a public consultation on the Caxton Avenue Conservation Area Appraisal, two rounds of consultation had subsequently been undertaken along with a public meeting.

Following consideration of all responses, along with engagement with Surrey County Council’s historic environmental planning team and Runnymede’s heritage and conservation officers, who both carried out independent assessments, officers retained the opinion that the area merited designation as a conservation area, and should Committee approve officers would carry out the necessary legal requirements, which included notifying the Secretary of State, Historic England, and placing notifications in the London Gazette and a local publication.

The Head of Planning confirmed to a member that whilst it would be necessary for residents in the potential designation area to apply for planning permission to make modification to trees, there was currently no cost for such applications.

A Member considered the legal requirement to publicise the designation in newspaper publications an outdated practise, particularly given the cost to the Council. Furthermore, the reach of digital communications would far outreach a local newspaper's circulation.

Resolved that –

The designation of a new Conservation Area at Caxton Avenue and adoption of the Caxton Avenue Conservation Area Appraisal as technical planning guidance was approved, subject to the Local Planning Authority giving notice to the Secretary of State, the Commission (Historic England) and publishing particulars of its effect in the London Gazette and in at least one newspaper circulating in the area of the local planning authority, as required by section 70 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

(The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.)

Chairman