

Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in the Village Hall,
Sonning Common, on Monday 03 February 2020 at 1930 hrs.

Present: Mr Rawlins (chairman), Mrs Lewis, Mr Fort, Mr Kedge, Mr Stoves, Mrs Diwell and Mrs Varnes (Deputy Parish Clerk) plus around 65 members of the public, a Henley Standard reporter and three Inspired Villages representatives.

P20/133 Apologies for absence: Mr Giles, Mr Coombs.

P20/134 Declarations of interest: none.

P20/135 Public consultation time: all public present attended the meeting in relation to the Inspired Villages planning application.

P20/136 New application:

P19/S4576/O. Hybrid planning application for the development of a continuing care retirement community care village. Full planning permission for a 'village core' with 31 assisted living units and 16 care units and ancillary care facilities, community space, gardens, green space, landscaping and car parking areas with a further 26 assisted living units in blocks B1-B4. An outline application (all matters reserved except access) for 60 assisted living units, ancillary community space, gardens, green space and landscaping and car parking areas on land at Little Sparrows, off the Blounts Court Road.

Inspired Villages representatives Mr Garnett, Mr Docherty and Mr Martin promoted the scheme, provided more detail on the planning application and answered questions from councillors and residents. Dr Emerson, a partner at Sonning Common Health Centre, outlined, in detail, the practice's opposition to the proposal, followed by around 10 residents who also spoke in opposition to the plans.

After much discussion members unanimously voted to recommend the refusal of the application (see attached letter).

P20/137 Matters for future agendas: none.

The meeting closed at 2055.

Date of next meeting: Monday 17 February 2020 at 1915.

Chairman: Date:

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office

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Nicola Smith
Planning Officer
SODC
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Oxfordshire
OX14 4SB

Thursday 13 February 2020

Dear Ms Smith,

Re: P19/S4576/O. A hybrid planning application for the development of a continuing care retirement community care village. Full planning permission for a ‘village core’ with 31 assisted living units and 16 care units and ancillary care facilities, community space, gardens, green space, landscaping and car parking areas with a further 26 assisted living units in blocks B1-B4. An outline application (all matters reserved except access) for 60 assisted living units, ancillary community space, gardens, green space and landscaping and car parking areas on land at Little Sparrows, off the Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common.

At its meeting on Monday 03 February 2020 members of Sonning Common Parish Council’s Planning Committee voted unanimously to recommend to SODC rejection of the above application.

The meeting was attended by around 70 residents, many of whom outlined their significant and specific objections to the proposal. Representatives of Inspired Villages and their agents also attended the meeting to present their proposals and to answer questions from councillors and residents about the scheme.

The Planning Committee strongly recommends the refusal of the application in line with SODC’s pre-application advice on 23 September 2019, which is summarised as follows:

“The proposed development conflicts with the Council’s adopted spatial strategy in that it does not comprise infill development and would comprise major development within the AONB where development should be allowed only in exceptional circumstances and where it is in the public interest.

“The Council can demonstrate a three-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The presumption is therefore that planning permission should be refused in line with S38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, unless material circumstances dictate otherwise.

“Additionally, given the location of the site within the AONB I am of the view that there are no other material considerations that would justify this major development and a departure from the development plan and the NPPF.”

(Mr Lloyd Jones, Major Applications Consultant, SODC).

Sonning Common Parish Council’s Planning Committee further recommends that the application be refused on the following grounds:

1. AONB Location

The site is highly sensitive due to:

- Its location with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognised by both residents and expert landscape architects to be of exceptional quality.
- The development of this site would constitute a major development within the Chilterns AONB; it would extend the built area of Sonning Common into unspoiled countryside and be a blight on the natural landscape.
- The site is elevated within the AONB and there are numerous prized public views of it from public rights of way, the Peppard Road, Blackmore Lane and from the village settlement generally.
- The proposed development of this site does not meet the “exceptional circumstances” test (paragraph 172, National Planning Policy Framework) for permissible development within the AONB and it is not in the public interest due to its failure to meet local housing needs and its unsustainable nature (which I will detail later).
- It is contrary to national planning policy, the new AONB Management Plan, SODC’s Core Strategy and the adopted Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan.
- The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is strongly opposed to this application and states in its consultation response to SODC:

“The proposal would represent a visually intrusive form of development in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and would fail to protect and enhance this highly valued, nationally protected landscape. No exceptional circumstances have been presented which demonstrate that the development is in the public interest, whereas great weight is given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the area.”

