

Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in the Village Hall, Sonning Common, on Thursday 08 December 2016 at 1930 hrs.

Present: Mrs Lewis (chairman), Mr Fort, Mr Rawlins, Mr Kedge, Mr Stoves, Mr Rust, Mr Collings (Parish Clerk).

P17/108 Apologies for absence: none.

P17/109 Declarations of interest: none.

P17/110 Public consultation time: approximately 20 members of the public attended the meeting along with two representatives from Pro-vision, the applicant's agents. Residents raised issues over the proposed development and asked questions of Pro-vision and councillors. Pro-vision responded to questions from residents and councillors and promoted the scheme.

P17/111 New application:

P16/S3707/O. A residential development of 30 dwellings together with associated landscaping and public open space on land behind 44 Kennylands Road RG4 9JT.

After discussion members resolved to recommend the application for refusal. See attached letter.

P17/112 Matters for future agendas: none.

Meeting closed at 2040.

Date of next meeting: Monday 12 December 2016 at 1915.

Chairman: Dated:

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office

VILLAGE HALL, WOOD LANE
SONNING COMMON, OXON, RG4 9SL

Clerk – Philip Collings

Tel 0118 972 3616

Email: clerk@sonningcommonparishcouncil.org.uk

Mr Paul Lucas
Senior Planning Officer
SODC
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Oxfordshire
OX14 4SB

Friday 16 December 2016

Dear Mr Lucas,

Re: P16/S3707/O. Outline planning application for the construction of 30 dwellings, including means of access and layout, on land off Kennylands Road, Sonning Common RG4 9JT.

At its meeting on Thursday 8 December 2016 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 20 residents, many of whom outlined their significant and specific objections to the proposal. Refusal of the application is recommended on the following grounds:

1) It is contrary to the adopted Sonning Common Neighbourhood Plan (SCNP).

The site is highly sensitive due to:

- The adjacent AONB, recognised by both residents and expert landscape architects to be of exceptional quality
- The character and very low density of adjacent housing
- The topography of the site and the land, the valley, around it
- The risk of enabling further break-out from the natural limits of Sonning Common to form conurbation with other settlements.

These sensitivities mean that the site cannot take a full density of new housing under the proposed layout – without causing permanent and significant harm to the adjacent AONB, the site itself and the privacy and amenity values of existing residents.

That is why the SCNP constrains sustainable development on this strategic site to 22 new homes under a proposed layout that would protect both the adjacent AONB and the privacy and amenity values of existing residents while being sensitive to the complexities and limitations of the site.

The SCNP has exceeded the number of homes allocated by SODC flowing from the SODC Core Strategy allocation to larger villages. Instead of the 138 new homes

specified, our NP has provided for 200 homes on allocated sites and a further 44 on reserve sites. It therefore follows that we have provided land for the appropriate number of new homes in our locality.

In areas where strong allocation numbers have been made, NPs have been ruled to be strong and not to be undone by any lack of an overall five-year land supply for new housing in the district (Crane vs SSCLG). Our NP is thus highly robust and has been promised full support, as evidenced by Government minister Gavin Barwell's statement to the House of Commons on 12 December 2016.

The SCNP policies relevant to this application are:

SC **H2** housing mix, SC **H3** Infill adjacencies, SC **D1** Design and SC **D1a** Storeys and SC **D1b** Allocated sites, SC **ENV1** AONB, SC **ENV2** Landscape Setting, SC **ENV 2a + 2b** re trees and SC ENV 3.

2) It is contrary to explicit conditions hitherto accepted by the developer.

Without the developer's agreement to these conditions the site would have been certainly excluded from the SCNP. The agreed conditions were that:

