

Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in the Village Hall on Monday 22 September 2014 at 1930 hours.

Present: Ms Noble (Chairman), Mrs Lewis, Mr Rawlins, Mr Kedge (ex-officio), Mr Stoves (ex-officio), Mr Collings (Parish Clerk). Fifty-six members of the public, Helen Patchett (Henley Standard) and Mr S Lilley (agent for the landowner).

P15/080 Apologies for absence: Mr Greenwood, Mr Reynolds.

P15/081 Declarations of interest: none.

P15/082 Public question time: see below.

P15/083 New application:

083.01/P14/S2391/FUL. Residential development of 50 open market and 32 affordable dwellings with associated open space, landscape planting and new access on to the Peppard Road at Lea Meadow RG4 9NJ.

The chairman invited members of the public to speak for or against the application. Eleven residents spoke in opposition and none in favour of the application.

After extensive consideration the committee voted unanimously to recommend rejection of the application to SODC. A letter setting out the reasons in full is appended hereto.

The meeting closed at 2035.

Chairman: Dated:

Parish Office

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

Clerk – Philip Collings

Tel 0118 972 3616

Email: clerk@sonningcommonparishcouncil.org.uk

Mr Peter Brampton
Planning Officer
South Oxfordshire District Council

25 September 2014

Dear Mr Brampton

Re: P14/S2391/FUL (Lea Meadow, Sonning Common)

The Planning Committee of Sonning Common Parish Council (SCPC) considered the above application to build 50 open market and 32 affordable dwellings on Lea Meadow at its meeting on Monday 22 September 2014. Members voted unanimously to recommend rejection of this proposal. The meeting was attended by 56 residents, some of whom spoke at length against the proposal (some of their comments accompany this letter).

SCPC's Planning Committee is strongly opposed to this application on the following grounds:

1. SODC already has a current Core Strategy and adequate housing supply in place for this area. The national planning system is Plan-Led (NPPF para. 17) "to empower local people to shape their surroundings". We do not see the advent of a draft SHMA as a justification for this application.
2. The proposed development would be outside the existing built limits of the settlements and, in terms of policies **CSR1** and **H4**, cannot be classified as infill as the applicant seeks to maintain. As an allocation site outside the current built limits, its development should only be as part of a holistic spatial strategy plan. The applicant's proposal to develop the site in isolation demonstrates a failure to integrate the suggested development with the surrounding area.

In 2010 the Sonning Common Community Plan Survey was distributed to 1,800 homes and returned by a remarkable 78 per cent of households. A total of 81 per cent of respondents stated that they would prefer any future housing developments to be spread around a number of small sites in the village rather than concentrated on one or two large sites. Therefore this application for a large, dense development clearly is clearly at odds with existing residents' wishes. These wishes have been strongly reiterated within the current Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

3. Lea Meadow, together with Hagpits Wood, Hagpits House and Hagpits Orchard sites represents a vital bridge between two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the East and West that shape Sonning Common. The sloping topography of this site must be considered in the context of the rolling and rising AONB land outside that is cherished by residents.
4. The AONB is neither conserved nor enhanced by this application in breach of **CS1**, **CSR1** and **CSEN1** as well as the **NPPF**. It is not screened with proper strategic planting and such planting, as is proposed, has Root Protection Zones in private plots. The proposed strategic planting at the base of the site near the B481 road to screen it to the AONB is inadequate. The proposed two-storey buildings are not sufficiently set back from the Peppard Road to comply with the line of the Herb Farm. The access road is also not conducive to screening the site from the AONB.

