

Minutes of the Withyham Parish Council **PLANNING COMMITTEE** meeting held at The Parish Office, Station Road, Groombridge on **14th August 2023** at 6.30pm

PRESENT: Cllrs Alan Gaukroger, Robert Gordon-James (Chair), Diana Kelly, Penny Lawne, Jill Pardey, Deviani Parekh-Jones.

In attendance: Debbie Siddle – Clerk
3 members of the public (to end of item 6.1)

Members of the public are encouraged to attend the meetings in person or via Zoom and there is a 10-minute opportunity at the start of the meeting for them to address the Planning Committee. There were three members of the public, all of which were present for agenda item 6.1.

The spokesperson commenting on WD/2022/2499/F read out the following presentation which was also provided to the Clerk electronically:

My family and I have lived in [the adjacent property] to the application site, for 12 years. Key points of objection:

Local Plan: *The proposal for Plots 1, 2 and 3 are OUTSIDE the Wealden District development boundary, contrary to Saved Policy GD2 (Development Boundaries) of the Wealden Local Plan 1998.*

This boundary line has been protected and upheld by Wealden District Council Planning for the last 66 years at least (oldest planning applications date back to 1957). All applications, without exception, for new dwellings beyond this boundary at Warren Drive and adjacent land (including [our property]), have been refused.

In the Proposed Submission Wealden Local Plan, August 2018, the Crowborough Development Boundary was moved to exclude the Warren entirely to safeguard its Arcadian and low-density character. The Plan stated: Obvious opportunities for infilling have been exhausted and further development here is likely to be detrimental to the more rural character as well as existing residential amenities. Secondly, significant parts of the Western edge of Crowborough are within 400m of the Ashdown Forest SPA, SAC and SSSI. In this boundary, it is not possible to mitigate the effects from residential development. These factors justify exclusion of this part of town from the development boundary.

The proposal would constitute an undesirable backland form of development and represent an unwarranted consolidation of development beyond the limits of the town.

Permitting the building of new housing beyond the established development boundary will set a dangerous precedent, one that will undermine the efforts made to protect the area's natural heritage, compromise the scenic views, degrade the natural beauty and erode the overall sense of place that makes this area so special.

Location/Environment: The proposed development is within the impact risk zone of influence of four statutory and one non-statutory protected sites: Statutory protected sites are Ashdown Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI 700m); Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC 700m); Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (700m) and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the North and West boundary. Non-statutory is it's within 0.5km of Crowborough Common SNCI. It is also within 80m of the Ashdown Forest Medieval Pale.

The environmental impact report is based on one site visit conducted in January and two bat visits later in the year and has provided a list of mitigations based on potential environmental damage due to the presence of habitats, hedgerows and trees of local importance. There are also records of common mammals, including hedgehogs and dormice with 2km. The badger information is redacted. They did not request access to our garden, where over the last 12 years we have encouraged wildlife with planting and bird feeding and created a wildlife corridor for multiple species including foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, deer, slow worms and snakes. We also have recorded evidence of an abundance of birds - including 4 on the British Trust for Ornithology's UK conservation red list: mistle thrush, house sparrow, yellowhammer and greenfinch, 6 on the amber list: tawny owls, wrens, song thrushes, bullfinches, dunnocks and whitethroats. We also have a great spotted woodpecker who visits our bird feeder along with tits, great tits and coal tits. I have no doubt that the building of Plots 2 and 3 will have a negative impact on this environment and the wildlife within and reduce the wildlife boundary of the forest.

Additionally, both Plots 2 and 3 cast huge shadows over the established garden at [our property] and put into deep shade carefully-sited trees, saplings, shrubs and plants. Even the applicant's own illustrations of the proposed properties have shown marked over-shadowing of our garden.

Character and appearance/design: The proposal conflicts with the aims of paragraphs 130 and 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that developments are sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting. The proposal would form an undesirable intrusion of development into a rural area.

The proposals for Plots 1, 2 and 3 do not follow the existing build lines of neighbouring properties, they are also outside the existing footprint within the plot.

The proposed development is in a cul-de-sac style, with shared vehicular access. This is completely alien to the rest of Fielden Road which consists of single dwellings within their own plots, surrounded by their own private gardens.

The plot space per property is much smaller than that of the neighbouring property.

Neighbouring properties/visual amenity/loss of privacy Amenities definition is: The pleasantness or attractiveness of a place: With reference to the National Planning Policy Framework point 15. no176 Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

The buildings would have a detrimental impact upon residential amenities of the locality and, contrary to the Wealden Design Guide point 2.8 and 4.3 would contribute negatively to the quality of the skyline. The outlook from Fielden

Road would be changed completely from a pleasant and attractive rural scene of AONB and green fields and skies to 2 intrusive, overdominant houses in Plot 2 and 3.

