

Minutes of the Environment Committee on Monday 5 March 2018 at Weaving Street Village Hall, Weaving Street, Weaving commencing at 8.42 pm.

Councillors present: Mrs W Hinder (Chair), Mrs A Brindle, Ms L Clarke, Mr P Dengate, Mr Ivor Davies and Mr Bob Hinder, together with the Clerk Mrs P Bowdery.

1. Apologies and absences

2. Declaration of Interests, Dispensations, Predetermination or Lobbying

None

The meeting was not adjourned as no members of the public were present.

3. Planning Applications for Consideration

18/500346/FULL Erection of 115 dwellings together with associated infrastructure, open space, landscaping and access works. Lordswood Urban Extension, Gleamingwood Drive, Lordswood. **Ratified** the Clerk's response after consulting members. Copy sent to Medway Council.

Boxley Parish Council strongly objects to this application and would like to see it refused and reported to the planning committee for the reasons set out below:

1. *The development of what is still effectively, due to non-implementation of the previous planning permission, a greenfield site is inherently unsustainable and will result in urbanisation creep into the countryside. The applicant considers that the previous planning permission is "extant given the timeline for submission of Reserved Matters does not expire until November 2018". The Parish Council considers that as the Planning Inspector was heavily influenced and swayed by the inclusion of a sustainable bio-mass unit and the fact that MBC did not then have a 5-year housing provision this site should be considered as greenfield.*
2. *The proposed development will appear as a sporadic, ad hoc and isolated extension of the built up area of Lords Wood poorly related in siting and layout terms to the existing built up urban area. It would thus appear an incongruous and out of character incursion of built development into adjoining undeveloped countryside. It will have an unacceptable visual impact on the rural character of the area contrary to the provisions of policy SP17 of the adopted local plan. It is also contrary to NPPF section 11.109/113/116 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment.*
3. *The proposed main access into the site from Gleamingwood Drive will involve the creation of significant gaps in the currently largely unbroken woodland fronting onto this section of winding road visually separating urban Lords Wood from the countryside. This will result in significant harm to the street scene and loss of visual amenity contrary to the provisions of the NPPF 2012.*
4. *The proposed road layout will result in the significant direct loss of Ancient Woodland while subdividing it into smaller less viable packets lacking connectivity. Dormice and bats, both protected species, exist in the woodlands and immediately adjacent to the proposed development. In addition the proximity of the proposed houses and gardens along with residential use taking place close to the Ancient Woodland with the associated lighting and activity and likelihood of informal and harmful recreational use taking place will further erode its function both as a wildlife habitat and a source of visual amenity to the wider area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the provisions of paragraph 118 of the NPPF 2012.*
5. *The woodland belt adjacent to Gleamingwood Drive has hitherto been protected from development as a buffer zone to the rural strategic gap that prevents urbanised*

Walderslade/Lords Wood connecting with the Hempstead/Wigmore suburbs of Gillingham.

6. *As the site is in the setting of the North Downs AONB it is considered that any development is contrary to NPPF section 11.115 "Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty".*
7. *The introduction of additional light and noise pollution will have an unacceptable and urbanising impact on the local countryside.*
8. *The government's interactive mapping website (www.magic.gov.uk) shows that the proposed site for development is replanted Ancient Woodland. It is considered that the proposed development will therefore be contrary to NPPF Section 11.118 "Planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats including Ancient Woodland and the loss of aged veteran trees found outside Ancient Woodland". Attention is drawn to the Natural England Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland (SAAW 2012). The introduction of the access/egress highway infrastructure across Ancient Woodland is also contrary to section 11.118.*
9. *The November 2015 Planning Inspector Appeal decision specifically identified the importance of sustainability for the site. "The sustainability credentials of either scheme [note two appeals were being heard at the one inquiry] would be enhanced because timber would be harvested locally to be used in a biomass energy facility leading to a reduction in CO2 emissions from fossil fuels".*

A main argument from the then applicant was that the proposed bio-mass facility would 'fund' better maintenance of the woodland and its habitats and this sustainability benefit outweighed the harm to the Ancient Woodland and the wildlife. The removal of the bio-mass unit from the current application clearly denigrates this argument.

