

CHILD OKEFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Objection to Planning Application to Develop land by the erection of up to 32 No. dwellings, form vehicular and pedestrian access. (Outline application to determine access). For access at Land Off Haywards Lane (West of Allen Close) Child Okeford, Dorset

Planning reference numbers: 2/2019/0318/OUT Alt Ref: PP-07627037

Child Okeford Parish Council want to Object in Principle to any housing development on this location as it is outside of the development boundary, not sustainable, there is no evidence for local need and the site hosts part of the ecosystem of a number of identified protected species.

Village Design Statement

The location is a greenfield site outside of the village settlement boundary to the rural village of Child Okeford. The North Dorset Local Plan (NDLP) policies 16-21 describe settlement boundaries in detail with the intention of using them as a means of “development management” and state that settlement boundaries around Stalbridge and the larger villages (including Child Okeford) will be retained. The Child Okeford Village Design Statement (VDS) supplementary to these policies also states that the Village Settlement Boundary should be “sacrosanct”. The Planning and Housing Statement provided by the applicant describes this site as a “rounding off of the existing settlement”. This is in direct conflict with these NDLP policies and VDS.

It is worth noting that the planning use for the two adjacent fields to the proposal are for equestrian purposes – grazing horses.

North Dorset Council Planning Strategy

The North Dorset Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) reports the proposed site as an “Included Site”, with longer term potential for development. The proposed density in the planning application is for 32 dwellings against the SSLA’s stated potential of 25. However, the development of this site was deemed to be not achievable, unless or until there is a policy review on the NDLP to remove the village settlement boundary.

Local Plan Policy 20 (The Countryside) says that development outside of settlement boundaries will have to demonstrate an overriding need. The Countryside Policy also states that the Countryside is “where development will be strictly controlled unless it is required to enable essential rural needs to be met. “ It goes on to say that “at Stalbridge and all the District’s villages, the focus will be on meeting local (rather than strategic) needs” in order to protect against infill housing development in order to satisfy local needs or essential rural worker-type housing. The applicant has provided little or no evidence that the new housing is aimed at meeting local needs, or at providing housing for essential rural workers.

Sustainability

Section 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is dedicated to achieving sustainable development using three interdependent objectives. These are detailed as economic, social and environmental and used to determine whether the development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Likewise Policy 1 and paragraph 3.12 of the North Dorset Local Plan describes delivering sustainable outcomes in alignment with these three objectives.

It is the Parish Council's view that this development could not be considered as sustainable as none of the three objectives are met by the applicant. Within this context paragraph 11.d.ii of the NPPF describes not granting permission to developments where the adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Policy 20 and objective 4 paragraph 2.52 of the North Dorset Local Plan emphasises that development in villages should be driven by local need and paragraph 103 of the NPPF supports sustainable transport through limiting the need to travel and offering genuine transport modes.

One element for a development site to be considered sustainable there should be a regular and frequent alternative transport options as viable alternatives to dependence on private vehicle ownership.

The X10 bus operated by First Buses of Somerset only provides a service Monday to Friday, once every 2 hours and only between the hours of 06.45 – 17.45. There is no evening or week-end service. With only this intermittent rural bus service as alternative transport available it cannot be considered that this is a viable alternative option.

The applicant has provided little evidence or justification that the new housing is aimed at meeting local needs or providing housing for essential rural workers. This would suggest that the people who are likely to live in the development are highly likely to have full and part time jobs outside of Child Okeford and also therefore have a heavy dependency on private cars. Policy 20 of the NDLP describes satisfying a local need for houses and "small numbers of market homes" – such a large development as proposed is clearly in conflict with these statements.

Likewise this falls out of line with the Core Spatial Strategy in Policy 2 of the NDLP and also Policy 3a of the NDLP facilitating the use of public transport, walking and cycling (described in more detail below but in brief – need for private vehicle use, no footpath, narrow lane, high hedges, no street lighting, Highways-confirmed zone of excessive speed). This also conflicts with the applicant's statement that the proposed development is in a sustainable location.