5. We note that the topography is misrepresented in the illustrations – even in comparison with the topographical survey that was submitted with P12-s2507. That plainly shows one area of the Saxon Maze bunds rising to above 91 metres. It also shows the height in the corner of the site by the Saxon Maze to be 89 metres. Furthermore it shows the height of the Peppard Road in the Bird Wood Court corner to be less than 84 metres – falling further to the East of the B481. The true fall of this site is substantial and has implications for both drainage (there appears to be inadequate space for SUDS in breach of **CSQ2 (vi)**) and sight lines. The rising nature of the site suggests that screening cannot simply be provided by planting along the Peppard Road and that other lateral, strategic planting is required part-way up the site.
6. The proposal breaches policy **CSB1** on wildlife. The existing wildlife corridor behind Essex Way and the adjacent AONB is a haven for local wildlife. The proposed wildlife corridors would be too narrow and too close to the access road and footpaths to function properly. The proposed planting on the northern boundary of the site is inadequate and does not provide a wildlife corridor. Hagpits Wood is an important wildlife reservoir, however it has not been surveyed by the applicant’s ecologists, and no wildlife corridor or under-storey planting is proposed along the border from Hagpits Wood and the planted Saxon Maze, past the Hagpits House site and out towards the Millennium Green.
7. Previously the owner’s agent submitted a proposal P12-s2507 for some 55 homes using a Net Developable Area of some 2.2 hectares at a density of 25 homes per NDH. The current proposal for 82 homes represents a significant over-development of the site. The sloping site is adjacent to AONB, surrounded by low density housing and is next to an agricultural herb nursery and woodland. A dense development of the nature proposed would be totally out of keeping with the surrounding rural and semi-rural area.

The applicant quotes a misleading density of 21 homes per gross hectare. The true gross size of the development site itself is 3.2 hectares, but the applicant seeks to inflate this by artificially including land along the Peppard Road in front of Bird Wood Court and land beyond Lea Meadow going up to Kennylands Road in the Hagpits area. The applicant does not appear to recognise the sensitivity of this site and the need to make deductions from the gross area to provide strategic planting, drainage, wildlife and wider-use recreational areas to arrive at a sensible net developable area. The application breaches planning policy CSH2 on housing density in taking no account of the gross impact of this proposed cramped over-development on the character of the area.

8. The proposed housing mix is at odds with SODC policy and contravenes policies **CSH3** and **CSH4**.

Proposed	Open	Affordable	TOTAL
4 bed	13	0	13
3 bed	24	12	36
2 bed	13	12	25
1 bed	0	8	8
TOTAL	50	32	82

It proposes an excessive number of three and four-bedroom houses. Of the 50 open market houses SODC requires that 25 should be three to four-bedroom, not 37 as proposed. The affordable housing mix fails to comply with SODC’s requirements. The housing mix is also at odds with Sonning Common’s housing needs, established through a comprehensive survey in 2012 of households as part of the NDP-planning process. Residents indicated a clear need for starter homes and down-sizing units, both of which are in short supply in the village.

Furthermore, the proposal’s affordable housing is concentrated in the north-west corner of Lea Meadow, by the Saxon Maze, rather than being ‘pepper-potted’ throughout the site, as **CSH3** requires.

9. Overall this application breaches policy **G2** as an adverse development. Such a development in a rural setting would have a detrimental impact on the environment and surrounding AONB, from which it would not be effectively screened. It would neither enhance nor conserve the adjacent AONB nor the character of the surrounding area.
10. Policy **D1** is breached due to poor design not respecting the landscape or settlement character with inadequate external areas and inappropriate layout. Policy **D3** is also breached by inadequate gardens out of keeping with the adjacent character.
11. The heritage of the old "Green Lane" running through from Kennylands Road along behind the Essex Way properties and down the southern boundary of Lea Meadow is not respected. **CSEN3**.
12. This application is contrary to policies **CSQ3** and **CSQ4** on design and layout. There is no similar development in Sonning Common where most residences have front and rear gardens, driveways and garages. This application proposes landscaped verges with open court parking and many houses without garages and driveways. Such a development would be out of keeping with the character of the existing settlement. The design and layout does not respect the character of the site and its surroundings in terms of layout, scale, ridge-heights, housing types or density. It does not provide adequate green infrastructure for this sensitive site, appropriate links or good accessibility. This design fails to integrate with the surroundings and does not provide a proper mix of housing types and tenures – all in breach of **CSH4**.
13. Proper Green infrastructure is not provided where it is needed on Lea Meadow. No under-storey planting is indicated at the top of the site along the SON 7 border and neither is it indicated along the SON 8 (TV Gym) and Bird Wood Court border. These are needed under **CSG1**.
14. Policy **D6**, community safety, is breached by the proposal. The principles of Secured by Design are ignored. The unnecessarily winding footpath through the dark wood behind the Essex Way retirement properties is a problem caused by seeking to develop this site in isolation. Safety and security issues are the overriding concerns of many residents, most of them elderly, living in Essex Way whose properties have very small gardens. Opening up their modest rear fences to a footpath through a wood will expose them to crime and fear of crime. The proximity of the play area, footpath and cycle way and the potential for noise disturbance is extremely concerning for the elderly residents. All this is evidenced by the 100 or so objections posted on SODC's website and the comments from residents at our Planning Committee meeting.