The submitted supporting documentation identifies that a Woodland Manager would be appointed to manage and sell coppiced wood to create an income stream for future management of the Ancient Woodland. This would require additional road traffic movements, as wood is transported off the site, which will defeat one of the original arguments about sustainability.

An agent of the applicant has approached the parish council for an introduction to the Walderslade Woodlands Group of volunteers, which the parish council financially supports, with a view to discussing their taking on a maintenance/management role. The fact that the applicant is exploring how to get volunteers involved suggests that the funding of future woodland management is not as robust as the supporting documents indicate.
10. *In 2015 Maidstone Borough Council did not have a 5-year housing allocation identified or an adopted Local Plan but now does. This site has not been identified as a housing allocation site in the adopted local plan.*
11. *The calculations for providing car parking on the site does not conform to policy. Each property should have a specific number of car parking spaces allocated to it (1.5 spaces for 2 bed dwellings, 2 spaces for 3 & 4 bed dwellings). The application fails to reach the parking provision required as it only supplies 253 spaces instead of 259.5. Furthermore the applicant identifies 23 of these spaces for visitors which means that they are not available for property owners. There is therefore a shortfall of 29.5 parking spaces for the proposed properties. Officers will be aware that the Policy for provision of providing car park spaces bears no relevance to real life as witnessed by the fact*

that on-street car parking is at nightmare proportions in the surrounding areas. Any shortfall on the minimum number of spaces required by policy should therefore be avoided.

12. *The site is considered unsustainable as residents will be heavily reliant on the use of private motorcars. In an attempt to deal with this issue, and possibly the short fall in the parking provision, the planning application contains a Travel Plan. The List of Travel Plan Initial Measures (page 34 of the Planning Statement) contains measures which are, to put it bluntly, themselves unsustainable. To reduce car dependency, single car occupancy and the impact on the local highway network the house sales team and some future other, as yet unidentified, source will provide information on car sharing, promote National Lift Sharing Week, bus timetables etc. After selling all the properties and moving on an unidentified source will encourage cycling by introducing an annual or twice a year bike surgery. How this and other initiatives will be funded is not stated. "The Welcome Pack for new owners will also....." the fantasy list just continues. The suggested initiatives are considered totally unmaintainable, unfunded and coming from cloud cuckoo land.*
13. *Public Open Space Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP). The parish council is concerned that MBC's policy of running down its existing non-strategic play areas may result in no on-site LEAP. As the nearest playground (in Autumn Glade) would be some 500m from the nearest house on the development and across an extremely busy road, children with nowhere to play may be attracted to the Ancient Woodland. Prior to any decision being taken on this application the Parish Council asks for a clear statement by MBC that it will take on and manage a LEAP. As the current policy of MBC appears to be that it would not sign up to long term provision, should this be the case then the information in this application should be revised to reflect that the nearest play equipment is located well off site.*
14. *NPPF Section 6 on delivering a wide choice of quality homes, sets certain standards for this type of greenfield development. It is considered that this application fails to meet these standards, specifically section 49 sustainable development: 50 sustainable inclusive and mixed communities; 53 development would cause harm to local area; 55 sustainable development in rural areas "where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities".*
15. *Boxley Parish Council questions the sustainability of the development in terms of availability of public transport. Although there are buses and bus stops in Gleamingwood Drive the proposed houses would not be close to them.*

There are three bus stops, the nearest stop (southbound) would be 80 metres from the site entrance and 250m from the nearest house, and northbound 150m and 320m respectively. Many houses would be over 500m from the nearest stop. Furthermore the bus stops could only be reached by walking along a road wooded on both sides or by walking through woodland. A similar situation occurs just up the road in the Walderslade Woodlands development where on-the-ground evidence is that residents, particularly women with children, choose to use their car rather than walk through a wooded area which is perceived to be dangerous. In reality few people will walk from where they live to access public transport, schools or local services and so will use their cars.

