

Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in the Village Hall on Monday 3 February 2014 at 19.30 hrs.

Present: Mr Greenwood, Mrs Lewis, Mr Rawlins (Chairman), Mr Reynolds, Mr Kedge (ex-officio)
Mrs Varnes (Deputy Parish Clerk).

Mr P Neville, Mr S Tanner and Mr and Mrs Smith regarding item 127.01.

P14/124 Apologies for absence: Ms Noble, Mr Stoves (ex-officio).

P14/125 Declarations of interest: none.

P14/126 Public question time: None other than applicants.

P14/127 New applications:

127.01 P13/S3776/FUL. Construction of 3 two-bedroom, 1 three-bedroom and 2 four-bedroom houses, incorporating parking and turning areas, on land to the rear of 19b-23 Wood Lane.

Mr P Neville and Mr S Tanner represented the applicant, Elegant Homes. Mr and Mrs Smith of 26 Grove Road were present to express their concerns.

Mr Neville explained the key features of the new application and that negotiation with the owners of the site behind 23c Wood Lane had failed to reach an agreement for a shared access from Wood Lane.

Mrs Smith expressed concerns about the proposed development's height and proximity.

After extensive discussion the committee agreed unanimously to recommend that this application be refused. The full grounds and policy references are covered in the attached letter to SODC.

127.02 P14/S0131/HH. Single-storey rear extension to the kitchen and a side porch at 17 Sedgewell Road. After discussion the committee agreed unanimously to recommend that this application be approved.

127.03 P14/S0083/HH. Two-storey side extension to form a family room and office on the ground floor and a bedroom and shower room on the first floor of 8 Kidmore Lane. After discussion the committee agreed unanimously to recommend that this application be approved.

P14/128 Applications granted: none.

P14/129 Applications refused: none.

P14/130 Matters for future consideration: none.

The meeting closed at 20.15

Chairman: Dated:

PLANNING APPLICATION: P13/s3776/FUL

The above application follows previous applications P12/s1429 FUL – which was refused but then allowed on appeal (subject to some conditions and changes which were complied with via P13/s3883/DIS). So P13/s3883/DIS represents the extant Consent.

At our meeting on 3rd February the Planning Committee **unanimously recommended refusal** of the above application.

