

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLANNING GROUP HELD ON 16th JANUARY 2023 IN THE MAIN HALL OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRE AT 7.00PM.

PRESENT: Cllrs Davies (Chairman), R Lewin, T Lewin, Summers & Waters

APOLOGIES: Cllr. Josephson

NOT PRESENT: Cllr. Spackman

IN ATTENDANCE: The Clerk & Asst Clerk. County Cllr. Taylor, District Cllr. Patterson-Vanegas, District Cllr. Millward & 15 members of the public

P1/23 PUBLIC QUESTIONS:

Simon Waters, Gareth Anthony and David Pinnegar voiced their objections to the proposals at Ashdown House.

- Pressure on already stretched infrastructure
- Junction on an already dangerous corner
- Only a bridlepath from the Hartfield Road
- Ashdown House is a very important architectural building

Jerome Stuart spoke in objection to the Fairfax Development proposal.

- Resubmission of a previous application to which the Parish Council objected
- Drainage suggestions are not sustainable
- Safety of access
- The suggested moving of the pinch point is very dangerous
- There has been no consultation to change the traffic calming
- Fairfax claimed to have reached an agreement with Highways – but Highways have no record of this.

Julia Mazur said that the traffic report was incorrect.

Sarah Waters explained that she lived opposite the proposed new pinch point – there had been no consultation and it would make it extremely dangerous to exit her driveway. There was also an increased risk of water run off.

P2/23 APOLOGIES

Cllr. Josephson due to holiday.

P3/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21st November 2022 were agreed as a true record.

P4/23 TO DECLARE ANY INTERESTS PERTAINING TO THE ITEMS BELOW

Cllr. Waters declared a personal interest in Application No. WD/ 2022/2372/MAJ & WD/2022/2373/LB as his family own the surrounding land.

P5/23 DATES OF NEXT WEALDEN PLANNING COMMITTEE NORTH MEETING.

- 19th January 2023 at 10.00am NOTED.

P6/23 REPORT FROM DISTRICT & COUNTY COUNCILLORS ON PLANNING MATTERS

District Cllr. Patterson-Vanegas explained that the Local Plan was still under discussion. Government announcements could impact the housing targets in which case the Local Plan would need to be revised. The Council would probably be under purdah at that time, so it probably would not be out for consultation until after the local elections in May.

District Cllr. Millward explained that both the applications for Ashdown House and the Fairfax development were in her ward so she would speak about them at Wealden meetings.

County Cllr. Taylor said that East Sussex were mainly concerned with road safety of the 2 applications under discussion. She was talking with officers and a report had not been done. She would relay the concerns of the community. There had been no consultation.

P7/23 DECISIONS TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The list had been previously circulated and was NOTED

P8/23 WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL – PLANNING DECISIONS RECEIVED

The list had been previously circulated and was NOTED. Cllr. R Lewin stated that the response from Wealden on WD/2022/2563/F did not correctly reflect the Parish Council's concerns.

P9/23 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Application Number & Address	Proposals	Comments
WD/2022/2372/MAJ & WD/2022/2373/LB ASHDOWN HOUSE SCHOOL, HARTFIELD ROAD, FOREST ROW	RESIDENTIAL USE AND PARTIAL REDEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER ASHDOWN HOUSE SCHOOL, INCLUDING 1) PARTIAL DEMOLITION OF EXISTING ACCRESTIONS, AND EXTENSION, ALTERATION AND CONVERSION OF ASHDOWN HOUSE TO RESIDENTIAL USE; 2) DEMOLITION AND PARTIAL DEMOLITION, EXTENSION AND REPLACEMENT OF DETACHED FREE-STANDING BUILDINGS FOR RESIDENTIAL USE; 3) ERECTION OF DWELLINGHOUSES; 4) RETENTION, REFURBISHMENT AND REORGANISATION OF EXISTING DWELLINGS. ALONG WITH ASSOCIATED HARD AND SOFT LANDSCAPING AND ASSOCIATED WORKS	The Parish Councils response is appended to these minutes.
WD/2022/3268/F LAND SOUTH OF HARTFIELD ROAD, FOREST ROW	ERECTION OF 4 NO. NEW DETACHED DWELLINGS AND ASSOCIATED GARAGING. FORMATION OF A NEW ACCESS FROM HARTFIELD ROAD (RESUBMISSION OF PLANNING APPLICATION WD/2021/1916/F)	My Council's observations in respect of this application are as follows:- We object strongly to this proposal on the following grounds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is outside the development boundary. • The site is in AONB. • The site is in the 400m development exclusion zone surrounding the Ashdown Forest. • The increased risk of flooding. • The increased problems of drainage, including the proposal to pump water to neighbouring land. • The safety of the access. • It is an inappropriate development for the village. • The loss of trees (TPO's). <p>There have been no consultations (which are a legal requirement)</p>

