
PLANNING WORKING GROUP

MINUTES of the Meeting held on Land North of Lower Road, Eastchurch on Tuesday, 4 April 2023 from 10.08 am - 11.08 am.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Tim Gibson (Chair), James Hall, Peter Marchington, Ken Rowles, Paul Stephen and Tony Winckless.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Andy Byrne, Kellie MacKenzie and Carly Stoddart.

APOLOGIES: Councillors James Hunt, Ben J Martin and Tim Valentine.

802 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

803 2.2 21/505041/OUT LAND NORTH OF LOWER ROAD, EASTCHURCH

The Chair welcomed the Applicant's Agents, members of the public, Members and officers to the meeting.

The Council's Planning Consultant (Major Projects) introduced the outline application which was for 63 dwellings and all necessary supporting infrastructure including internal access roads, footpaths and parking, open space and landscaping, drainage, utilities and service infrastructure works at Land North of Lower Road, Eastchurch. The Planning Consultant explained that the item had been deferred for a site meeting following issues raised at the Planning Committee meeting on 9 March 2023 that concerns raised by Eastchurch Parish Council and local residents had not been addressed.

The Planning Consultant said that whilst the development was outside of the defined boundary of Eastchurch, officers view was that it was a sustainable development. Officers also considered the development would not have a negative impact on the landscape and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) considered the site had a low-medium susceptibility to change.

The Planning Consultant reported that Kent County Council (KCC) Highways and Transportation raised no objection, subject to conditions.

Parish Councillor Mike Brown representing Eastchurch Parish Council, objected to the application and raised the following points: Eastchurch was the only 'proper' village left on the Isle of Sheppey and should be protected; this would be an overdevelopment of Eastchurch; the proposed access was in a dangerous location with poor sightlines; concerned that it would lead to more development and ultimately result in Eastchurch being joined with the Kingsbury Manor estate; the village of Eastchurch already had a shortage of GPs, had no dentists and experienced issues with water supply, sewage and powercuts; and the infrastructure could not support further development.

Local residents spoke against the application and raised points which included:

- What provision had been made to protect and relocate the barn owls, newts, slow worms and other wildlife?;
- had the impact of light pollution from the site been considered in terms of potential harm to bats and other wildlife?;
- the developer had a responsibility to protect the wildlife;
- concerned that KCC Highways and Transportation raised no objection, had they carried out a traffic count on Lower Road?;
- the development would be detrimental to the local streetscene;
- the important village gap needed to be protected to maintain the separation of Eastchurch and the Kingsbury Manor estate;
- would cause demonstrable harm to the landscape;
- any additional housing in Eastchurch would adversely impact the already pressured infrastructure and local amenities in Eastchurch;
- Lower Road was already not able to support the amount of traffic coming into and from the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey especially during the summer months;
- Lower Road was an accident blackspot and the proposed development would make that worse;
- emergency vehicles already had difficulty accessing Eastchurch and the proposed development would exacerbate this;
- Lower Road was already heavily congested and gridlocked during peak hours;
- supported the designation of brownfield sites in Queenborough for development but not in greenfield sites such as this one;
- concerned the proposed community garden and designated arable land would eventually be built on;
- traffic into Eastchurch was worse and much heavier than it was five years ago;
- the development was unacceptable due to the impact it would have on Lower Road;
- speeding vehicles through Eastchurch was an issue and the proposed access to the development would be very dangerous;
- Lower Road was the only route to and from the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey and also served three large prisons;
- Eastchurch already hosted the largest number of holidaymakers on the Isle of Sheppey and the road network was not adequate;
- it was dangerous to cross the high street due to speeding traffic;
- this would have an adverse impact on the structure of village life and social cohesion;
- considered Eastchurch should be treated as a “special case” and be protected from development;
- this would result in the village losing its identity;
- how was it fair that local residents could not get permission for small extensions and yet big housing developers could get permission for large estates;

- concerned that the houses would not be occupied by local people and that housing associations from London would buy-up the proposed dwellings if they could not be sold;
- concerned that if this application was approved it would lead to further development;
- the only mitigation measures proposed were moving the bus stop and planting a few trees, there was nothing in respect of highways;
- urged the Planning Committee to refuse the application and protect Eastchurch; and
- understood that the 12-month occupancy request of holiday homes on the Isle of Sheppey had been refused primarily due to traffic concerns.

The Planning Consultant reported that both an ecological assessment and transport assessment had been carried out and suitable conditions to mitigate the impact were proposed. She said that conditions in terms of protecting wildlife could be worded to ensure they were more robust.

The Applicant's Agent, spoke in support of the application. He outlined the benefits of the development which included: it would provide much needed housing in the area; open space; a transport mobility hub; new footpath and relocation of the existing bus-stop to a more suitable location; hedgerows would be reinstated; and landscaping. The Agent said that the scheme proposed different types of housing including bungalows which would meet current accessibility standards, and that there would be a net biodiversity gain. In response to a question from a resident, the Agent said there was no specific covenant stating that the properties were only for local residents.

In response to a question from a Member, the Planning Consultant indicated where the Public Rights of Way were located on the site and advised that the LVIA acknowledged that people using the footpaths outside of the site would not stick to the definitive footpaths as was observed by Members during the site visit.

Members toured the site with officers and the agents.

Chair

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel