

Planning Application 192325- Comments

Proposed development plots

The proposal includes housing development on three Plots: D, C1 and C2 within the western part of the South Wokingham SDL. This SDL is approved for housing development as part of the existing Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan. The South Wokingham Distribution Road runs roughly east/west through this area (approved PA 192928).

We recommend that Planning Application 192325 be rejected in its present form. The applicants should be invited to submit an application based on a modified proposal to develop Plot D only.

Our reasons for this recommendation are described below: -

Balancing Housing Targets and Community Value of the Existing Area

This western part of the SDL is an important rural area that is quickly accessible from Wokingham Town Centre. Several important Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) traverse and border the proposed Plots. The PRoWs play a vital role in gaining access to the countryside immediately south of Wokingham town. These are some of the most heavily used local footpaths. They offer rural aspects of high amenity value. They start close to Wokingham town centre and offer several highly used walking routes through attractive countryside to Nine Mile Ride, Gorrick Woods and Henry Lucas Hospital. Henry Lucas Hospital is a fine example of 17th century architecture and the only Grade 1 listed building in the Borough.

Combined with the impact of the approved South Wokingham Distribution Road, it is therefore important that any proposed housing developments do as little damage as possible to the usability, safety, amenity and public health value of these important PRoWs.

The Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary says on Page 15: "*The scheme will protect the existing Public Rights of Way through/adjoining the Application Site and their alignments. The intention is to integrate these into the development while preserving their rural character through appropriate landscaping, with the potential to create new pedestrian linkages.*"

The effect of the proposed three development sites, however, convert major parts of an existing footpath network with attractive rural aspects to walks through and alongside housing estates.

Plot D contains a former equestrian site with paddocks, stables and training areas on fairly level land. It is close to Wokingham town centre, a large Tesco store and the proposed Southern Distributor Road. Although the application does not specify in precise numbers the distribution of houses between the plots, it is apparent that Plot D would account for about 150 of the 190 total. This is a useful addition to the future housing supply in the area. Vehicular access to Plot D, through an adjacent roundabout, would appear to be suitable for this size of development. The application has proposed some layout measures in Plot D to accommodate two PRoWs: Footpaths 24 and 25. As described below, we recommend further footpath routes in mitigation.

Plots C1 and C2 combined are envisaged as later developments. They also provide a combined total of around 40 dwellings; a miniscule contribution to WBC housing targets. They also add two spur road junctions to interrupt the flow and add to the cost of the South Wokingham SDR. In addition, Plots C1 and C2 developments impact severely the amenity value to users of the most important PRoW on the site: Footpath 10. Footpath 10 will cross the SDR just to the east of the proposed spur junctions.

Plot C1 appears to hold only two 3-storey blocks: presumably only to squeeze in some high density development to meet the affordable housing target. Ground conditions in Plot C1 are particularly unstable.

A better balance between the value of contributing significantly to the WBC housing supply and avoiding the negative impacts to the SDR traffic flow and footpath amenity would be achieved by approving development in Plot D and refusing the proposals for Plots C1 and C2.

Plot D: Housing Types and Location

The indicative layout plan shows 3-storey blocks, presumably of higher density affordable housing, in the north-west corner of Plot D close to the busy SDR and its nearby roundabout. We believe that 3-storey buildings are inappropriate to a rural site in this location. WBC should encourage the provision of affordable dwellings in lower structures and in less noisy locations.

Plot D: Vehicular Access

This site is shown to accommodate the largest number of dwellings. Vehicular access to the site from the north would appear to be only from a single road to a new roundabout. It is unclear from the indicative plan on Page 29 of the Design & Access Statement whether the housing in D would have vehicle access from the south west corner. This would be undesirable. It would need to pass through the very small Guildford railway bridge. It would also add an unacceptable traffic volume to the junction of Luckley Road with Finchampstead Road. An additional junction with the SDR from the north east of the site would be preferable. Vehicles to and from Chapel Green House and Farm and Lucas Hospital should be separate, continuing to use the existing road access to the south. There should be no road connection from the new housing to this route.

Plot D: Rights of Way

Footpaths 24 and 25 run through the proposed housing in D. Pedestrians using both will have cross the SWSDR, albeit with proposed crossings. The PRoWs then appear to use parts of the housing development road network. This will impact the recreational value of these footpaths. In mitigation, WBC should demand an additional footpath skirting the housing development, Chapel Green House land and Lucas Hospital on the eastern boundaries to join the existing Ludgrove School road.

Plots C1 & C2: Geological Issues

The medieval combined terrace/ditch system of surface water retention and control in the southeast quadrant of the Wokingham Gravel Drift has been destroyed over the past decades. New watercourses have developed. After passing under the Waterloo Railway, the water emerges in and around the proposed development areas C1 & C2 south of the Waterloo railway. The north east portion of the area under consideration has multiple wet, boggy and damp areas. Water emerges from beneath the surface as it seeps from the severed edge of the gravel layer. Construction of foundation supports for 3-storey structures (and even less demanding loads) could cause significant structural stability and drainage problems. It is clearly irresponsible to propose such a development without a full hydro-geological survey and engineering audit.

Plots C1 & C2: Vehicular Access & Rights of Way

Vehicular access to Plots C1 and C2 is shown as two almost opposing spur junctions with a pedestrian crossing for busy Footpath 10 only a small distance to the east. This is potential an unsafe arrangement for pedestrians and a disruption to traffic flow on the SDR.

Rural views to the west from Footpath 10 would be blocked by houses on Plot C2 just before being blocked again by existing wooded areas all way to the crossing with the road to Ludgrove School.

Summary: Plots C1 & C2: Poor Value to Wokingham Borough Council

Very Low Contribution to Housing Targets - High Negative Impact on Rights of Way

Development of Plots C1 and C2 imposes negative impacts on the traffic flow on the SDR, adds safety hazards to pedestrians and significant damage to the amenity value of key Public Rights of Way. The combined housing target contribution of C1 & C2 is only around 40 units.

Recommendation:

We recommend that Planning Application 192325 be rejected in its present form.

The applicants should be invited to submit an application based on a modified proposal to develop Plot D only.