In its subsequent letter to the LPA of 24 January 2020 the CCB describes the site as, “an integral part of the landscape character that envelopes and defines the settlement of Sonning Common” and states:

“In conclusion, the Board considers that, because the development is considered to neither conserve nor enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB, it would have detrimental impacts on users of the AONB, it is contrary to planning and related legislation and there are no overriding circumstances that would warrant a departure. The application should be refused.”

2. Contrary to the adopted Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan (SCNP)

- This site is not allocated for residential development within the current Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan (SCNP), which was adopted by SODC as part of the Local Plan after being backed overwhelmingly by 94 per cent of residents in September 2016 (based on a 48 per cent turnout).
- The application site, known as SON 24 (land behind Widmore Pond), was put forward by the landowner for consideration for residential development under the revised Neighbourhood Plan. All new sites were extensively surveyed and assessed by teams of volunteer residents and professional landscape consultants last year and the survey results shared at a public presentation on 14 November 2019. The parish’s independent landscape consultant recommended that SON 24 was not considered further as a potential site option due to the following constraints:
 - *the site’s location is within the AONB and the potential harm to special qualities*
 - *the visibility of the eastern parts of site from views within the AONB*
 - *the importance of mature trees along the western boundaries*
 - *the remoteness of the eastern parts of site from the settlement and the role that part of site plays in the rural approach to the village.*

Consequently, the Neighbourhood Plan Working Party is recommending that this site is not taken forward for residential development under the revised Neighbourhood Plan.

- In addition, the proposal is premature to the SCNP revision process as well as the emerging new Local Plan.
- It is contrary to the SCNP's housing, design and infill policies as well as its spatial strategy. The proposed 11m ridge heights from three-storey accommodation on-site would be over-bearing and detrimental to the AONB.
- The scale of the proposed development is excessive and would provide more new homes than are required in Sonning Common and be inappropriate to the needs of the local population.
- The SCNP is seeking to allocate suitable sites for an appropriate amount of new housing to meet the needs of the village and its local population. Research conducted under the Neighbourhood Plan process to date has identified a need for modest and affordable new homes, suitable for young families and for downsizing. The exclusive nature of this proposed development – in providing accommodation for one section of the population only – is not in tune with the housing mix and numbers required for the village.

3. Sustainability

- To thrive and grow as a community in a sustainable way the committee considers that Sonning Common requires a balanced community. This proposed exclusive retirement community, isolated from the village centre, would do nothing to support the village's desire to develop in a sustainable way.
- At the recent Planning Committee meeting, a senior partner at the respected Sonning Common Health Centre stated that the proposed development would place "untenable pressure on existing facilities".

In objecting to the proposal she said:

"Considering the age of the population and their added medical needs, we already have a higher than average elderly population and we do not feel that we can manage with the even higher proportion that this development would give us, particularly as regards access. Parking is a current concern at the Health Centre and additional non-mobile patients will add to this significantly."

The closure of two neighbouring GP practices increased the practice's population by 1,000 last year alone and with planned housing development in the village the ratio of doctor to patient is expected to be 1:2000.

Under national guidelines the 1:2000 ratio should not be exceeded.

The Health Centre envisages that planned development will take the practice to the recommended maximum limit while unplanned development, such as the new retirement community proposed, would exceed that maximum limit.

Development of the Health Centre's existing village centre site is constrained and no alternative sites are currently available.

- Access from the site would be onto Blounts Court Road - a busy, narrow, winding country road with numerous blind spots, which is already considered to be dangerous by many motorists, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. There is no pavement along Blounts Court Road. The route to the village centre along Widmore Lane and Wood Lane is steep and there are no buses.

Conclusions

This is an unsuitable and unsustainable proposed development that would be detrimental to the local AONB landscape, the environment and the existing local population. It is excessive and inappropriate to meet local housing needs. The site is not within the village settlement, nor is it near any other buildings and as such would not constitute suitable infill development within a

large village. It if were to go ahead its excessive and exclusive nature would render the SCNP revision meaningless. It should be refused.

Sonning Common Parish Council's Planning Committee considers that the application is contrary to the following planning policies: CSS1, CSH1, CSR1, CSEN1 (Core Strategy 2027); G2, G4, C9, D1, T1 (South Oxfordshire Local Plan); and SCNP policies H1, H2, H2a, H3, D1, D1a, ENV1, ENV2.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ros Varnes". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ros Varnes
Deputy Clerk, Sonning Common Parish Council
(On behalf of the Planning Committee)