



E-Mail to; Development.control@wokingham.gov.uk

For the attention of the case Officer, Planning Application Ref No; 230201

16th February 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Walden Acres, Wokingham Road, Hurst, RG10 0RU. Planning Ref; 230201. Full application for the proposed erection of three family homes with associated parking and amenity space.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this “revised” planning application, the previous application (Planning Ref; 223677) having been withdrawn. Hurst Village Society’s (HVS) comments on this current application very closely mirror, with some minor differences, our original response to that application.

However firstly there are some general points HVS would want to bring to the attention of The Planning Authority.

The Society would question the extent of public consultation claimed to have been undertaken by the applicant prior to the original application. Certainly, the facilities

provided by the Hurst Parish Council did not facilitate a detailed presentation of the development proposals, but this was not helped by the scant level of information that was available for the applicant's representative to share with both the Councillors and those members of the public who were present. HVS recognises public consultation is not a statutory requirement for a development of this size, but on reflection the applicant, having considered the issues in the village currently, may now believe that a wider public consultation exercise would have been more beneficial to everybody concerned rather than just "reaching out to adjacent neighbours". Subsequently a Community Statement has been included as part of this new application. This predominantly deals with a revised "red line" delineating the site and also addresses some of the comments raised by the local community and in the words of the applicant "clarifies a number of misconceptions". The Society has taken note of these additional points in submitting this response, but notes that there still does not appear to have been any pre-application discussions between the applicant(s) and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

However HVS would wish to ensure Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) acting as the Local Planning Authority, is aware that consideration of this application by The Society has been on the basis of "every planning application should be judged on its own individual merits" and as such not influenced by any other development proposals in the locality no matter what stage in the planning process they are currently at. In this respect the following comments made by the applicant; "If planning permission is not obtained, the brothers will have to consider their options which, most likely, will be to sell Walden Acres in its entirety. Naturally, the house and land would therefore be on the open market for anyone who is interested. This could include speculative house builders and the landowners to the north." is at best not helpful and at worst is a veiled threat aimed at influencing your professional consideration and judgement of this application which is abhorred by the Society.

The proposed development site clearly falls outside the defined developed area of Hurst (The so-called village envelope) such that development would not normally be supported, and in addition the circumstances of this application do not trigger any of the exceptions to this rule as stated within the relevant WBC planning policy. HVS, has typically, objected to such proposals, other than where it believes a more pragmatic view in terms of planning balance could be sustained. The Society believes this is such a case, particularly given the added importance that must be given to planning balance due to other circumstances, which cannot be ignored and which we comment on later in this letter. Village envelopes (or equivalent) were classically put in place to prevent neighbouring localities and settlements merging or coalescing into one, by preventing development on the periphery of villages. HVS considers the site to be more of an infill site of only three new dwellings, that consequently sits within an established residential part of the village and not on the edge of it and is also within the wider relatively developed part of Hurst. Whilst HVS is not competent to ascertain whether or not the applicants claim that the site can



be considered to be “previously developed land” can be substantiated, it has looked at how the application fits in relation to WBC policy TB06 (back land development).

Whilst of the opinion that the application is not directly in contravention of the policy, HVS does recognise that as the Planning Authority, WBC considers private residential gardens are excluded from the definition of previously developed land, and as such this would lower the priority of such sites for development. The Society is therefore reliant on the technical officers of WBC to consider this very important matter and come to a conclusion as to the status of the land, as clearly the National Planning Policy Framework encourages local planning authorities to make an effective use of previously developed land particularly, as could be the case here; previously developed land within settlements that is to be used for homes.

HVS understands that WBC is currently unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing supply which is why the emphasis on planning balance earlier in this letter, and under these circumstances whilst albeit very small this development could still be considered to be contributing positively to that supply. In the same vein, the lack of progress by WBC in delivering the Updated Local Plan draws into question which planning policies, eg. those that would normally be used to assess an application such as this, are in fact considered out of date, and therefore to which little or no weight can be given. The Society whilst recognising that this is in accord with the National Planning Policy Framework, very much regrets that the ability to properly consider individual planning applications is being restrained somewhat.

Notwithstanding our previous comments, in all other respects HVS is content that the application is in accordance with other relevant planning policies, including the sympathetic design of the new houses, and the potential biodiversity gain as a result of the provision and replanting of a more native species of hedge and other trees

and shrubs which will be planted as part of a relandscaping plan in mitigation for the removal of existing diseased and sparse vegetation.

Hurst Village Society therefore having taken a pragmatic view in this case as to the fact that the development proposals are undeniably outside the village envelope, finds it hard, when applying the planning balance principle, to sustain any objection to this application. We hope that our comments are helpful to you when considering your decision.

Yours faithfully,

John Osborne on behalf of Hurst Village Society