The applicant makes the statement that the North Dorset "Council's inability to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply means that such policies are not applicable to this application." This is hugely contentious and over-simplified. The NDLP policies 6, 9 and 20

specifically describe protection of the countryside against housing developments such as whilst simultaneously looking to meet local need/rural worker housing and providing an effective strategy to meet the wider demand for housing needs. Likewise the applicant has omitted to describe NDDC meeting strategic housing goals and implementing these through the identified development areas throughout North Dorset.

There is no higher purpose within this application – it is simply looking to take financial advantage by way of an excessive development of a currently sustainable rural community.

Objective 6 paragraph 2.54 of the NDLP and section 2 paragraph 8b of the NPPF describe the social objective regarding sustainability of strong, vibrant and healthy communities. With such a sizeable development the amenities in the village such as the school and the GP surgery do not have the capacity to support such a large increase in the village population.

The GP surgery in the village is already severely stretched and serves a wide catchment area outside of the village and has a higher than average percentage of older patients / clients, which in turn gives disproportionate pressure to the continued sustainability of a surgery for the village.

The current wait times for the surgery are at 3 weeks and above. An influx of new residents will lead to delays of over a month for an appointment at the surgery.

This is manifest in an accompanying statement from the NHS regarding this planning application: Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust) is currently operating at full capacity in the provision of acute and planned healthcare. It is further demonstrated that this development will create potentially long term impact on the Trust ability provide services as required. (See NHS FOUNDATION TRUST PART1 document in planning application on <https://planning.north-dorset.gov.uk>)

Section 2 paragraph 8.b of the NPPF describes the environmental objective of sustainable development. This is further referenced within paragraph 3.12 of the NDLP “where a long-term perspective is needed, and in relation to potential impacts on environmental assets, especially those that are protected by legislation and/or are considered irreplaceable.”

The development is within the landscape buffer of the Cranborne Chase AONB and is visible from Hambledon Hill. The existing site is one of trees and grass and will be replaced with 32 dwellings expanding the built up area of the village and degrading the view from the National Trust owned area of outstanding natural beauty. The potential impact of 32 homes with the associated light pollution, colour and signage to this broken outline will be significantly more harmful to the AONB, against the landscape character, and thus in conflict with Policy 4 of the NDLP.

Further Development

If this proposed development is approved, it sets a precedent for development outside of the village boundary and it is likely that there would then be a proposal to develop the field to the west of the proposed site, abutting Lynch Lane. The applicant’s Design & Access Statement shows potential vehicular and pedestrian access to this field. This would

encourage further development elsewhere in the village, outside of the village settlement boundary. There is already a planning application for 68 dwellings on the Dorset Self-Storage site which is still awaiting a decision. For these reasons, we do not consider the proposed development to be the “right type in the right place” under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)’s definition of sustainability and thus flowing into the NDLP.

Other, more suitable sites within the settlement boundary meeting the strategic and policy planning criteria have been identified in the SHLAA.

Demographics

As previously described policy 20 of the NDLP emphasises that development in villages should be driven by local need. There is no evidence provided by the applicant to suggest that there is a local need for a new housing development in Child Okeford. Likewise Policy 6 of the NDLP describes identifying “key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period” and promoting “sustainable development in rural areas”. This is clearly not the case with the location of this application outside of the settlement boundary and no local need for housing to satisfy.

Highways and traffic

The proposed access site is opposite the village school and nursery with the village playing fields a few metres farther up the road. The traffic survey conducted by the developer took place on the 6th August during the school holidays leading to an extremely subjective report. The main access proposed is just a few metres from the entrance to the school – used in term time by parents, grandparents, carers, children and toddlers. As well as the school day a number of after-school clubs are provided by the school and nursery ensuring footfall over wide sections of the day.

