

APPLICATION NO: 25/0210/OUT

LOCATION: LAND AT PRESTBURY ROAD, MACCLESFIELD

PROPOSAL: Outline planning permission (with all matters reserved except site access) for residential development (Use Class C3) comprising of new dwellings, public open space, hard and soft landscaping, and associated infrastructure and works

ADDITIONAL REPRESENTATIONS / CONSULTATIONS

Representations have been received from an objector representing the 'Ashfield Drive', 'Prestbury Road', and 'Bollinbarn and Bollinbrook' residents' groups. The further objection requests that the application be deferred or refused on the basis that the Agenda Report contains procedural and evidential shortcomings which would prevent Members from being able to make an informed decision. The grounds for objection and deferral are summarised below:

- Access is a non-reserved matter - safety and access issues not addressed.
- The agenda report fails to bring to the Members' attention critical issues (pedestrian provision, visibility splays, bus stop conflicts) highlighted by highway professional objectors and an independent highways report and obstructed sight lines, unsafe pedestrian provision, below absolute minimum design standards omission of key junctions, and under-reporting of queue lengths
- The pedestrian/cycle access at Abbey Road is not secured and cannot yet be determined.
- Condition 3 requires access to be built in accordance with the current drawing, thereby locking in defects
- Housing supply position misrepresented – report states that the borough-wide housing land supply is 3.8-year supply. However, analysis of the latest Cheshire East Housing Supply annexes demonstrate that Macclesfield has a 5.7-year supply.
- Public representations marginalised - Almost 500 detailed objections have been compressed into a brief bullet list in the report, without engagement with their substance.
- The ARUP Green Belt Assessment, adopted as part of the Local Plan, found this site makes a Major Contribution to historic town setting. The officer report downgrades this to "Moderate" without solid transparent reasoning.
- Key objections from Cheshire East Officers (Landscape and Heritage) are not included.
- No Ancient Woodland Impact Assessment has been undertaken; buffer adequacy is unknown - CE's Principal Ecology Officer advises that "...planning consent must not be granted until the potential effects of the proposed development upon the adjacent woodland have been fully assessed and considered".

- The volume of objections and above issues require a recasting and rebalance of weight to various considerations

Additional representations have been received requesting that statements be read out in lieu of being able to speak at the meeting of Strategic Planning Board. These statements cover the following:

- The development would dramatically worsen existing traffic congestion and pose new safety hazards
- There have been four crashes near the site
- The gradient of Prestbury road means that vehicles speed and come round the bend too fast
- It's not safe to cross the road nor leave during rush hour periods
- The creation of extensive impermeable surfaces—via tarmac and concrete—would greatly elevate the flood risk
- The proposed development would have a deeply detrimental effect on the amenity and privacy of neighbouring residents
- Macclesfield District General Hospital is not a trauma centre and therefore any accidents involving children requiring an ambulance will require transfer to the nearest children's trauma unit 16 miles away
- Air quality will be made worse harming children walking to school
- None of the extensive range of objections raised at consultation are directly addressed
- The recommendation is weighted in favour of statements from the applicant
- Providing access to the riverside park, does not justify the loss of so much valuable Green Belt and agricultural land

NHS East Cheshire Trust – a letter of support has been received from the East Cheshire NHS Trust. They support the application on the basis that the proposal will provide affordable homes for their workforce located within close proximity to their sites including walking distance of Macclesfield District General Hospital, which aligns and supports the delivery of their workforce strategy.

The applicant's agent has commented on the Agenda Report with respect to Biodiversity Net Gain, heritage impact, the S106 Heads of Terms, highways contributions, public open space, affordable housing and education.

OFFICER COMMENT

Access and Highways

The independent Highways Report / Transport Statement submitted by objectors has been reviewed by the Council's Head of Strategic Infrastructure (HSI - Highways). The HSI has confirmed that the findings of the report do not raise any significant issues that would result in a 'severe' impact on the highway network or safety issues that would warrant a refusal of the detailed access proposals.