		<p>regarding the proposed new pinch point.</p> <p>It was also noted that the documentation contains a lot of inconsistencies especially regarding trees.</p> <p>This development would change the landscape character of the AONB and the approach to Forest Row.</p> <p>There have been incorrect claims that ESCC Highways have agreed road layout alterations – which we understand they have not.</p>
WD/2022/3296/F RIDGELEY, CHAPEL LANE, FOREST ROW	SINGLE STOREY REAR EXTENSION TO LOWER GROUND FLOOR, ADAPT EXISTING WINDOWS TO STUDY, NEW ENTRANCE PORCH CANOPY AND GARAGE OUTBUILDING	No objections to this proposal
WD/2022/3007/F SONGHURST, THORNHILL, ASHURST WOOD	REPLACE GARAGE ROOF AND DOORS; TO REPAIR AND UPGRADE	No objections to this proposal
WD/2022/3332/F OWLETT'S FARM, FLEUR COTTAGE, THORNHILL, ASHURST WOOD	ERECTION OF A SINGLE STOREY DETACHED DWELLING WITH BASEMENT AND CONVERSION OF EXISTING BUNGALOW TO FARM OFFICE/STORE	There was no planning notice displayed and although we have no objections in principle, we do not believe neighbours have been given an opportunity to comment.
WD/2023/0017/F ROWAN COTTAGE, PRIMROSE LANE, FOREST ROW	TWO STOREY SIDE EXTENSION	We have no objections as long as there are no neighbour objections.

P10/23 TO COMMENT ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER CIRCULATION OF AGENDA

Application Number & Address	Proposals	Comments

P11/23 CORRESPONDENCE

None

P12/23 ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION BY THIS COMMITTEE OR FULL COUNCIL

None

The meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Ashdown House Planning Application (the “Application”)

Comment

This Council will welcome a development proposal for this site, so long as it:

- Protects the integrity of the historically important building at its centre
- Has a realistic Transport Study
- Has appropriate traffic management on the long drive, which doubles as a bridleway extensively used by horses, pedestrians and cyclists, as well as those other homes and businesses who share it
- Has a safe junction with Hartfield Road
- Makes use of existing assets, rather than demolishing them
- Protects important trees
- Provides a level of affordable housing and/or a S106 agreement that will be applied to benefit this Parish

Unfortunately, we feel as currently presented the Application falls far short on these, and therefore we object.

We comment further on some of these issues below.

The building

We understand that a view may be taken that, in the absence of anyone wishing to purchase the House as a single dwelling or hotel (as approved for Homestall Manor, a listed ex-boarding school in this Parish), the division of the House into flats is the only solution. However, in our view, this will result in significant damage, particularly due to the unsympathetic nature of the proposal. Pressure should be put on the developers for a better solution, as Wealden Planning did with Homestall.

Many of the 50+ comments on this application have commented on this aspect in detail, so we will not repeat them here.

The Transport Study

Again a significant cause of concern of our Parishioners.

The statement that this development will not result in any intensification of traffic is false, based as it is on deeply flawed assumptions regarding the number of day pupils at the school. For almost all its existence the school only accepted boarders but in the last few years, when pupil numbers had fallen by over 30% from the height, it sought to attract some day pupils, but with limited success.

In this regard, we do not accept any suggestion that the school could possibly reopen as a day school, resulting in even more traffic. Ashdown House closed partly because it was unable to attract sufficient day pupils, no doubt due to the strong competition from the successful private day/boarding schools very close by (Michael Hall, Brambletye and Cumnor House).

The drive

The drive is a long, single track lane with raised grass verges on either side and only two passing points. The verges are approximately a metre each, with either hedges or mostly lower arable fields (which form part of the Medway flood plain) beyond. We understand that the verges are not included in the right of way.

Given the above, the increased intensification of traffic will require either a reduction in the size of the development or measures to ameliorate the severe impact on existing users, including the homes and businesses, and the bridleway. This application should be declined unless the developer can reach an agreement with, and pay for, further passing places. Additionally, the current informal connexion onto the Forest Way should be adopted by East Sussex Pathways, who may require a financial contribution, to avoid the added danger of horses and people on the old, narrow railway bridge over the Forest Way.

The junction

Many comments from our Parishioners have expressed their concern about how the Transport Study has assessed (or failed to assess), the impact on the junction of the drive with Hartfield Road. We support these comments and wish to add our further observations. It is not obvious from maps or photographs, but the junction from the drive is steep, very narrow down to and beyond the old railway bridge (and no passing points nearby). Most traffic will, from the development, be turning right towards a traffic calming point; those going to the development will come from that point and be unable to turn off the road onto the drive, causing a major pinch point.

Existing assets

We are disappointed that the developers have not made any effort to reach out to our community or use their existing assets to make their development part of the Village/Parish. Some attempt at this would, in our view, have eased this Application in making it part of the Village, rather than effectively a gated community on an island on the flood plain. The swimming pool used to be available to Forest Row Primary School; the theatre would be an asset to a Village that is highly artistic; and abandoning cricket/rugby/football fields to untended landscaping are all things that could embrace any development with its surrounds.

We were invited some time ago (prior to any any plans or proposals being offered) to meet with the developer, but declined at the time due to past bad experience when such meetings with other developers were misrepresented in subsequent applications. We very clearly stated our willingness to meet once they had a specific proposal. No further invitation was extended.

Trees

We require TPOs on a number of trees. We understand that there is no current intention to remove these but wish to have this formalised.

Affordable housing

We understand that developers may seek to avoid any obligation to provide affordable housing by entering into an S106 agreement, which this developer does blatantly. This Parish is in dire need of affordable housing. If Wealden is willing to accept such an agreement, which would be disappointing, the District should be prepared to use the proceeds for this purpose in this Parish.

In Conclusion

We understand that an English Heritage assessment is outstanding on the building. What we fail to understand, given the significance of the highways issues highlighted by this Council and our residents, is that we are legally required to make our Comments before seeing any East Sussex Highways report, other than their holding assessment.