16. *It is unclear whether the 46 affordable homes provided will comply with any of the indicative targets tenure in Policy SP20, 3 (i) (ii) of the MBLP. The Parish Council could not locate supporting information on how the 46 properties will contribute (in that they are rented housing, social rented housing, or intermediate affordable housing) to the delivery of affordable houses to Maidstone. There is evidence that MBLP Policy SP19 (1) which requires a range of house sizes, types is partially met by the application but the application fails to satisfy the majority of the policy.*

17. *The Southern Water response to the 2013 application was to object as the local sewer network would be inadequate to cope with discharge from a development at this site.*
18. *The application assumes that most traffic from the proposed development will wish to travel north on roads within the Medway Unitary Authority. In reality, much will head west to access the M2, M20 or national highway network at the Lord Lees and Bridgewood roundabouts. This route lies completely within Kent and mainly within Maidstone. It seems therefore that insufficient consideration/research has been undertaken on:*
- *The impact on Walderslade Woods Road, the M2 feeder roads and the heavily used narrow, winding Westfield Sole Road.*
 - *The ability of the junction of Gleamingwood Drive and Lordswood Lane to cope with the additional usage.*

A statement that "minimal effect" will be caused by the increase in traffic is not considered a reasonable judgement by the Parish Council. The applicant is basing this conclusion on too many assumptions on how the new residents will choose to travel and where they will travel to. The Parish Council considers the vast majority will not use public transport, bikes or choose to walk because of the following reasons:

- *The frequent bus service to and from Chatham Bus Station takes 25-35 minutes via a convoluted route.*
- *The bus service to Maidstone is minimal. The 150 only operates 6 times per day and it has a 'round the houses route' that even confuses locals.*
- *To access the bus service the residents will have to walk a long distance and for some it will be through an area that they judge as unsafe.*
- *The official bike routes connecting the site to Chatham and Maidstone start/end 170m below the site, normally only the most enthusiastic cyclist will attempt such a commute.*
- *The frantic pattern of modern day living means that parents/carers do combined trips and after dropping a child at school/nursery will go on to some other task which requires the use of a car.*
- *The local shopping area is quite a walk away and residents will rely on the car to carry shopping etc.*

The proposed entrance to this development is a narrow road accessed from Gleamingwood Drive and the proposed junction is on a very long bend. Gleamingwood Drive is poorly designed with inadequate vision splays, on-street car parking and multiple junctions on a long bend. A shared pedestrian/cycling route exists in Medway (small section in MBC). The MBC section of Gleamingwood Drive does not have a cycle path. Due to its poor design any additional traffic introduced into this system will have an adverse impact on the safety of current users.

The parish council also considers that using the 2013 traffic count statistics and scaling them up for another 11 properties when in fact there will be 26 new properties gives a false and inaccurate picture of the traffic impact that will occur.

19. *Since the 2013 planning application:*
- *KCC Highways has identified that M2 junction 3 is beyond its design capacity.*
 - *Outline planning permission has been given by Medway Council for up to 450 market and affordable dwellings with associated access, estate roads and residential open space at Gibraltar Farm Ham Lane, which is approximately 1.75 miles away. Evidence produced for this application showed that the Gleamingwood Drive/Lordswood Lane junction required the introduction of a specific left hand turn lane as the junction was near capacity and would exceed capacity with local development.*
 - *The proposed Lower Thames Crossing is expected to increase the already heavy traffic transferring from the M2 to the M20 via Jct 3 with the A229 and visa versa. Local MPs have raised this with the Minister for Transport as there has been no*

- investment in upgrading the local highway infrastructure.
- The local medical services are at and even beyond capacity.
- There is increasing concern about air pollution in the area.