The pedestrian access to Kennylands Road does not appear to be safe. It is not clear whether lighting is proposed for it. Although it would be essential to the primary pedestrian access it would be disturbing to residents and local wildlife populations and liable to vandalism.

The poor layout also opens up the rear of properties in Bird Wood Court by placing the access road and footpaths directly behind them. In their case not only has the security of their properties been compromised but it will also be possible to bring vehicles close to the rear of their properties to support crime and the fear of it.

15. Appropriate playing space under policy **R2** does not appear to have been provided. This facility should also be planned to meet wider needs in this area of the village. It is not clear how requirements under **R6** are to be met given the compromised nature of the area behind the Essex Way properties.
16. Planning policy **T1** on traffic and transport is breached by the proposal. The application does not provide a safe and convenient vehicular access to the highway network. The access is on the inside of a long, sweeping bend, to the south of the site on the Peppard Road, B481. Drivers coming north will have just left the current 30 mph zone and be accelerating into the 40 mph zone to pass this site. Drivers from the south may turn right into the site and drivers emerging from the site may seek to turn right to go towards Reading. This

positioning of the access road will plainly compromise the visibility for motorists and raise the potential for serious road accidents.

The NDP working party had a report prepared by expert Highways consultants concerning all the potential sites that was discussed in detail, amended in minor ways and agreed by Huw Jones of OCC Highways. The firm conclusion on Lea Meadow was that the access point should be further north, from the mid-way point of the site's frontage upwards for precisely the reasons stated in the paragraph above. No secondary emergency access provision appears to have been made, which appears questionable for 82 homes.

Further in breach of **T1** a safe and convenient pedestrian access has not been provided – particularly to remote bus services along Kennylands Road. The Co-Op, Post Office and secondary school are all over 1,000m away, about 1,200m to the Post Office and these walks also involve safety issues. This site, being remote from the village centre, is also either likely to encourage its residents to use Emmer Green or to drive into the village centre and add to the parking and congestion problems already there.

17. A number of the illustrations of land on SON 7 do not comply to the owned area supported by the Land Registry record.
18. The voluminous documentation provided by the applicant appears inconsistent and unreliable. On inspection of it, many discrepancies and serious omissions appear. Many documents bear dates over a two-three year period and are not consistent with each other. Contradictory statements, data and sizes abound. For example, the housing density figures and specific boundary details between the proposed development and bordering properties. The application neglects to include details of security fencing. The quoted topographical data is very often incomplete, contradictory or simply misrepresented.
19. Sonning Common's NDP working party has put an enormous amount of time and effort into coming up with a proposal for this site that is in keeping with local housing needs, residents' wishes and which reflects and protects the rural nature of the surrounding area and the character of the village. The NDP working party proposes 47 as the appropriate number of dwellings on this site, compared with the applicant's excessive 82 homes, many of which would be large, expensive family homes, which are not tailored to meet the current needs of local people. Furthermore there is scope to provide a much better relationship between this site and its surroundings, including better and safer access to Kennylands Road – safer both for pedestrians and existing residents.

For all of these reasons, SCPC's Planning Committee urges you to reject this flawed over-development proposal that would seriously undermine the character of the village.

Yours sincerely



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