

BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Planning Committee held at the New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate on 29 September 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors S. Parnall (Chairman), M. S. Blacker (Vice-Chair), J. Baker, Z. Cooper, A. King, J. P. King, S. A. Kulka, S. McKenna, R. Michalowski, R. Ritter, C. Stevens, S. T. Walsh and C. T. H. Whinney (Substitute).

Also present: Councillors G. Adamson and F. Kelly.

30. MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

31. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Harper, Councillor Whinney attended as his substitute.

Councillors Adamson and Kelly attended the meeting virtually and were therefore unable to vote.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Blacker declared a pecuniary interest in item 7, 7, Arbutus Close, RH1 6NP as he was the agent for this application. Councillor Blacker was not present at the meeting for the duration of this item.

It was stated that all Councillors present had a general interest in item 5, as all were borough Council Tax payers and would indirectly benefit from the proposed development if it was to be approved.

33. ADDENDUM TO THE AGENDA

RESOLVED that the addendum be noted.

34. 21/00192/F - LAND PARCEL, SOUTH WEST OF WOODHATCH ROAD, REIGATE

The Committee considered an application at Land Parcel, South West of Woodhatch Road, Reigate for the construction of a crematorium with associated landscape, parking and infrastructure, including a revised junction with Woodhatch Road. As amended on 01/04/2021, 09/04/2021 and on 04/05/2021.

Amie Vaccaro, a member of the public and Chair of Woodhatch Green Spaces Preservation Group, spoke in objection to the application stating that the group was made up of a number of residents, concerned about the potential harm to the Green Belt site. The history of the site was described, as was the importance of the site to the local community for a variety of reasons, with close proximity being a key feature. Policy CEM1 required a robust need for the crematorium. Representations

submitted raised serious concerns regarding the inadequate demonstration of need, sufficient to outweigh national planning policy, where planning policy applied substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriate development. It was felt that national policy had not been correctly applied and that “very special circumstances” were not substantiated. The Alternative Sites Assessment did not look at sites outside of the Green Belt and other sites were present. Green Belt designation was not based upon landscape quality but spatial separation and the avoidance of coalescence. Such an approach toward assessing the merits of Green Belt was not in accordance with national planning policy. This site was not included in the Green Belt review for the current Development Management Plan (adopted 2019) and was discounted at Stage 1 of the Sustainable Urban Extension Technical review. Therefore, the conclusion that this site was of lower importance conflicted with these assessments. The report referenced a threat to alternative development however there was no alternative on the table. This was irrelevant and potentially misleading. It was felt that the report adopted an incorrect balancing exercise in order to achieve very special circumstances in support of this application and Members were urged to refuse the application.

Geoffrey Stearn, a member of the public, spoke in objection to the application explaining the importance of the area as local resource for recreation. Its proximity to New Pond Farm was described as was this area’s overall importance, referencing its biodiversity. The plans placed the crematorium in the middle of the fields, causing the maximum visual impact to the whole area. The area would be blighted by the erection of buildings and chimneys, the grassland replaced with roads and carparks. The circular walk would become a circuit of the crematorium. Smoke from the cremator would be naturally directed by the prevailing winds over the junior football pitches and Earlswood Lakes. Several allotments would be lost to the development and there was currently a waiting list for an allotment. According to the National Planning Policy Framework, a crematorium was inappropriate development on Green Belt land. Section 99 of the framework stated that a local authority should look to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity. The overall impact of the proposed development would be the opposite of this, and this would discourage people from using the area for recreational purposes. The proposed Crematorium site was designated as a ‘Site of Nature Conservation Importance’. The need for green spaces would continue to grow and it was felt that the degradation of this valued recreational and wildlife resource was too much of a loss.

Kirstie Clifton, the agent, spoke in support of the application stating that the proposal would provide an important piece of community infrastructure that was not currently provided within the Borough. The sensitivity of the site in Green Belt terms and its role within the SNCI had been considered throughout the feasibility and application process, as had the relationship of the site to the existing amenity space, ensuring losses as a result of development would be reprovided in this location and to an equal or higher standard. The development had been assessed in terms of need, capacity, layout and environmental impact, and the evidence submitted was confirmed as robust by the relevant authorities and independent advisors as well as met requirements set out under Policy CEM1 that specifically aimed to manage the development of a crematorium within the Borough. The design and location of the development was explained as well as the enhancements, including those to biodiversity. The ecological survey of the site was

comprehensive and demonstrated that the proposals would deliver enhancements that ensured a net gain in biodiversity, proposing significant native planting, pond features, and securing their long-term maintenance. It was acknowledged that there would be changes visually and physically, however the supporting assessments and design information confirmed that the development was justified and appropriately located to meet the needs of local residents, and any impacts would not be so significant in the planning balance. The application accorded with NPPF and the specific requirements of Policy CEM1 and based on the evidence members were requested to support the officer's recommendation to grant permission.

Councillor Booton, a visiting member, spoke on the application discussing resident's opinion on whether there was a need for the development. Residents appeared to concur, regardless of whether they agreed there was a need or not, that once Green Belt land was built on this was a permanent loss. Councillors were custodians of this on behalf of residents. If the application was approved in its current form, members would have to explain why the Council had set a precedent to build on Green Belt land and if the cycle continued the most significant feature of the borough would have been eroded indefinitely. Page 13 of the Council's Environment Strategy was outlined, and the proposed location of this application would erode the 69% of Green Belt in the borough and remove one of its sites of nature conservation interest. It was possible that a crematorium was needed, however an alternative site should be sought.