- The 'orchard' land of Alpen Rose be excluded from the site with no access provided to it and the existing hedgerow between the site and Alpen Rose land be retained.
This was to prevent housing sprawl into the open countryside, toward the AONB land of Rudgings Plantation and Bur Wood, to prevent conurbation with Kidmore End, Chalkhouse Green and Reading.
The Alpen Rose land has well-developed trees and hedgerows of an architectural character, which create an important full stop in the landscape, into and beyond which urban development should not go.
- A 20-metre landscape planting and root zone buffer be provided all along the site's western boundary with the AONB.
The need was recognised for a sufficient root protection zone for the existing hedgerow together with a substantial buffer for new planting that would grow to significant height, density and root-spread.
(In landscape architect Paul Machin's original report for an earlier appeal on the site, arising from application P11-e0667/O, at 3.2.13 he makes the point that a single linear hedgerow has inherent limitations; he goes on to specify that what is required for screening is a, "wide variable density arrangement of planting".
Subsequent to Paul Machin's ultra-detailed work, SODC commissioned landscape architect Bettina Kirkham to assess the landscape character of potential LV sites. She too concluded that a strong landscape planting buffer was required).
- The existing overhead HP electricity cables would be taken underground.
- The site should take 22 dwellings of the mix specified in the SCNP. This recognised the high character and low density (C.10) of the existing adjacent residential area on one side and the sensitivity of the neighbouring AONB landscape on the other side of the site (compounded by topography).
It was recognised that the site was constrained by planting needs, areas of sinkhole subsidence and chalk solution pipes together with strict limits on the heights to which buildings could go in particular areas of the site so as

not to conflict with screening from the AONB. The AONB valley falls rises outside the site and has a footpath giving scope for views over the top of any low planting.

- The site should respect the AONB and existing character in its development and appearance as well as pepper-potting the distribution of affordable homes throughout the site.

These conditions were all explicitly agreed to. The applicant was asked to confirm that the site was viable with 22 homes and that assurance was given on behalf of TA Fisher, in the knowledge that this is a greenfield site that has previously only been used as a paddock with low existing use value.

3) It is an OUTLINE application in which the applicant has elected to apply for access and layout on a full basis and to elect scale, landscaping and appearance to reserved matters.

Clearly there are major risks with outline applications and it is necessary to constrain each area with detailed understandings and conditions. Each one of the five areas plus the question of development in principle will now be considered in the following sections.

a) General principle and numbers

Since this site is approved by the SCNP then some development on this site is plainly acceptable. However, this site would have been excluded but for the explicit conditions agreed - which were justified from careful analysis of previous applications and expert analysis.

In effect the NP gives the site outline permission for **22 homes** – subject to the other conditions. The residents of Sonning Common were loathe to include this site in the SCNP and their assent was given grudgingly – based on assurances that the development would be done sensitively and in accord with the agreed conditions. The amount of bulk, scale and massing on-site is important. It would be appropriate to apply clear conditions limiting both numbers of dwellings and the overall Gross Internal Area (GIA) of development on site **plus** the internal area of car ports. (Car ports are not counted in GIA by RICS standards, but often become garages very soon after initial development; garages do count in GIA).

A total GIA plus number should be set for the site as a maximum based on a reasonable figure for each type of home (number of bedrooms etc.). This would provide more reassurance for later reserved matters.

b) Access

In general the access point is agreed. It is vital that there should be no overflow parking from the site onto Kennylands Road, which is a critical part of the main road network for the village serving the village centre. It is significantly used by buses, school coaches and lorries.

We recognise that OCC Highways have properly required parking bays not to block pavements and footpaths. The current positioning of the bus stop may need to be reviewed for safety reasons.

There should be NO onward provision of road access to the land behind Alpen Rose; the current plan provides this at precisely the position of least vegetation. It should not exist there and any turning head would be better located near the boundaries of existing properties.

c) Layout

The applicant's proposed layout does not remotely address the confirmed conditions.

Firstly, the landscape planting along the boundary to the AONB has not been given the agreed 20-metre buffer – this needs to be applied. Planting should be of species that will grow to an architectural height and density that will fulfil the intended function, as set out in Paul Machin's report.

It is well established that existing screening and topography is kindest to the area to the south of the site. Lateral views are possible from the NW across to (approximately) numbers 48/50 Kennylands Road, but to the south the site is less exposed.

Two-storey buildings would fit best in the southern end of the site and along the boundary with Alpen Rose.

It is obvious that building blocks aligned with the Alpen Rose boundary would use that screened area well and help enable a layout less in conflict with the existing residential area and less at risk of visually intruding onto the AONB – especially in winter when there is least foliage.

This would have the side benefit of closing off vehicular and development access to Alpen Rose – for the wider benefit of the landscape and the integrity of the Sonning Common settlement.