This country lane is narrow, high hedges on both sides, without safe areas for pedestrians and characterised by DCC Highways as a route with an excess speed issue. As seen in the photos below, there is no scope for improving access for foot, cycling and only extremely minimal public transport is available.

Likewise paragraph 110 of the NPPF states that applications for development should create places that are “safe” and “minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter”. Clearly the proximity to the school and nursery, lack of scope for provision of cycle or pedestrian transport and the associated signage and streetlights with access and the development are in direct conflict with this policy.

The impact of significantly more traffic in the village and increase in the number of vehicles parked outside the school during drop off and collection has not been taken into account during the applicants Transport Study.

For reference the following photos were taken on 11th April 2019 during a normal school day.



Looking back towards school

Hayward's Lane looking back towards St Nicholas School



Hayward's Lane looking back towards Hayward's Bridge



No space for pedestrians or cyclists. Many agricultural and HGV's use this route

The sides of the road during school time are congested with parked cars which make walking children to school a particularly dangerous experience. This development will result in an increase in this parking and such a natural overflow will occur into nearby residential

areas like Allen Close and Chalwell increasing the risks of incidents. The most recent incident on Hayward's Lane was classified as "serious" and occurred in November 2017.

This part of Haywards Lane is a narrow country lane of with high hedges and pinch points of less than two lanes. As show in the photographs above there are no footpaths nor space for any to be added. Traffic, including agricultural machinery from the local farms and two contractors located at opposite ends of the village, frequently has to mount the grass verge to pass. This is extremely hazardous and the application for a further 32 residences with the associated extra vehicles and footfall will be heaviest at peak times when the primary school and nursery day starts and ends.

According to the applicants Transport Study, the effect of 32 new homes outside the village boundary would increase the traffic through the already congested village centre by up to 316 journeys per day. This might be insignificant on the wider highways network but would have a harmful impact on the amenity and safety of the school, nursery, village centre and a potentially harmful impact on the village conservation area.

As described the applicant's Transport Study does not consider any of the above and paints what amounts to a very biased picture of a rural lane with systemic traffic issues.

Speeding

Within the past 2 years DCC Highways have undertaken a survey to determine the speed of vehicles entering and leaving the village routes. Two roads of excess speed were identified, one of which was Hayward's Lane where the "tubes" measuring speed, direction and vehicle type were deployed. The access off Hayward's Lane to the proposed development is within 30 metres of the tube deployment site – both within the 30mph zone. It is the Parish Council's view that the access to the site is on road that has been designated as having an issue with speed, with children and toddlers nearby in the school. The addition of several hundred extra journeys per day with the other factors – no pavement or lightning, high hedges not providing safe pedestrian or cycle zones – materially increases the risk of another serious accident.

Street lights

There are currently no street lights on this stretch of the road. This development includes low level street lighting which will add to light pollution in the village. With the increase in traffic, there would surely need to be new street lighting added to Haywards Lane to make navigating to and from the school gates safe for children crossing the road between the parked cars.

Street lights are not common through Child Okeford and diminish the rural character by way of urbanisation and goes against policies 2, 6 and 20 of the NDLP. These streetlights also conflict with NPPF paragraph 110.c to avoid street clutter and respond to local character.

Biodiversity and protected species

This part of the village is alive as a foraging habitat for protected species – notably bats using the flora and fauna of the native hedgerows and development site. The development, and the resultant light pollution, will significantly negatively affect this sensitive ecosystem. This is confirmed in the applicant’s Biodiversity Study which over the course of three days spread out over the year states that “the site is regularly used by a wide range of bats” and the “majority of bat calls that were recorded were Common pipistrelles, Soprano pipistrelles and Serotine bats. A high number of bat calls were recorded along the hedgerows/treelines within the site and the Western boundary hedgerow was found to be a particular hotspot”.

The Biodiversity Study conclusion describes that the light pollution both during and post development will have negative consequences for the bat population. Even with the numerous external lighting mitigation factors proposed by the applicant (including switching off streetlights!) the internal lights from the 32 houses would be significant and severely detrimental.