Background

1. Concerns raised previously concerning s1429 were in respect of :
 - Impact on the surrounding residential area
 - Overspill parking issues impacting an already difficult problem in the service centre
 - Strategic impact by allowing a precedent for a growing degradation of the character of our village and its central area.
2. On appeal the Inspector allowed s1429, subject to removal of the 3 car ports/garages that were part of that proposal. The Inspector removed these for over-development of the site and perhaps for fear that they would become storage spaces no used for the parking of cars. The proposal was for 6 dwellings with 15 bedrooms and 6 studies (in 2 or 3 bedroom units). After the Inspectors change there were no garages or car ports within the consent. Now in this new proposal there are 2 car ports and 4 large garages. The car ports are likely to rapidly become garages once owners arrange for the walls to be filled-in. SODC guidance indicates that garages are not welcome due to their tendency to become used solely for storage. In a VERY sensitive location and with strong over-development of the site the new application raises strong concerns about harmful over-spill parking being generated on Wood Lane.
3. In the original application there were 6 dwellings being: 3 Semis with 2-beds, 1 Semi with 3-beds and 2 Detached with 3-beds. So it was for 15 bedrooms, plus each of the 6 dwellings also had a study. These were extolled as being the modest scale of homes that our village needed – even though the internal space was generous and there were fears that their market price would not be starter or modest family prices. Now in this new application there are 6 dwellings being: 2 Detached 2-beds, 1 Semi 2-bed, 1 Semi 3-bed and 2 Semi 4-beds. So now there is a total of 17 bedrooms - with each of the 6 dwellings also having a study and now either a large garage or car port. The 4-bed element now moves that package away from the modest position indicated and is now out of keeping with the needed housing mix for both SODC across the district and Sonning Common's needs as specified through the NDP and its research findings – which are strictly for 1, 2 and 3-bed units. Thus the new mix proposed is out of keeping with the identified need.
4. In the previous application s1429, the Design and Access statement made a virtue of the restraint made to comply with the needs of the site. It said "*The design approach has been to keep the height, bulk and massing of the proposed buildings to a minimum in order to respect the setting of the site and the amenities of neighbouring occupiers. The dwellings would be of 1.5 storey scale with First Floor accommodation contained in the roof space with use of discrete dormers and roof lights.*" Previously a virtue was made of standing the proposed buildings away from the existing residents on Grove Road and sought not to upset the residents at 19 Wood Lane. The ridge heights were previously some 6.7 metres. Now the ridge heights go to 2 storeys on plots 3-6 at a height of 8.7 metres. The residents of Grove Road – notably at 26 and 26a - face a high wall of property at quite close quarters behind them. In fact, the existing residents of 26 Grove Road were restrained by SODC when they extended their bungalow into the roof and were held back to a 1.5 storey scale. They have made strong representation that they find this new application to be over-bearing. If a full 2 storey proposal is allowed, it would also enable scope for future loft extensions and dormers etc to potentially make the 4 dwellings at plots 3-6 into 3 storey accommodation. Collectively there are significant impacts on the amenities and privacy of neighbours and on the character and density of the surrounding residential area – which has traditionally been of low density. The applicant now argues that since the application for s0492 was allowed to go to 2 storeys on appeal (albeit with less mass and bulk in the dwellings) then it now makes sense to increase the ridge heights on this site – certainly for plots 3-6.
5. In the Design and Access statement supporting this application there is a suggestion that the overall Gross Internal Area of the new application is virtually the same as that of the extant Consent (as in application s3883). The generally accepted standards for measuring GIA are set down by the RICS.

These standards require the internal space of garages to be included in the overall GIA measurement. However it is the case that the GIA measurement for the current application EXCLUDES the internal area of the four large garage/bike-stores and the 2 car ports – which would soon probably also become enclosed garages. Clearly the new application – with 2 storey form will have significantly more cubic volume than the previous 1.5 storey format. RICS standards require any square metres which fall under a minimum height of 0.45 metres to be ignored. It is not clear if this affects the measurement of the stated GIA of the extant consent in s3883. Overall it is clear that the new application would substantially increase the intensity of the built form on this site. From the plans it is clear that considerably more of the area of the site is covered by building and it is also clear that the height, mass, bulk and scale of s3776 is substantially larger than in the s3883 version which complies with the Inspector's consent.

6. The access drive within this new application has been re-positioned and appears to be set up to offer access to further backland development in the grounds of 19/19a Wood Lane and beyond. This would be a very unwelcome prospect, would imply risks of a further degradation of the character of the area, would attack the setting of 19 Wood Lane which has considerable history and was the residence of the celebrated Dr Esther Carling and would imply even more risks for the parking access and traffic problems on Wood Lane.
7. The adjacent site was approved on appeal under P12/s0492 in a piecemeal way. As a parish we would welcome the prospect of the vehicular access to the adjacent P12/s0492 being from the access to this site, as we and our residents regard the currently proposed access for s0492 to cause a large range of harmful effects. However access to that site is already readily possible from the consented s3883 application format - just as readily as from this current revised s3776 application. In both cases only a modest re-positioning of parking areas and driveway layouts on the s0492 site are required to accommodate a unified access. Unified access would greatly improve the scope to construct both sites and reduce the cost complexity and village over-spill effects of the necessary delivery and construction works. However the commercial considerations are quite another matter. We certainly would not welcome any suggestion of increased density or mass and bulk on that s0492 site.