20. The applicant's Community Involvement document implies that community consultation took place which is incorrect. The only consultation that occurred was with Maidstone Borough Council in pre-application meetings. The applicant made no effort to contact the Parish Council nor, it is understood the Ward Members, until it was submitting the planning application. On 11 January a leaflet was delivered to local properties and letters were sent to the Ward Members, the Parish Council, on being notified of the leaflets contacted the company. As para 3.11 of the Design and Access Statement clearly shows the applicant had no intention to consult with the community as "This leaflet consultation was not to invite comments on the scheme itself...".

Should MBC be minded to approve this application then the parish council requests that Section 106 payments are requested for:

- Highway improvements at the junction of Gleamingwood Drive/Lordswood Lane.
- A contribution towards improvements to Beechen Hall, the local parish council hall.
- A contribution to ensure that the bike routes are linked.

20/02/2018 Additional comment was placed on the MBC website.

Boxley Parish Council objects to the redesign of the residents parking area immediately opposite the proposed new junction on Gleamingwood Drive. The loss of 5-6 car parking spaces in an area that already suffers from a lack of parking spaces is unacceptable as it will lead to more problem parking.

18/500691/LBC Listed Building Consent for alterations to form an ensuite bathroom and restoration of a fireplace. 1 Weaving Manor Weaving Street Weaving. **Ratified** the Clerk's response after consulting members, *The parish council has no material reason to object. Defer to the view of the Conservation Officer.*

18/500694/TPO application to lift the crown of one Sycamore tree by removing lower branches. 13 Spindle Glade Walderslade. **Ratified** the Clerk's response after consulting members, *Do not wish to object. Defer to the view of the Landscape Officer.*

18/500663/TPO application - to fell 4 x Ash trees, canopy trimming by 25% of 1 x Ash tree. 5 Chequers Close Walderslade.

Ratified the Clerk's response after consulting members, *the felling of 4 ash trees – wish to see refused but not reported to the planning committee. It is considered that tree management is acceptable but not felling. These trees form part of the Ancient Woodland and whilst the parish council has sympathy for residents who wish to have more light in their garden and property the loss of 4 potentially healthy Ash Trees is unacceptable.*

18/500713/TPO application - 1no. Ash Tree - Fell, 1no. Field Maple - Remove the crown overhanging the footprint of the house, crown reduce 20%. 19 Spenlow Drive Walderslade. **Ratified** the Clerk's response after consulting members, *Tree management is acceptable but do not wish to see the felling of the ash tree.*

MC/18/0556 GIBRALTAR FARM, HAM LANE, HEMPSTEAD, GILLINGHAM, ME7 3JJ. Outline application with some matters reserved (appearance, landscaping, layout, scale) for construction of up to 450 market and affordable dwellings with associated access, estate roads and residential open space (Renewal of Planning Permission MC/14/2395). *Boxley Parish Council wishes to reiterate its previous objection to MC/14/2395 Objection.*

Reasons for refusal:

1. The proposed development will be on greenfield land that is a substantial tract of undeveloped land extending from the North Downs as a green wedge into the heart of the urban area.

The area:

- Provides a wider landscape setting for Capstone Farm Country Park.*
 - Contributes to the setting of the Kent Downs AONB to the south and the M2 motorway.*
 - Contributes significantly to informal open space needs of the communities which adjoin it.*
 - Prevents coalescence of Lordswood/ Princes Park/Walderslade and Hempstead.*
- It is considered that development would be contrary to BNE25 Development in the Countryside, BNE34 Areas of Local Landscape Importance.*

2. The likely proximity to wildlife habitats, ancient woodland and woodlands, with the associated lighting and activity and likelihood of informal and harmful recreational use, of the proposed houses and gardens, will further adversely impact on flora and fauna habitats and the visual amenity to the wider area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the provisions of paragraph 118 of the NPPF 2012 and BNE37: Wildlife Habitats.

