

Sonning Common Parish Council
Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held on
Monday 23 October 2023 in the Village Hall.

Present: Mr Rawlins (Chair) Mrs Diwell, Mrs McLellan and Mr Collings (Parish Clerk) plus 16 members of the public, Mr J Neville (Elegant Homes), Mr T Fort (Millennium Green) and Mr R Newton (Kennylands Gym).

P24/023 Apologies for absence - Mrs Pearman and Mr Robinson.

P24/024 Declarations of interest - none

P24/025 Public question time.

P24/026 New applications:

026.1 P23/S1824/O Outline application for access only for the erection of 9 dwellings with associated infrastructure and landscaping, works to the Dorian Centre to provide repairs and sustainability upgrades, and construction of new car park facility for the Dorian Centre (indicative layout revised to increase size of ecological buffer and provide more details on enhancements to gymnasium building as shown on amended plans and supporting documents received 11th October 2023) at The Dorian Centre Bird Wood Court Sonning Common RG4 9RF. This application received extensive comment from all the public present and responses from Messrs Neville and Newton. It was agreed that details should be sent to the planning officer as in the letter to SODC appended hereto and that the committee would express no strong views.

P24/027 027.1 Review of P22/S2586/FUL Application for sport mitigation measures associated with adjacent residential application (reference P22/S2180/FUL) to include: Construction of a replacement Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), alterations to existing sports hall building and boundaries, replacement of cricket strip and provision of additional car and cycle parking. (Description amended 10 July 2023 and as amplified by additional information received 05 June 2023 and amended plans and additional information received 30 June 2023 and as amplified by additional information received 29 September 2023.) At Chiltern Edge Secondary School Reade's Lane Sonning Common RG4 9LN. Due to lack of time this item was not addressed.

P24/028 Matters for future agendas - none.

Meeting closed at 21.15. Next meeting: Monday 20 November 2023 at 19.15.

Chairman: Dated:

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office VILLAGE HALL, WOOD LANE SONNING COMMON, OXON, RG4 9SL

30th October 2023

Dear Mr Lucas,

Sonning Common Parish Council's Planning Committee considered the amendments to the following application at its meeting of 23rd October 2023

P23/S1824/O. Outline application for access only for the erection of 9 dwellings with associated infrastructure and landscaping, works to the Dorian Centre to provide repairs and sustainability upgrades and construction of new car park for the Dorian Centre (indicative layout revised to increase size of ecological buffer and provide more details on enhancements to gymnasium building as shown on amended plans and supporting documents received 11th October 2023). At the Dorian Centre, Bird Wood Court, Sonning Common RG4 9RF.

The meeting was well attended by residents. Residents acknowledged changes but still voiced a range of concerns including impact on character and perceptions that this comparatively close development might detract from the peaceful retirement community aims of Essex Way (restricted to those over 50 years of age).

Members unanimously agree a no fixed view. Members were of like mind and saw benefits for the gym but had concerns as detailed below :

1. Members agreed that, absent the covenant, this site would represent infill (as confirmed at pre-application) and that issues of access appeared to have been resolved.

2. Members welcomed the improvements in the revised layout that does better address the issue of privacy and moves the plotland boundary of the dwellings to enable a better ecological buffer (or wildlife corridor). This corridor is important to link the Millennium Green and AONB areas to the south through to the explicit wildlife and planted buffer alongside the adjacent Lea Meadow development – as agreed in its planning approval.

Members welcomed the post and rail fence along the boundary to the dwellings. However, it was felt that hedging or shrub plants should be planted along the outer (estate-managed) side of the boundary to support the ecological corridor and to soften the development visually and as regards sound.