The applicant’s Ecological Study also describes the presence of multiple bat species recorded within the immediate local area. This includes 8 roosts (including one maternity roost) for a variety of species. Notably the data search for the immediate area also records 38 records of the European Otter with a site visit “here could be potential opportunities for otters to casually forage on the site especially as they can have large home ranges”.

Otters and all bat species are fully protected under section 9 (5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. According to this act it is an offence to “intentionally or recklessly disturb an animal whilst it is using this place” or “intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used by one of these animals for shelter or protection”.

These species also receive additional protection from the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 under Schedule 2 which implements the EC Directive 92/43/EEC under which it is an offence to “deliberately disturb a European Protected Species” or “damage or destroy the breeding site or resting place of a European Protected Species”.

It is the Parish Council’s view that both of these pieces of legislation will be contravened both during and post development for the local protected species.

Other records were provided for – amongst many animals - Barn owls, badgers (including identifying a potential trail through the hedgerow on the south boundary during a site visit) and hedgehogs.

Alongside all these protected species the Biodiversity Study also states the “high potential habitat for breeding birds within the trees and hedgerows”. These would be severely disrupted or removed within development and post development. The environmental objective of the NPPF is taken on and driven in Objective 2 of the NDLP to conserve the natural environment. This development is in conflict with these objectives by taking away the natural environment, reducing biodiversity and disturbing the critical and fragile ecosystem of protected species.

Flood risk and drainage

The Parish Council would like to point out that the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy (FRADS) provided by the applicant has been dimensioned for 16 houses rather than the 100% increase of dwellings put forward in the core proposal of this applicant. As such we would expect considerable weight be given to this inaccuracy.

Local knowledge is that Hayward's Lane is frequently flooded during periods of inclement weather with numerous visits from Wessex Water and Highways each year (on the request of the Parish Council and residents) resolve the various drainage and safety issues.

Due to the prevailing topology where the entire site slopes towards the southern border and with the mass of new roadway and buildings described in the application the run-off is towards the entire length of the proposed development along Hayward's Lane and the entrance to the school. This is confirmed and described in section 2.2 of the applicant's Flood Risk Assessment.

This should be placed in conjunction with section 4.8 of the FRADS which makes cautionary note of a "careful consideration" given to the design as there is potential for run-off to be directed at buildings and other critical infrastructure. Both St Nicholas Primary School and the Ark Nursery are in the direct path of the run-off from the entire site both during and post development.

Village character and conservation area

Child Okeford is a rural community with many houses and buildings constructed prior to 1900 throughout the village providing a distinctive feel of rural character within and outside of the conservation areas. Houses are typically detached, some semi-detached and very little terraced. The nearby Allen Close is 6 detached houses each with good sized gardens.

The proposed development is for an infill estate of 32 properties biased towards semi-detached and terraced houses with very small gardens. For a sense of scale these 32 properties are squeezed into an area only 2.5x the size of Allen Close. None of the scaling, size or architecture of the proposal, site or properties keep within this local character or distinctiveness.

NPPF policy paragraph 83 (c) states , Policy 2 of the NDLP and Child Okeford Village Design Statement reference the need to maintain the character of areas – with paragraph 3.33 of the NDLP going so far as to say planning decisions should take the position of recognising the "intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it".

In conclusion

The Child Okeford Parish Council object in principle to this development for the reasons given above, however in brief they are:

- Development outside of the village boundary (NDLP policies 2, 16-21 and the NPPF)
- Unsustainable and urbanised development of an otherwise sustainable rural community (NDLP policies 2, 3, 16-21 and the NPPF sustainability objectives)
- No evidence for local need (NDLP policy 20, 16-19)
- Access safety concerns without scope for improvement (NDLP, NPPF)
- Protection of identified protected species (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1980, Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, EC Directive 92/43/EEC)