

Land North West of Hogmoor Lane, Hurst – Information

This site which is part of The Haines Hill Estate, has been in the ownership of a highly respected family for over one hundred years, and is now the subject of a planning application for; **Outline Planning Permission for the erection of 9 dwellings with three accesses off Broadwater Lane. All other matters relating to appearance, scale, layout and landscaping to be reserved.**

The Haines Hill Estate has played a significant role in the development of all sectors of the local community over numerous years, and each and every one of us will have benefitted (possibly without realising it) in some way from their generosity during that time. The purpose in highlighting this is because, whatever your own views as to the potential development, it cannot be regarded as a so called “speculative” development that is seeking, as some individuals are suggesting, to take advantage of Wokingham Borough Council’s (WBC) inability to meet their housing supply requirements.

The established role and willing participation, in all aspects of the local community, of the landowner cannot be underestimated and should be acknowledged, so that statements such as “no guarantee that any of the “illustrative” detail proposed in the application, will be adhered to” have no basis whatsoever, based on their proven track record. The landowner is well able (but should not need to) to defend their role in the community but unfortunately due to too much unsupported criticism of them, in documents being circulated, the HVS Committee believes it is appropriate to provide some clarity.

Every planning application, which although assessed on it’s own individual merits, nevertheless needs to pay proper regard to the planning history of the site, which is a material consideration, including decisions of previous Planning Inspectors and also any relevant decisions by WBC acting as The Local Planning Authority. In addition the relevant Planning Policy and a detailed assessment of the potential development, in respect of those policies, is essential. In this case the former of these pre-requisites is easily dealt with in that it is accepted there are no historic planning permissions relating to this site. However it is in relation to the latter where there is confusion, and this is because ;

- The Draft Local Plan Revised Growth Strategy is still at an early stage of preparation and therefore currently carries only limited weight in accordance with The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

- WBC in its role as the Local Planning Authority is unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, and as such, those planning policies that an application of this kind would be assessed against are considered out of date (although because of over supply in previous years this is tempered) and therefore to which little or no weight can be given, resulting in the “Tilted Planning Balance” being engaged. In such a case there is therefore a presumption that permission will be granted unless “the impacts do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposed development when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole”.
- Despite being designated as a Neighbourhood Area in April 2018, Hurst has not yet published a Local Neighbourhood Plan nor is there any indication of a timescale by which any such plan would be the subject to the statutory local public referendum, which is required before the Local Planning Authority can consider adopting it as part of local planning policy. This is a huge flaw, and puts the community at risk, in that the existence of such a plan would undoubtedly have brought some clarity as to what sites in the village might or might not be suitable for future development and have provided some ownership by the large majority of the village community as to a shared vision for the future.
- HVS in June 2021 raised concerns as to the credibility of the methodology used in the assessment of this site (5HU030), and omissions in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment, resulting in it being identified for future development. Whilst receiving an assurance that the site along with others would be reassessed; because of the delay in The Draft Local Plan Update referred to above there is no definitive information from WBC as to the current status of this site. However HVS recently wrote to WBC requesting an urgent update, which was provided and a copy of this correspondence can be found here.

Against this backdrop of somewhat of a delay in updating local planning policies the HVS Committee, nevertheless works hard to implement a constructive rational strategy (informed by its own planning guidelines) for dealing with development proposals whilst recognising that by making any representations on behalf of all the members of The Society these must be consistent, accurate, credible and evidence based.

HVS is aware that an action group has been set up by local residents, who “considered themselves most affected by the development, for the purpose of objecting to this application”. HVS, perhaps understandably, was not invited to any of the group discussions or to offer any views on what were being considered as the substantive material planning considerations and other issues in relation to the group’s objection to the development proposals. HVS would like to acknowledge that the founder members of that group nevertheless have subsequently taken the time to discuss in detail the letter of objection that has been sent to the Parish Council, with an HVS committee member.

Such community involvement is not unexpected given the lack of a Local Neighbourhood Plan, and should be acknowledged; however there has been an unacceptable event as part of the group’s activities which involved accessing land associated with the development proposals without the two owner’s knowledge and destroying greenery, again without the knowledge of the two owners. We would hope the majority of the local community would join HVS in condemning this action in the strictest possible terms, and disassociating itself from, this type of behaviour.

Unfortunately there has been an increase in the criticism of individual members of the HVS committee, often of a very toxic nature, and intimidating threats as to the future of the Society as a result of the stance we have taken in recent planning applications. Some individuals have shown their dissatisfaction and have left the Society as of course is their choice, (but not in the “droves” as often inaccurately reported), but in the light of many of these toxic comments and intimidating background, it is becoming harder for the Committee to concentrate on all the other more charitable activities of the Society.

The HVS Committee in light of the above and understanding that any of our individual members who may wish to object to these proposals have access to a variety of issues and concerns they may see as appropriate to use as the basis of their submission to WBC, have decided on this occasion to only supply an informative to WBC as part of the public consultation, which it is hoped will aid their consideration of this application.

Please if you have any views, comments or concerns in relation to any of the matters raised please contact us at communications@hvs.org.uk.