Careful account of building heights on each area of the site must be made in relation to the AONB. The site rises up to the existing homes along Kennylands Road. The top of the site is much further forward than the homes along Kennylands Road and risks standing out in the AONB over the top of landscape planting.

From the perspective of the AONB it would be better to limit ridge heights to 7 metres along the top of the site and to refrain from building two-storey dwellings close to the boundaries of the existing residential area.

This is further underlined by the need to blend the character areas and to avoid having a lot of high density buildings up against the existing low-density character of the neighbouring residential area.

The exposed area at the top of the site would be suitable for gardens, turning heads, carports and other low-rise areas.

Note: Appropriate drainage systems and foundation works are necessary to cope with the chalk nature of the previously-mined site and the inherent risks from sinkholes and solution pipes.

d) Scale

The applicants reserve scale for discussion under reserved matters. This is a matter of great concern as it would imply scope to change the housing mix and bulk up the scale of the development.

It will be important to make explicit conditions on the ridge heights, amount of site coverage by area and overall GIA plus car-port areas for the site. This move would avoid vexatious difficulties later on.

e) Landscaping

The applicant elects to include landscaping under reserved matters.

This is fair enough, if just for the finer points of the planting detail. However, if the applicant later challenges the need for the level of landscaping and buffers specified in the SCNP's site policy, backed up by expert evidence, then this would be unacceptable.

Conditions must be applied to ensure that planting is of sufficient strategic and architectural scale to screen the AONB.

f) Appearance

Conditions should be applied so that the development's design complements **both** existing housing and the AONB.

Planning background to this site

There is a long history of applications on this site going back to P11-e0667/O, which was refused by SODC and went to appeal.

Architect Paul Machin, of Machin Bates, prepared a report for the appeal detailing the sensitive nature of this site. It stipulated the height and depth of the landscape planting and buffer required to deal with the unusual and complex character of the site.

Mr Machin's report was central to the formation of the SCNP's site policy on SON 5. The specific justifications for the policy are outlined in detail within the Plan's evidence base.

However, the independent examiner who reviewed the SCNP may not have been aware of the Plan's evidence base and the history of planning applications and appeals relating to this site, given that he had no requirement to examine them. Therefore, his comments in relation to SON 5 should be qualified accordingly.

In 2014 the applicant submitted another application for the site, P14-s3230. Numerous revisions were made to the application and by Spring 2015 the applicant was proposing a layout for 33 homes. The proposed developers were never able to convince Paul Machin that they had properly addressed all the necessary issues concerning planting, positioning and heights of buildings.

In the layout drawing 27922-A-02-001 revision P7 showed the 33 homes with the following heights:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 7 homes | 1 storey |
| 11 homes | 1.5 storey |
| 15 homes | 2 storeys |
| Total 33 homes | (average 1.62 storeys) |

However there were five four-bedroom, two-storey homes on the Alpen Rose land, so a deduction of those would have given:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 7 homes | 1 storey |
| 11 homes | 1.5 storey |
| 10 homes | 2 storeys |
| Total 28 homes | (average 1.55 storeys) |

Presently, on the site area, excluding Alpen Rose, the applicant was expected to bring forward 22 homes, which, by height in particular, would respect the sensitivity of the site. Accordingly one might have expected something like:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 7 homes | 1 storey |
| 9 homes | 1.5 storey |
| 6 homes | 2 storeys |
| Total 22 homes | (average 1.48 storeys) |

However, in TA Fisher's new application, as illustrated in layout drawing 27922-A-02-002 revision P13 , the applicant has not only failed to provide the agreed depth of landscaping against the AONB, but have proposed the following two-storey heavy layout:

| | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 2 homes | 1 storey |
| 2 homes | 1.5 storey |
| 26 homes | 2 storeys |
| Total 30 homes | (average 1.9 storeys) |

It is vital, therefore, that the applicant's proposed layout and housing mix is revised and strict conditions applied to ensure that the development addresses the specific needs and sensitivities of this site.

We have advised the applicant of our decision to recommend refusal of this application unless the concerns outlined above are addressed. If the applicant fails to address these matters then we expect SODC to back us in roundly rejecting this application as it stands.

It must be remembered that an explicit deal with conditions was made between the SCNP and TA Fisher via Pro-vision. Without that deal the whole site would have been excluded from the SCNP altogether.

Yours sincerely



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