Councillor Chandler, a visiting ward member, spoke on the application stating he had received many expressions of concern from residents regarding the proposal as they valued the recreation space and its ecology. Road safety was also raised as a concern along with increased congestion. There were over 500 submissions objecting to the proposal and it was felt there was the larger number residents that cared but felt unable to contribute. Residents' concerns related to the Needs Assessment, the Alternative Sites Assessment and the harm both to community amenities and to the Green Belt. This was inappropriate development that did not meet the threshold for very special circumstances required to develop on Green Belt land. Concerns regarding need were explained, stating that assumptions had been made on future need and that there was the potential for a similar development in a neighbouring borough, which if that went ahead, could also alter the need for this crematorium. This proposal would take away permanent open space that has been stewarded, protected and enhanced by the Council for many years with inappropriate building on the Green Belt and the impact on biodiversity was outlined. The harm to community amenity and to the Green Belt was considered to outweigh the inadequately defined need and the incomplete assessment of alternative sites. The harm was clear; however the need was less clear and on balance members were asked to refuse the application.

The Chairman thanked all members that had attended the site visit on Saturday 25 September.

A reason for refusal was proposed by Councillor J King and seconded by Councillor Michalowski, whereupon the Committee voted and **RESOLVED** that planning permission be **REFUSED** on the grounds that:

1. The proposed development would be inappropriate within the Metropolitan Green Belt and harmful to its openness. Further harm would result by

virtue of the loss of the land for open recreation and the loss of allotments. In the absence of very special circumstances to outweigh this harm, including a robust demonstration of need or alternative site assessment, the proposal would be contrary to Policies CEM1, NHE4, NHE5 and INF2 of the Development Management Plan 2019, Policies CS3 and CS12 of the Core Strategy 2014 (reviewed 2019) and advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

A second reason for refusal was proposed by Councillor J King and seconded by Councillor Blacker, whereupon the Committee voted and **RESOLVED** that planning permission be **REFUSED** on the grounds that:

2. The proposed development, by virtue of extent of development and associated habitat loss within the designated Site of Nature Conservation Importance and Biodiversity Opportunity Area would have an unacceptable adverse impact on biodiversity and the ecological potential of the site, contrary to Policy CEM1, NHE 2 and NHE4 of the Development Management Plan 2019, Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy 2014 (reviewed 2019) and advice contained within the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

Councillors J King and Stevens requested that it be noted that they voted in favour for refusal of the application.

35. A) 21/01602/F AND B) 20/01603/LBC - WESTON ACRES, BELVEDERE HOUSE, WOODMANSTERENE LANE, WOODMANSTERNE

The Committee considered applications at Weston Acres, Belvedere House, Woodmansterene Lane, Woodmansterne for a planning application and listed building consent for the extension and refurbishment of part of the ground floor of The Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society; to reorganise and enlarge No. 24 ground floor bedroom suits, including a single storey ground floor extension and new day space. Also includes first floor extensions to east and north wings. All existing and proposed use class will remain as C2 and there will be no change to total bedroom numbers or parking. As amended on 18/08/202.

RESOLVED that planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to conditions for applications a) 21/01602/F and b) 20/01603/LBC and as per addendum changes.

36. 21/01992/HHOLD - 7 ARBUTUS CLOSE, RH1 6NP

The Committee considered an application at 7 Arbutus Close, RH1 6NP for a Proposed single storey rear extension and first floor side extension above an existing single storey side extension and front porch.

RESOLVED that planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to conditions.

37. TO REPORT AND CONSIDER THE RESULTS OF THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE WALTON ON THE HILL CONSERVATION AREA

The Committee considered a report that reported the results of the public consultation on Walton on the Hill Conservation Area boundary changes and considered the designation of the proposed changes to Walton on the Hill Conservation Area boundary.

Councillor Turner, a visiting ward member spoke in support of the report, stating that the last review of the area was 30 years ago. There had been a working group lead by a former ward Councillor and the Vice Chair of Tadworth and Walton Residents Association, and the makeup of this group was outlined. There had been a number of meetings and walking meetings in the area. On behalf of the group, Councillor Turner thanked John McInally, the Conservation Officer for his help and guidance throughout the review.

RESOLVED that the boundary changes to Walton on the Hill Conservation Area be **APPROVED**.

38. TO CONSIDER A PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE TADWORTH CONSERVATION AREA

The Committee considered a report that recommended that public consultation took place on the proposed boundary changes to Tadworth Conservation Area, as delineated on the plans within the report, in pursuance to the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and to be reported back to the Planning Committee for consideration.

Councillor Turner, a visiting member, spoke in support of the proposal stating that since the 2018 conservation review there had been a request from the ward member and Tadworth and Walton on the Hill Residents Association for other areas to be looked at for inclusion within the Tadworth Conservation Area. The Conservation Officer supported the bulk of suggested areas. Recently 2 hedgerows had been removed from a lane full of character and a house in The Avenue was close to demolition by the developer, however the Conservation Officer acted quickly and put a temporary order on the property. Both the lane and the house were in the proposed conservation extension and the Councillor looked forward to working with the Conservation Officer again.

RESOLVED that public consultation on the proposed boundary changes to the Tadworth Conservation Area be **APPROVED**.

39. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was none.

The Meeting closed at 10.27 pm