3. It will have an unacceptable visual and sensory impact on the rural character of the area. The importance of which is identified in the Medway classification of it as an Area of Local Landscape Importance. It is considered that development will be contrary to section (ii) of BNE1: General Principles for build development.

4. It is an incongruous and out of character incursion of built development into undeveloped countryside which will result in the irretrievable loss of agricultural land.

5. Traffic introduced into the adjacent residential area will have an adverse affect on the existing infrastructure and will likely result in Gleamingwood Drive becoming a rat-run. Princes Avenue, Lordswood Lane and Walderslade Woods Road will be used to access the M2 and the parish council is of the opinion that the infrastructure will not cope. Access to Maidstone will be via Boxley Village using a C road that is already heavily used. Other roads in the area, Westfield Sole and Harp Farm Road, are already used as rat-runs and are little more than country lanes. It is considered that the development will be contrary to BNE2 Amenity Protection (iii) Activity levels & traffic generation.

6. In the absence of legal agreement being in place to secure developer contributions in connection with education, health, recreation and community services, the development will place additional demands on local services without provision first being in place to ensure that the additional demands placed on these services are being met. The proposal will therefore result in an intensified use of these facilities to the detriment of existing users. The proposed development is close to the administrative boundary with Kent and Maidstone and these areas will be adversely impacted upon so section 106 payments should also used outside of the Medway boundary.

7. The area is within the setting of the North Downs AONB and is also a water catchment area so development will potentially have an adverse impact on both.

The site will be immediately adjacent to the Asbestos First Waste Transfer Site.

Additional comment:

Since the Planning Inspector's decision on MC/14/2395 Kent County Council has identified that Junction 3 of the M2 is now operating beyond design capacity. A report on the inadequacy of the local highway infrastructure has been submitted to local Members of Parliament with a request for intervention.

In 2015 planning permission was granted for up to 89 dwellings on land east of Gleamingwood Drive and this will have a significant impact on traffic volumes on Gleamingwood Drive and the surrounding local highway infrastructure.

In February 2018 an application (18/500346/FULL) to replace the 89 dwellings on the Gleamingwood site with 115 dwellings was submitted to Maidstone Borough Council.

Boxley Parish Council strongly objects to a renewal of planning permission.

18/500319/FULL/JOCM Demolition of existing dwelling and outbuildings, and erection of 4 semidetached dwellings. Hawthorn Cottage Dunn Street. **Ratified** the Clerk’s response after consulting members,

The parish council defers to the views of Bredhurst Parish Council as the actual buildings are within its parish. There are concerns that:

- *The design, size and bulk is detrimental to the street scene.*
- *The entrance onto a main road is at point where it is narrow, on a bend and totally unsuitable.*
- *There is no available on-street car parking and with only 8 car parking spaces at the site (although it states 6 in the actual written application) any attempt to do so close to the dwellings will likely require parking on a footway.*

4. OFF STREET PARKING PLACES ORDER AMENDMENT MBC consultation

After considering MBC’s proposals to amend car parking fees members agreed a response.

It was felt that the proposed increase in parking fees, for any stay over one hour, would have a detrimental impact on the businesses in the Town Centre as shoppers would opt to go to out of town shopping areas where there is free parking. It was considered that the decrease in fees for less than one hour’s stay would be of no real benefit to shoppers.

Residents in the north of Boxley Parish already gravitate towards Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre where there is free parking and towards the Medway Towns where there is now going to be considerably cheaper car parking charges.

Should MBC go ahead with the proposed fee changes it is suggested that figures are rounded down to 10 pence amounts as people are less likely to have 5 pence pieces to use in machines.

5. Next Meeting

Next full environment meeting 12 March 2018 at Beechen Hall commencing at 7:30pm.

Meeting closed at 8.57 pm.

Signed as a correct record of the proceedings.

Chairman Date