



20th February 2023

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

For the attention of the Case Officer, Development Control, Wokingham Borough Council

Dear Sir/ Madam

Re; Planning Application Ref No.; 223805. Land at Broadcommon Road, Hurst, RG10 0RG. Outline Planning Permission for a phased development including the proposed erection of up to 33no. Custom and Self Build homes (Plots) to include 17 no. affordable homes, plus public open spaces with equipped play, landscaping and other associated infrastructure (All matters reserved except for access).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above outline planning application.

It is understood this “improved” proposal has been submitted following refusal of a previous planning application (Ref No.; 213378) on 19th January 2022 “in agreement



with the Planning Authority, to benefit from a “free go” under Regulation 9 of the 2012 Fees Regulations”.

A document; “Addressing The Reasons for Refusal” has been submitted as part of this new application. In it the developers say “*Leaper is enthusiastic about working with officers and councillors on refining and improving aspects of the proposal further and in agreeing developer contributions and off-site improvements*”. Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) is well aware that Hurst Village Society (HVS) generally welcomes pre application discussions. However WBC will have realised from the number of responses in relation to both this, and the previous application, the strength of objection based on sound material planning considerations (backed up by a great deal of local knowledge) to these proposals within the local community. Certainly the position WBC, acting as The Planning Authority, finds itself in, having regard to a lack of progress in Updating The Local Plan, and failure to meet it’s Five Year Housing Supply and the difficulties this brings in potentially sustaining any objections to applications at Appeal is recognised. Nevertheless it is hoped that these pre-application discussions cannot be mistaken as giving developers a green light to proposals outside of the democratic process, whilst The Planning Authority is perceived to be under duress or threat because of the position it finds itself in, and as a result the likelihood of any potential future appeals.

HVS is not clear at the inference of the changes in wording to the new application eg. “a *phased* development *including* the proposed development ...”. Self Build programmes are notorious for the length of construction time, and a phased development suggests an even more prolonged period of inconvenience and nuisance during construction, should approval be granted. The phrase “including the proposed development” suggests these proposals are part of further development proposals which are not detailed in the application and that would therefore be of concern. Apologies if this is a misunderstanding on our behalf.

Whilst having considered all the documents which form part of the application, Hurst Village Society objects to these development proposals and requests Wokingham Borough Council to refuse the application because the proposed development is on a greenfield site outside current Hurst development limits.



As such the proposed development, which lies within designated countryside, does not comply with Wokingham Borough Council's Core Strategy Policy CP11. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) does identify exceptions where in such circumstances development would be permitted, but there is no evidence in the application that the proposals meet any of these conditions.

In objecting to the Application for this reason, HVS is maintaining the stance that it has taken in considering recent applications for development outside current development limits, and where there are no other mitigating circumstances that allow for a more pragmatic approach in terms of planning balance.

However, HVS is concerned that an objection, based on what appears to be an obvious and simple conflict with local planning policy, to be sustained, both during the consideration of this application, and depending on the outcome, at any subsequent Appeal, will be made difficult because WBC does not currently have a deliverable housing land supply of at least five years. The ongoing lack of such a supply (even accepting the successful delivery of new homes in Wokingham and possible future national legislative changes) will make the objections to the development proposals in this application hard to sustain even having regard to the overwhelming number of individuals within the local community bitterly opposed to the application. HVS is reliant on WBC to progress this issue so that CP11 and any other restrictive local policies pertinent to this application cannot be shown to be inconsistent with The National Planning Policy Framework and that Settlement Boundaries might be considered to be out of date, not least where a Council's ability to demonstrate and maintain a minimum five-year land supply is dependent on sites being approved in breach of countryside policies beyond defined settlement edges.

The NPPF is clear that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. HVS would feel reassured if WBC are able to confirm that the new draft Local Plan will be published for public consultation very soon so that proper weight can be given to those policies when formally considering this and any other applications, and as above, at any subsequent Appeal. HVS is aware that as part of the consideration of sites for future housing development forming part of



the WBC Draft Local Plan Update this site was assessed as being unsuitable due to it being in open countryside away from the built-up area.

The interpretation of the requirements of The Self Build and Custom-Building Act 2015, and associated reference within the NPPF, implying that a Local Authority is to have regard to the demand for Custom and Self Build Housing in exercising its housing and planning functions is seen by HVS to be important in the consideration of this application. This is particularly so when the developer is alleging that “there are issues with the Council’s approach to determining both Custom and Self-Build demand and planning permissions”. Whilst the Society is reassured that it believes that the emerging Draft Local Plan will deal with the delivery and demand for such housing, again because of the timescales the Local Plan Update will only hold limited weight until it’s adoption and therefore may affect the planning balance in assessing whether to grant or refuse planning permission in this case.

The Transport Statement submitted as part of the application, even accepting that it has been revised, still does not properly reflect the local situation in terms of the safety of pedestrians using Broadcommon Road, and therefore is unable to show how walking safely to local amenities can be encouraged, and therefore that future occupants will not be over reliant on private cars, especially as the provision of public transport in this area is poor. This is in conflict with both WBC Core Strategies and NPPF core planning principles.

The Transport Statement is also unrealistic in regard to the expected additional number of traffic movements as a result of the development proposals and still does not give proper regard to additional traffic as a result of delivery or service vehicles.

Accepting that there have been some design changes, only one vehicle access to the site is proposed. This and the safety of the design of the access is still considered unsatisfactory having regard to levels of both existing and proposed traffic. The detailed technical details will be expected to be properly considered by WBC’s



transport engineers who are a statutory consultee in relation to an application of this type.

In terms of the character and local identity of the area, the proposed built form, as illustrated in the application shows a poor relationship with the landscape features and openness of the Areas of Special Character which are in close proximity to the North and West of the site.

HVS is concerned that there is a clear encroachment of development southwards that will impact upon the character of the local countryside, and that the layout of the scheme is considered too suburban in its design, and therefore not sympathetic to the character of Hurst.

The Ecological Report that has been submitted as part of the application, despite modification is still lacking in sufficient detail and evidence and HVS considers that it does not make a convincing argument in relation to the presence and therefore, potential risk to any protected species. Is The Planning Authority satisfied that the ecological impact statement and associated information is now in accord with all relevant UK Habitats standards?

To accord with the requirements of the NPPF there is only marginal confidence that the development proposals provide that a minimum of a 10% biodiversity net gain will be achieved.

There are concerns shared by HVS and local residents as to the potential for flooding in the area. Indeed, The Environment Agency has confirmed that two parts of the site are at risk of flooding from surface water and this is borne out by recent actual events. The site is in Flood Zone 1 and therefore any residential development in this flood zone is required to ensure that the surface water drainage proposals will not increase the flood risk elsewhere and the Drainage Report which forms part of the application does not detail as to how this will be realistically achieved and subsequently maintained.

Hurst Village Society

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In conclusion Hurst Village Society believes that in addition to the fact that the development is outside the current development limits, the accumulative effect of the other material planning considerations highlighted above warrant a refusal of this application by Wokingham Borough Council acting in it's role as The Planning Authority.

Is the Society correct in assuming that this would be considered a major application? and therefore if the recommendation of officers was for approval that the matter would have to be reported to the Planning Committee?

In any case the Society hopes that these comments are helpful in your consideration of this application.

Yours faithfully,

John Osborne, on behalf of The Hurst Village Society