Whilst objectors have stated that condition number 4 recommended on page 39 of the Agenda Reports Pack should not be imposed, this is required given that access is a detailed matter for consideration and approval at this stage. Construction in accordance with the detail is required to ensure that the access achieves the required safety standard that the HSI has determined is suitable and acceptable for this development.

Housing Land Supply

Objectors have asserted that the settlement of Macclesfield has a housing land supply of 5.7 years. This is an incorrect methodology for calculating housing land supply as it is not calculated at settlement level. The housing requirement (standard method) is a Borough wide calculation and is currently at 3.8 years.

The local plan settlement hierarchy set out in CELPS Policy PG 2 categorises settlements into four tiers: principal towns, key service centres, local service centres and other settlements and rural areas. Macclesfield is one of the two principal towns in the borough, the other being Crewe. By their nature and size, it is expected that they will accommodate a larger proportion of new development over the plan period where 'significant development will be encouraged to support their revitalisation' and to maximise use of existing infrastructure. This proposal aligns with this.

Green Belt/Grey Belt

On page 11 at paragraph 9.9. of the Agenda Report, it is acknowledged that during the Council's Green Belt Assessment Update, the parcel of land that the site subject of this application falls within made a "significant contribution to the five Green Belt purposes, taken together". However, this assessment was undertaken prior to the revisions to the NPPF and NPPG relating to the introduction of Grey Belt and the associated tests to determine such. The three tests for whether the site strongly contributes to the following purposes are:

- (a) is – 'to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas'.
- (b) is – 'to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another'
- (d) is – 'to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns'

Applying the tests and guidance to establish whether the site constitutes Grey Belt, it is considered that the site does not 'strongly' contribute to the above for the reasons rehearsed on page 11-16 of Agenda Report.

With specific reference to purpose (d), the historic setting of the town, "it's separated from the historic aspects by existing development and the proposed illustrative layout has included a generous green buffer at the mouth of the development where it interacts with the closest views in and out of the conservation area". The provision of up to 200 on this site would not injure the historic setting of the town.

Ecology

The requirement for an Ancient Woodland Impact Assessment would be addressed by condition number 8 recommended on page 39 of the Agenda Report. This would require the Impact Assessment to be undertaken prior to the submission of the Reserved Matters, so that it can inform the detailed layout and landscaping and provide and inform the requisite buffer with the woodland.

Members are advised that there is an error in the Agenda Report Summary on page 2 and paragraphs 9.138 and 10.9. The report incorrectly identifies a Biodiversity Net Gain of 130.3% for area-based habitats. This should read +13.03%, the equivalent of 12.92 habitat units.

Applicant's Comments

The applicant's agent has requested that the trigger points for payment of the Highways Commuted Sum be clarified and amended. In the Agenda Report on page 38, the trigger for the £600,000 towards public transport provision (bus services) is detailed as being required on 'commencement of development'. This is unreasonable and so it agreed and proposed that this be amended to the following:

- First £200,000 to be paid upon first occupation
- Second £200,000 to be paid 12 months after first occupation
- Third £200,000 to be paid 24 months after first occupation

For the avoidance of doubt, the commuted sums relevant to healthcare, education, and indoor sport and recreation will be calculated on a formula basis within the s106 legal agreement dictated by the final number of houses.

The applicant has also enquired about the tenure split of the affordable housing. It is officer's view that this must accord with the Council's current tenure split of 65% / 35% split to realise the full benefit of the affordable housing provision.

Other Matters

Representations have been reviewed, considered and summarised in the report. The relevant sections of the report dealing with the subject of issues raised explain why the proposal accords with policy, or where it does not, why other matters outweigh any identified harm. The detailed representations are available to view on the file, and it is not the purpose of a report to include them verbatim.

The views of the Landscape, Heritage and Design officers are commentated on within the Agenda Report. These are internal consultees within the Council's Planning Service (not external consultees) and are normally reported in this way.

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE as per the recommendation on pages 38-40 of the Agenda Reports Pack, subject to amendment of the trigger point for payment of the Highways Commuted Sum as above.