[our property] is designed so its principal rooms all take advantage of the Westerly far-reaching green fields and tree views over the AONB and Ashdown Forest, a sightline uninterrupted by any buildings or lights. Plots 2 and 3 will sit squarely in the middle of this outlook, changing the character and charm of our home, creating a severe visual impact on a private property that effects the residential amenity of [our property]. The outlook, instead of green, will be the brick sides of houses. As the applicant has themselves quoted: Homes are the building blocks of our communities. They affect our health, our wealth, and our opportunities for happiness.' The green outlook of [our property] has a significant bearing on the health and happiness of the family who live there. Our privacy will also be compromised - Plot 3 has a roofline of windows that directly overlook our house and garden because the garden at [our property] slopes downwards towards Plot 3. Plot 2 has windows to two sides of the property that directly overlook our house and garden.

Over-dominance on existing properties: *Wealden Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2008)*

10.3 Scale, form and massing - When maximising the scale of new development, care needs to be taken to ensure that: The scale and massing does not lead to over-dominant buildings in inappropriate locations, for example, visually exposed ridges and infill sites.

Both Plot 2 and 3 are imposing buildings that are butted right up against the South and West boundary lines of [our property] to the extent that the property is overshadowed, overlooked, hemmed in on two sides. Plot 2 is 15% bigger than the neighbouring property [our property] and Plot 3, in the direct sightline of [our property], 23% bigger, which makes them even more overbearing.

Contrary to principle 4 of the Wealden Design Guide, the proposal removes the privacy over [our property] and its garden - both are overlooked by 2 sides of Plot 2 and the roof of plot 3.

Light pollution: *The Wealden Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document states that the introduction of urban elements, such as lighting, has a detrimental impact on an area's rural character and the impact of lighting on views from and into the surrounding countryside, especially Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be considered. Fielden Road is a private road with no street lights. The development borders an intrinsically dark landscape of AONB where new lighting from Plots 2 and 3 would be conspicuously out of keeping and materially alter existing local nocturnal light levels. From the road and nearby residential properties, the lights from Plots 2*

and 3 would be glaring and undermine the enjoyment of the countryside and night sky.

From an ecological perspective, the applicant's ecology report confirms extensive records of light-averse species in the local area and states that all light spill upon surrounding trees and hedgerows should be avoided. This is unavoidable from Plots 2 and 3, particularly plot 3 - its rear features large

expanses of vertical glass which when lit from within will shine light directly across the landscape.

The Design Guide also states the use of rooflights should be restricted. Plot 3 has 25 roof lights, 7 of which directly face West into the AONB with no interruption from trees and hedging. This would adversely impact local species and risk habitat fragmentation.

Commenting on an historical potential application for an additional house in [our property]'s boundary, Doug Moss, Development Management, Wealden District Council, concluded: Lighting would be inappropriate and unacceptable in this location.'

Noise Pollution: *[our property] exists in the quiet surrounds of the AONB. Noise comes from wildlife - owls, foxes, birds etc and the occasional dog bark or car passing by. The road is a private, unmade road and so has minimal traffic. Warren Drive was a nursing home. The residents, as can be imagined, were not noisy. We were never disturbed by any noise from Warren Drive and have never put in any noise complaints in the 12 years we have lived next door to the property. The proposal would likely bring 4 new families to the site with multiple cars, pets, deliveries etc which would certainly add to the noise pollution of this tranquil area.*

Problems with application: *There are factual design errors in the 3D plans which means some give a misleading impression of space, size and light. There are factual design errors in the plans. The roofline on the proposed side elevation of Plot 3 facing [our property] on one plan has 4 roof lights and a chimney. While on the roof plan there are 6 roof lights and no chimney.*

Traffic movements: Appendix 1 is missing, so cannot comment on accuracy.

We do not need more 4 and 5 bedroom houses in Crowborough. A search on property website RightMove for 4+ bedroom properties in Crowborough threw up 103 results. This does not include all the properties currently being built in Crowborough.

We support the demolition of the extension to the existing building at Warren Drive and the return of it to its historical original use of a residential dwelling as illustrated in the plans. This is the only part of the application we can support.

The residents also stated that planning notices had only been displayed very recently.

