

MINUTES

of the

PLANNING COMMITTEE

held on 3 November 2020 at 6:00pm

Present:

Councillor J A Sosin (Chair)

Councillors L Ashley, H Ayres, A Davidson, S Dobson, J Frasca, P Hughes, R Hyland, J Lardge, R Lee, R J Poulter, T E Roper, C Shaw, R J Shepherd and I Wright

Also present: Councillor N Chambers

1. Chair's Announcements

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

2. Attendance and Apologies for Absence

The attendance of those present was confirmed. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors G H J Pooley and E Sampson, who had appointed Councillors J Lardge and A Davidson as their substitutes.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members are reminded that they must disclose any interests they know they have 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 become aware of the interest. If the interest is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they are 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 6 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Question Time

Members of the public made statements on item 6 on the agenda. Details are recorded under minute number 6 below.

6. Site at Ash Tree Farm, Bishops Stortford Road, Rowell – 19/02123/OUT

The Committee considered an outline application for the demolition of all existing workshops and commercial buildings at the site of Ash Tree Farm, Roxwell and the removal of hardstanding. They would be replaced by up to 55 dwellings and there would be alterations to vehicular and pedestrian access, the formation of new estate roads, public footpaths, parking spaces, private amenity areas and public open spaces with a children's play area and drainage infrastructure. A Green Sheet of additions to the information in the report on the application was circulated.

Seven statements from members of the public and one from the local ward councillor were heard at the meeting. They argued that although the site was designated in the Local Plan as a rural employment site, and its redevelopment for housing would therefore be contrary to policy, the proposed development would be an improvement on the current use, part of which was unlawful and which caused disturbance and nuisance to local residents. Further, they were of the view that enforcement action would not resolve the problems associated with the current use, that the impact of the proposed development on the countryside would be no more harmful than that of the present use, and that the site was in a sustainable location.

The Committee's ensuing discussion centred on whether material considerations associated with the application could justify a departure from the Local Plan. Some members argued that in this case the benefits afforded by the proposed development, in terms of additional housing and improving the amenity of residents, were material considerations. Others said that whilst there were other rural employment sites not far from the application site, this site had specifically been designated as such in the recently adopted Local Plan, which as well as providing sufficient land to meet housing need during the Plan period, also sought to meet anticipated demand for land to support business and economic growth.

Members also expressed doubts about the effectiveness of the enforcement action taken or proposed against the unauthorised uses of the site. Officers said that enforcement action only concerned unauthorised use of the northern part of the site and that the use and operation of the rest of the site complied with planning and operational requirements. The effectiveness of planned action involving other authorities could not be judged at this stage.

Asked whether the footpaths between the site and Rowell village could be upgraded, officers said that they crossed privately-owned land, would need to be upgraded with hard surfaces and lighting, would be difficult to widen in places, and parts may be susceptible to flooding. It was therefore unlikely that they could be improved to the necessary standard.

Members also expressed views that the proposed development would not be as detrimental to the appearance of the countryside as the current use, that residential development would provide economic benefits to the area and that it would be more beneficial to biodiversity. There were contrary arguments that whilst the site was brownfield it did not mean that it all of it should be developed for housing, nor that the whole of the site could be regarded as detrimental to the appearance of the countryside.

After votes on motions either to refuse the application or to defer its consideration to enable conditions to be presented on any grant of planning permission, it was:

RESOLVED that the Committee, being minded to approve application 19/02123/OUT in respect of the site at Ash Tree Farm, Bishops Stortford Road, Roxwell, defer it to enable officers to report to a future meeting on conditions that could be attached to any grant of planning permission for the development.

(6.0pm to 7.46pm)

7. Planning Appeals

RESOLVED that the information on appeal decisions between 16 September to 15 October 2020 be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.47pm

Chair