3. Residents maintain that the deeds and maps that they hold are in conflict on ownership boundaries with those submitted by the applicant – based in fairness on current Land Registry records for the Dorian Centre. The conflict will need to be resolved and it was suggested in the meeting that the parties meet to share records and seek to establish the differences. However, by revising the boundary of the plots to be owned by the new dwellings, this issue does not seem likely to prevent development. (Some residents queried the extent of development noting that the first Neighbourhood Plan had considered a reserve site for 4 bungalows in the relevant area and set back from the red line adjacent to the flats – provided that the proceeds were reinvested in the gym. The NP also considered a phase 2 of 10 homes if the gym were lost and subject to reinvestment in new build community and sports facilities – this, envisaged to be much later if at all. It now seems that the immediate refurbishment needs of the gym are much greater. Nonetheless, residents queried the extent of the move from 4 bungalows to 9 two-storey homes. Members recognised that the separation distances proposed fully comply with current guidelines and that the excavation plan proposed removal of the current mounds.)

4. Members recognised that there are protective covenants in Planning and Property Law in favour of OCC and SODC which restrict use of the site to recreation and sports use - which should not be lost. The applicants have clarified the works to be done on the gym and members were supportive that this was necessary. The applicants indicated that these works would see the gym sound for 15-20 years. They also highlighted that the improvements would make the building more sustainable and cost-effective in operation – which might offer some scope to build up a “sinking fund” to help address future refurbishments when they fall due.

Members were re-assured by the applicants' further detail on the gym condition and assurances that other material flaws do not exist.

However, given the significant but limited nature of the works proposed, and given the strength of the covenants, members queried whether enough of the proceeds were going for investment in recreation generally and whether funds should go towards the future needs of the gym. Other recreation projects such as Memorial Park and R.U.F.C are also underway seeking to address deficits of location sports and recreation provision.

Ordinarily value is not relevant to planning applications but given the covenants here – including in property law – in favour of OCC and SODC - by exception in this case value is relevant. Members felt that the Planning Officer should be invited to assess this matter. The owner represented that this facility had been provided to the village for some 30 years – with the aim of providing scope for gymnastics and other activity - rather than for profit. In the event that the covenants are recommended to be amended members felt that it would be necessary at the very least to continue the covenants in both planning and property law as regards the residual Gym building, car park and curtilage; in favour of OCC and SODC as now.

IF it should be the case that approval is eventually given for this application, the parish council believes that such s106 work should be heavily conditioned to be completed (and if applicable funded) before any other work on the site begins if planning is approved. (IF the covenant were to be amended, consideration should also be given to making an s106 contribution to improving off-site provision within the parish such as in favour of investment in Memorial Park and its facilities – such as toilets.)

4. Car park – The application requires the car park to be moved – this raises amenity concerns for numbers 42-44 Essex Way. There are very small distances from these homes to their rear fence, footpath and the new car park. Members felt that some extra hedging and shrubbery on the edge of the car park to the footpath would help soften noise and support the ecology corridor. Ideally (car) users should be encouraged to restrict unnecessary noise and pollution and operation should not extend too late?

5. Asbestos – No asbestos has been found in the Dorian Centre. However there have been strong indications that asbestos will be found in the mounds where the demolished materials of the old school were interred. Whilst no ground contamination analysis has been done it seems likely that asbestos may be present. In the absence of evidence to the contrary it would seem important to condition this to ensure that full H.S.E.-approved methodology is applied? Naturally residents voiced concerns that public and neighbouring health would be protected.

6. Clearly, this is an outline application, and the layout is indicative; however, the plots of the dwellings should not extend too close to neighbouring dwellings. Moreover, design should be in keeping with the Neighbourhood Plan Policy on infill.

7. Clearly TPOs and trees need to be respected – which they appear to be.

8. Reserved matters. The applicants noted at point 8.2 of the Planning, Design and Access statement that this application was an outline one – because of uncertainty over the covenants. Members and residents strongly seek a full public consultation for reserved matters - if this outline application receives approval.

Sonning Common Parish Council request that if this outline planning application is approved, we would ask that South Oxfordshire District Council deal with the remaining reserved matters under public consultation to include the Parish and residents, not behind closed doors.

Members wanted the above issues to be considered by the planning officer but resolved overall to take no fixed view. Yours sincerely Signed by Philip Collings Clerk, Sonning Common Parish Council (on behalf of the Planning Committee)