

DC/20/05183- Chilton Woods

Since the committee report was published several updated consultation responses were received, listed as follows:

Chilton Parish Council:

Object. 1- application is premature as design code has not been agreed and government have issued a draft Model Design Code and Guidance Notes for Design Code, 2- construction access shown on plans runs adjacent to County Wildlife Site, 3- infrastructure application is not outside of the considerations of the design code, 4- full landscaping details for the entire site should be submitted, 5- no notification on the discharge of conditions applications, 6- construction management plan should be agreed now not via condition 7- Arboricultural impact assessment is misleading, 8- question the credibility and reliability of other assessments submitted to support the application.

Great Waldingfield Parish Council:

Object. No information has been given on the construction access.

SCC Minerals and Waste:

Holding objection. Borehole and grading analysis should be carried out prior to determination to determine if there are any economically viable minerals to extract.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust:

Holding objection. 1- CEMP should be produced now to show access route, 2- concerned that vegetation being trimmed may affect the county wildlife site, 3- license is required from Natural England to mitigate impacts on Great Crested Newts.

These comments should be read in conjunction with the explanation and detail provided within the committee report and full consultee comments, which can be viewed online.

In the interests of transparency, the following email was sent from the Chief Planning Officer to the chair of Chilton Parish Council:

----- Original message -----

From: Philip Isbell <Philip.Isbell@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk>

Date: 03/03/2021 21:15 (GMT+00:00)

To: Val Hart <valhartofchilton@btinternet.com>

Cc: "Clive Arthey (Cllr)" <Clive.Arthey@babbergh.gov.uk>, "Margaret Maybury (Cllr)" <Margaret.Maybury@babbergh.gov.uk>, "Elisabeth Malvisi (Cllr)" <Elisabeth.Malvisi@babbergh.gov.uk>, Ian De Prez <ian.deprez@westsuffolk.gov.uk>, Steven Stroud <Steven.Stroud@babberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk>

Subject: Re: Planners and parish liaison re Chilton Woods

Dear Valerie

With apologies for the delay I have now given your meeting proposal thought.

As you may be aware we do not normally advise any Parish or stakeholder when an application will be going to Committee for the simple reason that the publication of the agenda is that notice and in practice there are so many variables which may lead to an application not being reported that is simply not realistic to give anything more than a general indication. Councillors have no special advantage in notification of committee timing as again it would be improper to raise undue expectations either way.

The management of expectation should thus be assisted by clarity in the publicity and consultation timetable. Once that has concluded any application may be foreseeably reported to Committee and it is prudent for any Parish Council or stakeholder to ensure that they have made comment in good time so that this may reasonably be reported within the body of the case report and may more readily reviewed by Committee Members when the report is read. In my opinion a Parish Council invited to comment would be alive to this potential for reporting, once the consultation period has passed, as a matter of alertness and interest. I suggest that keeping in touch with the case officer can provide the best confidence of what is likely and I have always recommended this in Parish training sessions.

I gather that my case officer advised your Clerk that her report on the current application DC/20/05183 would be due on 24th February when she emailed your Clerk on 15th February. I realise that this email followed an exchange in which your Clerk had requested until 12 March to comment but given that the application was valid on 14 November 2020 and due for decision, not simply hearing at committee, by 18 March I believe that the District Council has given the Parish Council reasonable opportunity to consider and comment upon these Reserved Matters. I think it reasonable to assume that your Clerk kept yourself and Parish Councillors informed. With that in mind I consider that the approach to community consultation followed here has been consistent with the expectations upon the planning authority including in our Statement of Community Involvement.

I note that it is important that authorities continue to provide the best service possible in these stretching times and prioritise decision-making to ensure the planning system continues to function, especially where this will support the local economy. There is always a careful balance to draw

between consultation and timely decision making in the interests of economic activity. From what I have seen I hold that the District Councils approach in this case has drawn that balance appropriately.

It is unusual, in my experience, to receive a request to meet so late in the process of planning consideration of an application when formal publicity and consultation is under way and Committee consideration is in prospect. I cannot personally recall a similar such request for a Councillor and Parish meeting of this nature at this point in the processing of an application. Such proposals are fraught with complexity, as I would hope you understand, if the planning decision making process is not to be brought into question. Requests made outside office hours also pose a practical challenge as they cannot be responded to comprehensively without almost inevitable delay.

You will recognise that all parties to a planning matter may expect impartiality and that this should be both upheld and be seen to be upheld. No matter the scale of an application public confidence is safeguarded by certainty that the planning process is, and is seen to be, impartial. Where Councillors may be invited to a meeting which is not public I am confident you will appreciate that this could well be perceived as lacking transparency and impartiality no matter how sincere the intent.

Lobbying, as I understand it, could include interest groups seeking to influence a decision and, in my opinion, neither Parishes nor Districts for that matter are immune from perceptions that in any given matter they may wish to achieve a preferred outcome. Lobbying is recognised as a normal part and parcel of the political process and in my view therefore the question of raising local concerns about planning matters can be transparently achieved through the medium of a planning committee hearing. I believe that planning committee is the right and proper place in which those concerns can be ventilated to the decision making body.

You have expressed concerns that issues and concerns have been raised frequently at the working group. I have not attended all of those meetings and I am not convinced that the concerns you describe have been so readily apparent as you suggest. The point for me is not so much that those concerns exist but that the present request to meet and discuss them has come so late in the day when, in my opinion, it cannot but appear to undermine the impartiality of the planning process so close to the foreseeable hearing of an application at Planning Committee. Even the perception of this would be troubling to the local planning authority.

Better in my opinion for these issues and concerns to be heard in the public forum of planning committee where Councillors may instruct Officers as to their reasonable wishes.

As regards speaking time at Committee I shall raise the matter with our Governance team for discussion with the Committee Chairman.

Regards

Philip Isbell

Chief Planning Officer

Sustainable Communities

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