

**MINUTES**  
of the  
**PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
held on 5 December 2023 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Sosin (Chair)  
Councillor S. Dobson (Vice Chair)

Councillors J. Armstrong, S. Hall, R. Hyland, J. Lardge, R. Lee, V. Pappa, E. Sampson, A. Thompson, A. Thorpe-Apps, C. Tron and P. Wilson

Also Present:

Councillors P. Clark, S. Davis and S. Scott

### 1. Chair's Announcements

For the benefit of the public, the Chair explained the arrangements for the meeting.

### 2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

### 4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 7 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 5. Public Question Time

Public questions and statements were asked on Items 6,7 and 8 and are detailed under the relevant item. [The statements submitted in advance can be viewed via this link.](#)

## 6. 23/00532/FUL – Land South of Southlands Cottages, Runwell Road, Runwell, Wickford, Essex

The Committee considered an application seeking consent for the installation of a large solar farm, with associated development, on an area of land measuring 66.1 hectares in the Green Belt. The Committee heard that the form of development sought within the Green Belt was not an exception listed in the National Planning Policy Framework. It was therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt in principle and any harm must be considered in the context of 'very special circumstances'. These must clearly outweigh the inappropriateness or any other harm. The Committee were also referred to additional information that had been circulated via a green sheet. Officers felt that the proposal would have a substantial impact on the spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt, as well as representing physical and visual encroachment in the countryside. Officers acknowledged the very special circumstances put forward by the applicant in terms of meeting a need for renewable energy, biodiversity gains, lack of other sites, amongst others, but on balance the proposal was contrary to both local and national planning policy and was therefore recommended for refusal.

The Committee heard from the applicant who highlighted the obvious importance for more renewable energy, given global circumstances leading to energy concerns. They also highlighted that any harm to the green belt would disappear when decommissioning the site. They also highlighted the significant benefits of renewable energy, the significant investment in Chelmsford and the diversification and economic support for a local farming business. They also highlighted recent decisions by the Planning Inspectorate to allow renewable projects at nearby sites and referred to the Climate Emergency and Climate Change Action Plan agreed by the Council and that a recommendation for refusal sat uncomfortably against this.

The Committee also heard from members of the public, who supported the officers recommendation for refusal. They highlighted the loss of views, the loss of countryside fields to walk in leading to associated safety concerns, concerns on the impact of endangered breeds in the area, the loss of a significant area of the Green Belt and associated farmland. The Committee also heard concerns about the enclosed walkway that would in effect be created and the issues this would cause for lone walkers in the area.

The Committee also heard from a local ward member who referred to the application that had been reduced in size after previous public consultation and to the recent decisions by the Planning Inspectorate to permit similar developments nearby. They felt that a refusal by the Council would be lost on appeal due to the very special circumstances of green energy provision and to the fact that the 40-year lease was temporary, with the land returning to its original green belt state at the end of the lease. They also stated that there would be significant biodiversity gains and that the site lied adjacent to major and busy trunk roads with arrays of electricity pylons. They felt that this development with the use of underground cables would also lessen the impact of the site. The Committee also heard that if the Council were serious about meeting carbon neutral targets, then the application should be approved.

In response officers stated that they could only assess the application before them and not the potential of more suitable sites. The Committee also heard from the Council's landscaping consultants who had assessed the site and come to the view that the visual impact would be substantial and they felt that applicants assessment did not appropriately address the concerns on the visual impact. They also referred to the enclosed walkway which would pose a security issue for the site. Officers also confirmed that they were not aware of any community benefits being offered by the applicant. Officers also acknowledged that there had been appeals against similar refusals upheld by the planning inspectorate but their view was that

the harm to the greenbelt was substantial and outweighed on planning balance the green energy benefits and felt that this was backed up by both national and local policies.

Members of the Committee expressed views on both sides of the argument, including the significant increase in green energy provided but also the impact to the green belt and surrounding area. Views were shared that the Council had a responsibility to meet its own climate targets but also that policy did not detail that it was acceptable to build solar farms on the green belt.

