

Planning Policy
West Oxfordshire District Council
New Yatt Road
Witney
OX28 1PB

planning.policy@westoxon.gov.uk

6th February, 2021

Dear Joan Desmond

COMMUNITY LETTER RESPONDING TO OUTLINE PLANNING APPLICATION FOR CHILBRIDGE MEADOWS, WEST EYNHAM

We, the undersigned, support this community letter created by GreenTEA (Transition Eynsham Area) and EPIC (Eynsham Planning Improvement Campaign). As residents of the Eynsham area, we have a keen interest in this application as it will affect Eynsham village substantially.

We are worried about the tactics of the applicant, Goldfield Estates Ltd, Pandora Properties Ltd, (a joint venture between Jansons Property and the William Pears Trust) in submitting the outline planning application now.

The applicant is only seeking permission for the principle of residential development and the means of access (i.e., a fourth leg on the proposed Park and Ride roundabout on the A40). Although the application has considerable supplementary information, it is not legally part of a potential outline permission and cannot be guaranteed to be part of the subsequent detailed reserved matters. Nevertheless, we have commented on the supplementary information to encourage the applicant to carry forward the good parts, and there are some, and to improve the poor parts.

This application, although only pertaining to a small part of the much larger Strategic Development Area, will significantly affect future development to the south (and a smaller area to the west) and Eynsham. Without an agreed masterplan or overarching policy, we have commented on the key planning issues in the wider development area.

Principle of Development - the application is premature

The **Strategic Development Area (SDA)** is part of the adopted Local Plan and that policy EW2 requires *b) comprehensive development to be led by an agreed masterplan*. This application is clearly **premature** as it does not follow “an agreed masterplan” and only relates to one, northern, section of the site; this is not a fully co-ordinated approach. It is unacceptable that such a major change should be permitted on this basis with “all matters reserved [until a later date] except for access”. The vast majority of documents are for information only, offering no certainty for the future quality of this major development.

The need for an integrated approach and a comprehensive agreed masterplan

The “*illustrative SDA framework masterplan*” was not widely consulted. Direct community engagement was a short online presentation; although we understand current restrictions, this was far from the interactive design workshop that we had been led to expect. In advance of the **Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** for the SDA, this masterplan cannot be seen as agreed

and is only included as an illustration, with minimal supporting information. For instance, there are no parameter plans for the whole SDA. Moreover, WODC are preparing the SPD for infrastructure contributions from all interconnected developments in the wider Eynsham area, for example, major A40 roadworks, water supply and sewage disposal.

As such, this application does not provide an agreed, clear or co-ordinated plan for the whole SDA, nor does it assess the cumulative impacts on our area. The most critical parts of the SDA are further south, where they could seriously increase traffic in and through Eynsham and, crucially, these southern parts of the SDA are not part of this application. It is also critical that matters such as flooding, biodiversity, access and energy strategies are fully co-ordinated throughout the SDA.

Phasing and impact on Eynsham

The adopted Local Plan policy EW2(f) also requires “*development to be phased in accordance with the timing of provision of essential supporting infrastructure and facilities*”. The proposed phasing in the Outline Planning Application (Vision Document) means that essentials such as a school and local centre are delayed until phase 3. In the meantime, residents will rely on distant Eynsham facilities and all access, including foot, cycle and mobility vehicle, partly accessed along the A40 - noisy, unattractive and air polluted from heavy traffic. The existing primary school is 1900m away, hardly “*within a reasonable walking distance*” (*travel Plan 3.5.3*) and well in excess of the walkable limits set out under Eynsham Neighbourhood Plan ENP8: Connected Place. In advance of the opening of the new primary school (if indeed it is built) and centre in the SDA there is a risk of overwhelming existing facilities, transport and other local infrastructure. Surely a developed masterplan should provide better non-car access to essential facilities from the first phase?

Comprehensive assessment needed

The development of the SDA will greatly affect our access to and appreciation of the countryside and this needs to be comprehensively assessed. For instance, the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment viewpoints omit key views from Chilbridge Road and only relate to this application site.

Equally, issues such as the climate and ecological emergency, flood risk/alleviation, air quality, green infrastructure and heritage need comprehensive attention. Now that the Garden Village Outline Planning Application has been submitted, the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment to look at cumulative impacts, such as flooding, should be revisited. The applicant’s approach to biodiversity and net gain looks promising, but may in any case fall short on connectivity, by interrupting hedgerows, for example, or because of the number of new roads. We remain convinced that the A40 noise impact, biodiversity and archaeology of the SDA have been underestimated (see also negative comments from the Oxfordshire County Council archaeologist).

Supporting documents – sustainability

We are encouraged by the approach to fabric standards and energy in the Sustainability and Energy Statement but note that there is no firm commitment at this stage and standards may not achieve net zero without subsequent expensive retrofit of dwellings. A district heating system may help achieve zero carbon. The opportunity of a district heating system on the application site is acknowledged, but only “*if a district heating network was considered a viable option for the larger SDA site*”. This would have to be decided before earthworks begin, so it would only be possible with early co-ordination. The need for full planned coordination also applies to other options such as an energy hub. Therefore, we are pleased that Eynsham’s Smart and Fair Futures energy project is

mentioned, but if the opportunities are to be realised a co-ordinated approach should be embedded in the masterplan, in planning applications, and supported by the SPD.

Supporting documents: roads, active travel and public transport

These are key issues for local residents. There must be a traffic management scheme for the whole SDA, limiting car access to and through Eynsham and seeking to reduce traffic within Eynsham. If this site is reliant, in Phase 1, on existing Eynsham facilities (primary school and local centre), car use will increase. In addition, applications to the south and developer pressure for a vehicular access along Chilbridge Road bridleway or through the Wimpey Thornbury Green site into Eynsham are key. These are some of the strongest reasons for a detailed, evidence-based masterplan.

For active travel, the statement in 3.6.15 that “The audit demonstrates that, in general, existing walking and cycling infrastructure fulfils the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in a safe and attractive manner” is wholly unconvincing and does not inspire confidence in those who have tried to practise safe and healthy active travel round the village with young children, nor does the assertion in 3.7.1 that “the conditions of local roads support on-carriageway cycling”. These two statements are consistent with the unambitious travel plan targets in table 5.1 which only represent a marginal increase on the WODC baseline; we would like much more ambitious targets to increase safe active travel on roads with acceptable levels of air and noise pollution (as set out in the A40 air quality report).

Access to the countryside from the SDA and Eynsham should be protected and enhanced. In particular, although outside this application, Chilbridge Road as the key recreation corridor for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, should be protected from traffic and enhanced for amenity use. This route is heavily used and highly valued by Eynsham residents.

We support the option for the Spine Road connection to the proposed Park and Ride roundabout, as long as it is seen as a local access road with measures to deter rat running and to facilitate safe and attractive cycling and pedestrian routes along and across it. The road’s location offers an opportunity for a bus service through the site and beyond to settlements to the south, which should reduce car use in these settlements.

Noise assessment underplays the future dualling of the A40 between Witney and the Park & Ride, which will inevitably increase the noise levels even further. Residents next to the A40 are unlikely to regard the estimated increase, interspersed with wailing sirens of sharply greater volume, as “negligible” or “minor adverse”. Light pollution could also be a problem, for the existing village as well, if Oxfordshire County Council insists on street lighting. Noise, light and air pollution will be increased by the planned tree loss along the A40.

Finally, a more detailed response to this application will be submitted jointly by GreenTEA and EPIC.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Address