MAIN Issues

- A. The existing Consent as set by the Inspector and what is implied by s3883 must be accepted and respected.
- B. The applicants point out that the Inspectorate made decisions in approving both s0492 and s1429 in a piecemeal way - leaving the dwellings in an incompatible alignment. The two layouts were in fundamental conflict and yet were both approved without considering the overall effect. In the absence of over-development there would be merit in the alignments of the new dwellings complying with the prevailing pattern displayed along Wood Lane and Grove Road. However this would require a reduction of the density and intensity of building on the sites. The current application *increases* the scale of building on this site and adversely impacts on the amenity and privacy of existing neighbours and surrounding uses.
- C. We believe that this application is contrary to policy CSR1 as the housing does not meet the identified local needs. Also, because it is an over-development of the site. The GROSS site area is 0.22 hectares less the space provided for the access road to give a NET developable site area of less than 0.2 hectares. With 6 properties this equates to 30 or so dwellings per net developable hectare, but in addition they are now large full height dwellings with garages. Given the minimum guideline of 25 per NET developable hectare this is clearly over-development with excess height and scale for the nature of the location which contravenes policy and the findings of the Inspector. It is important to take account of the low density and modest scale of the adjacent residential properties.
- D. There are some positives. Again this application is supported with clear professional quality plans, documentation and proposed building materials. The detail of design is good as is the indication that the build would ensure disabled access across each floor.
- E. We believe that the new application is contrary to policy CSH4 as the mix of housing proposed is not compliant with the identified need for the mix of new housing in Sonning Common.
- F. Due to the height and positioning of the layout the provided external areas are small and shaded such that compliance with policy D1 is questionable.
- G. The new proposal breaches policy D4 due to the impact on the privacy and amenity of neighbours – particularly as regards 26 and 26a Grove Road.

- H. Likewise it breaches D5 due to the harmful effect on the amenity of adjoining uses - including the likelihood of increased overspill parking impact on Wood Lane. The design is inappropriate for the location demonstrating over-development and excess height, mass, bulk and overall scale.
- I. Because of the over-development and provision of garages and proto-garages, which will all potentially become used for storage, there will not be adequate parking provision on the site – with consequent unwanted over-spill parking in the sensitive and problematic environment on Wood Lane. The effect of this will be to contravene:-
- o CSS1 where development should support and enhance SC as a local service centre. The inherent overspill parking risk from the increased scale of development in a very sensitive area is harmful to the sustainability of that centre.
 - o CST1 on the same basis
 - o D2 with lack of adequate parking provision

In summary we unanimously agreed to recommend **refusal** of this application.

Conditions

If it should nonetheless be decided either by SODC or by an Inspector to allow this application we would suggest that there should be some key conditions:-

- Given the intensity of the design, the rights of the properties for allowable development should, by exception, be removed. It should be clear that applications for loft extensions and enlargements or any proposal to turn car ports into garages would be refused.
- Given the character of the area and the importance of the Maitlands/ Esther Carling house with its character and history at 19 Wood lane, It should be a condition that the access road for this application must not be used for access to any further backland development in the grounds of 19 Wood lane or other property beyond it. This is particularly important given the high sensitivity of the parking and access problems on Wood Lane and opposite Woodlands Road.
- If nonetheless any access were provided for an application for new dwellings in the land of 19/19a or beyond then, under CSH 3, all the units - including those for this application should be viewed as one new development with those and subject to affordable housing contributions in the normal way.

General

There is some concern that the planning system should not be “gamed” with one application continuing to build on another “banked” one to ratchet up intensity in a way likely to lead to over-development and continuing damage to the character of our area. Here we have two adjacent sites, consented in a piecemeal way, where the most intensive aspects of each approval on one site is then used as a rationale to increase the over-development on the other site? Given the sensitivity of our village centre and important local character we fear that such a process would not be conducive to a sustainable future.

Yours faithfully



pp: Leigh Rawlins
Vice Chair of Planning Committee