**RESOLVED** that the application be refused for the reasons detailed in the report.

(7.03pm to 8.04pm)

#### 7. 23/01193/REM - 1 Brassie Wood, Chelmsford Garden Community, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 3FP

*Cllrs Pappa and Tron declared interests at this part of the meeting and did not take part in it.*

The Committee considered an application for the approval of reserved matters in relation to Condition 1 of outline planning permission for the development of a two storey day nursery together with associated access, car parking, landscaping and enclosed garden to serve the day nursery and related works. It was noted that the application had been referred at the request of a local ward member who had concerns on parking provision, traffic flows and noise impacts. Officers informed the Committee that the S106 agreement on the outline planning permission for Channels, required the provision of an early years and childcare facility within the development, as was being applied for and the site for the day nursery had been agreed through the Channels Phase 2 reserved matters approval. Officers felt that proposal was of an acceptable scale, form and design, and would integrate successfully with the Phase 2 development and street scene. It was also noted that a noise management plan successfully demonstrated there would be no adverse noise impacts. Officers also said that parking concerns were addressed by existing visitor parking spaces that would be managed by controls through a traffic regulation order and therefore the application was recommended for approval. The applicant had also proposed an additional three visitor parking spaces for drop off/pick up within their site.

The Committee heard from the applicant who referred to their proven track record in running similar facilities, the requirement under the S106 agreement, the proposal for a high quality building complementing the local surroundings along with measures to address noise and parking concerns.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was clarified that a parking survey had not been required on nearby streets as appropriate levels of visitor parking provision had been secured through the Channels Phase 2 reserved matters approval to serve the day nursery, the retail unit, now an architect's office and to provide parking for residents visitors. Further all properties across the Channels development had been provided with good on-plot parking provision, with garages/car ports and parking spaces sized to accommodate modern day vehicles. Contamination was addressed by a condition on the outline planning permission which required submission of a report, provision of necessary measures and photographic evidence and certificates to confirm the measures had been installed.

**RESOLVED** that the application be approved subject to the conditions detailed in the report.

(8.05pm to 8.28pm)

## 8. 23/012821/FUL - Hen Cottage, North Hill, Little Baddow, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 4TQ

The Committee considered an application for the demolition of the existing dwelling and detached outbuilding and the construction of a replacement dwelling. Officers informed the Committee the application had been called in by a local ward member, due to concerns that the proposal would have an adverse impact on the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside, local character and adjacent heritage assets. The Committee heard the replacement would be taller and more substantial, but well designed and appropriate in scale in comparison to contextual built form. Officers had recommended the application for approval due to it not being harmful to adjacent designated heritage assets, not adversely impacting the intrinsic beauty and not having an adverse impact on neighbouring amenity.

The Committee heard from members of the public who raised concerns with the access road to the development site which was unsuitable, the increased height of the building, negative impacts on the unique harmony of the historic part of the village and the views expressed in the Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan. Residents also raised concerns about the area potentially soon being listed as an area of natural beauty and stated the site was especially sensitive and historically important.

The Committee also heard from the Chair of the local Parish Council. They agreed with the concerns raised by local residents and stated the application would harm a particularly important part of the village, outside of the defined settlement area. They stated that there were no modern properties nearby and the proposed height and width would negatively impact the area. They also queried whether the Neighbourhood Plan had been correctly followed and highlighted the current application for the area to be classed as one of outstanding natural beauty and felt the application required more scrutiny.

The Committee also heard from a local ward member who echoed the concerns already raised. They also referred to the fact that the existing development could not be seen from the road but the proposed one would and that the village should be protected. They also raised concerns about natural water drainage in the area and that Gravy Lane should remain unobstructed and queried whether the correct people in Essex Highways had been consulted. They also highlighted a concern that there was a constraint on the initial grant of planning permission restricting the design to single storey to be subservient to nearby cottages.

In response officers stated that they could only make an assessment on the current position and could not take into account current or future applications to make the area one of outstanding natural beauty. They also stated that Gravy Lane was not a designated or non designated heritage asset. In response to questions from the Committee, officers also stated that the Neighbourhood Plan had been taken into consideration and given due weight in the planning balance assessment. Officers also confirmed that Condition 13 relating to no unbound material being brought onto the site could be removed if the Committee felt it was not required. Officers also stated that the proposal was 1.8m higher but across a split level and was viewed as well designed and articulated, alongside the fact that there were no restrictions on height or scale in the area.

Two members of the Committee requested a site visit, but this was not supported by the majority of Committee members.

**RESOLVED** that the application be approved subject to the conditions detailed in the report.

(8.29pm to 9.05pm)

## 9. Planning Appeals

RESOLVED that the information submitted to the meeting on appeal decisions between 21<sup>st</sup> October and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm.

Chair