1. ENQUIRE WHETHER ANYONE PRESENT INTENDS TO FILM, PHOTOGRAPH AND/OR RECORD THE MEETING – none.

2. APOLOGIES – None**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – None****4. MINUTES****4.1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31st July 2023 - Agreed**

002546 RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31st July 2023 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman.

4.2 MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM THESE MINUTES - None**5. ENFORCEMENT - None**

6. PLANNING APPLICATIONS
COMMENTS TO BE RETURNED TO WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

6.1 WD/2022/2499/F WARREN DRIVE REST HOME, FIELDEN ROAD, CROWBOROUGH, TN6 1TP Description: REDEVELOPMENT OF THE EXISTING RETIREMENT HOME SITE COMPRISING PART DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDING AND REINSTATEMENT OF ORIGINAL DETACHED DWELLING TOGETHER WITH THREE NEW DETACHED DWELLINGS WITHIN THE SITE BOUNDARY. Expiry date for comments: 22 August 2023. Link to documents on web:

<https://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=159493>

Committee members thanked the spokesperson for their presentation. Two members of the Committee had undertaken a site visit and agreed that, if they were in the same position as the adjacent neighbours they would have valid concerns about visual intrusion and being overseen by two plots. They concurred with the other material considerations mentioned in the presentation.

The Committee felt that the proposal is oversized and overly dominant for the footprint of the curtilage. They understood the neighbours concerns about being overlooked and overshadowed. The roof line of one of the plots is high and prominent, and the visual impact imposing. They agreed that the new plots were inappropriately sized and their layout on the site could be better so as not to affect the neighbours, and that more 4 and 5 bedroom properties are not needed.

The Committee felt that the application was poor and that arguments within it were unconvincing, for example sufficient reason was not given for building outside of the Development Line, transport movements appear underestimated and the rationale to build because the nursing home had failed is weak.

The Committee would support the demolition of the extension as the existing property is architecturally interesting.

In particular, the Committee felt that weight must be given to this proposal being outside the Development Line, that it borders the AONB, the effect on the neighbouring property, the overdominance of the proposal, its impact on flora and fauna and negative affects of lighting (Dark Skies Policy).

The Committee strongly objects to the application for the reasons given by the Committee and those within the neighbours' presentation.

The members of the public left the meeting.

7. TO NOTE AND AGREE ANY ADDITIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NOTICE OF APPEAL ISSUED UNDER THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

LAND TO REAR OF BADGERS RUN, WITHYHAM ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9QT Proposal: 4 NO. DWELLINGS: 2 NO. PAIRS OF THREE-BEDROOM SEMI-DETACHED HOUSES. ASSOCIATED PARKING AND LANDSCAPING (WD/2020/2460). Planning Inspectorate Ref: APP/C1435/W/23/3320568

The Committee had previously made comments on WD/2020/2460 and had nothing further to add to theirs or the residents' comments recorded in the Parish Council minutes of 11th January 2021 which had been submitted to Wealden.

8. APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AFTER THE AGENDA BY THE CLERK - None

002547 **RESOLVED** that the observations on the planning issues detailed in these minutes be submitted to the Planning Authority.

**9. PLANNING DECISIONS FOR NOTING – All Noted
APPROVED**

WD/2023/1415/F RETENTION OF EXISTING ANCILLARY RESIDENTIAL BARN AS ANCILLARY ACCOMMODATION TO THE COTTAGE THE COTTAGE, NORTH OF 1 SCHOOL HILL HOUSE. WITHYHAM ROAD, WITHYHAM, TN7 4BE

WD/2023/1552/F CONVERSION OF EXISTING LOFT SPACE TO ADDITIONAL ACCOMMODATION WITH PROVISION OF DORMER WINDOW TO REAR ELEVATION. ST QUENTIN, STATION ROAD, WITHYHAM, TN7 4BT

WD/2023/1178/F DEMOLITION OF SINGLE-STOREY ATTACHED GARAGE/UTILITY. TWO-STOREY SIDE EXTENSION TO CREATE KITCHEN/DINING ROOM AT GROUND FLOOR AND ADDITIONAL BEDROOM WITH EN-SUITE AT FIRST FLOOR. NEW DETACHED TIMBER GARAGE/WORKSHOP AT FRONT OF PROPERTY. GREEN TREES, WITHYHAM ROAD, GROOMBRIDGE, TN3 9QT

10. MATTERS OF URGENT IMPORTANCE FOR NOTING OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA - None

11. DATE OF MEETING - to note that the date of the next meeting is on **Monday 4th September at 6.30pm** to be held at The Parish Office unless otherwise notified by the agenda

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm