

BICKNOLLER PARISH COUNCIL – 3 FEBRUARY 2020

An extraordinary meeting of the Council was held in the Village Hall at 7.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors C Warren, J Anderson, S Dowding, A Harrison, and M Rawle.

IN ATTENDANCE: 15 members of the public and Mrs C Richards (Clerk),

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Apologies for absence were received from Parish Councillors K Ogilvie-White and Mrs C Skinner, Somerset County Councillor Mrs C Lawrence, District Councillors A H Trollope-Bellew and M Rigby.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None.

3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2020 & MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 January 2020 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

4. PLANNING APPLICATION 3/01/20/003 – LAND AT BYWAYS, 19 CHURCH LANE, BICKNOLLER, TA4 4EL

Proposal: Erection of 5 (No.) dwellinghouses with access and associated development.

The Chairman asked members of the public if they wished to speak on this item. Eight spoke against the application. Reasons included unsafe access on a blind bend; siting, appearance and density of dwellings contrary to the general nature of the village; concerns about the natural habitat and wildlife of the site, including the proposed site being in a County Wildlife Site; the drainage of this marshy site, and what could happen as a result of development; detrimental effects to the AONB, and potential spoiling of amenity.

After listening to the comments of members of the public and having discussed the application, the Parish Council resolved to object to this planning application on the following grounds –

In 1979 permission was refused for the erection of two dwellings on the whole field and that an appeal was 'dismissed having regard to the proposed access in that scheme direct to Church Lane' [see document T/APP/H3320/A/93/219352/P7, dated 12 May 1993 dismissing application 3/01/92/023].

That all subsequent applications have proposed coming through Parsons Close, and that comments from Highways have added in their letters "2. No vehicular or pedestrian access shall be made from the site direct to Church Street" [see letters HT/PA/3/01/KCD dated 29 December 1993 and 15 November 1994].

If the access was not suitable for two dwellings, then it cannot be so for five dwellings.

The Parish Council felt that refusal 2 on the previous planning application (3/01/18/005) had not been overcome as, even though there are fewer houses, the development will still cover most of the field. The housing is still too dense for a rural village. Refusal 2 states 'The proposed development by virtue of its position the edge of the village and its intended scale will result in harm to the visual appearance and character of this part of the village and the wider AONB in which the village is situated. The proposed development will be visible from close to and from the nearby high land to the east. The development will harm the setting, character and appearance of the village in the landscape as well the wider character and beauty of the area thereby undermining its statutory purpose and designation. The proposal is considered to be contrary to the Local plan policies SV1, NH5 and NH14 as well as paragraphs 7, 115 and 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework

(2012) On this occasion there are no overriding matters of public interest that warrant approval of this major development in a nationally designated landscape'.

Siting and Appearance. WSC2016 POLICY SC1: HIERARCHY OF SETTLEMENTS states:

4. Development within or in close proximity (within 50 metres) to the contiguous built-up area of Minehead/Alcombe, Watchet, Williton and primary and secondary villages will only be considered where it can be demonstrated that:

In 4.a. 'It is well related to existing essential services and social facilities within the settlement'

In 4.b 'There is safe and easy pedestrian access to the essential services and social facilities within the settlement'

In 4c. 'It respects the historic environment and complements the character of the existing settlement'

In 4d. 'It does not generate significant additional traffic movements over minor roads to and from the national primary and country highway route network E. It does not harm the amenity of the area or the adjoining land uses. Development elsewhere in the open countryside will be considered under Policy OC1'

Bicknoller is a relatively small village in a rural location that offers some basic local services, such as village hall, community shop and Church. Whilst they are not particularly far from the appeal site, the routes to these services and social facilities are narrow in parts, lack footways and/or street lightening. The limited range of the services and facilities that Bicknoller offers would conceivably necessitate regular access to essential services and facilities further afield. A bus route runs along the A358 providing a regular service to larger settlements, such as Taunton, Minehead and Williton. The closest bus stop to this site would involve walking or cycling along the narrow, unlit Church Lane. Although the distances between the site and the services/facilities in Bicknoller or to the A358 are not long, the nature of the routes would be a deterrent to walking along them on foot, particularly during darker winter months or in inclement weather. The location would limit opportunities to regularly access services and facilities by sustainable transport modes. The majority of journeys to schools, supermarkets and employment would be taken by private car trips. Therefore the site does not offer a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to whether there would be safe and easy pedestrian access to services and facilities. This is in conflict with Policies SD1, SC1 and TR2 of the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, Revised February 2019 that seeks to ensure development is sustainable and provides a safe built environment, with accessible services, and is located to maximise the attractiveness of modes of transport other than by the private car.

Safe access on a blind bend is not conducive to 4.b. A footpath/cycle path to Parsons Close may not always be used. The proposed footpath/cycle path into Parsons Close appears to show it will go through the trunks of at least one if not two trees which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

The style, height and density of the proposed housing is not in keeping with the character of the village and certainly not those nearby. The nearby dwellings are single storey. The design of these very large houses is strange such as all the roof lights, the triangular dormers, triangular windows in the gable ends and the central turret on some of the houses. Rooflights are included which is undesirable in an area close to the Exmoor National Park Dark Skies Policy. The houses are tall as they are really 3 storey houses as there are rooms in the roof, even though the Agent describes them as being 2 storeys, and would be out of keeping with the village character of single storied bungalows.

In addition, in the Flood Risk Assessment at paragraph 316 it states:

It is recommended that the Finished Floor Level (FFL) of the proposed dwellings are set 300 mm above existing ground levels. It is recommended that the proposed dwellings adjacent to the swale (Plots 3, 4 and 5) should also be located 300 mm above the top of bank of the swale, whichever is higher.

This will mean that the houses will be even more prominent in the landscape. Plots 3, 4 and 5 will have a 300 higher FFL thus making them even more prominent than Nos. 1 and 2, which are already well out-of-keeping with the surrounding area.

Due to the contours of the land to the north and east the plot is the channel for a large part of the runoff from the surrounding area. It is for that reason that the land is boggy and unsuitable.

Bicknoller is classified as a primary village where limited development is acceptable and where it can be demonstrated that the development will contribute to the wider sustainability benefits of the area. Limited development is defined as individual schemes of up to 10 houses providing about a 10% increase in the total number of dwellings over the Plan period (2016 to 2032) and is limited to about 30% in any five year period. At the start of the plan period, Bicknoller had 122 dwellings. This means that an additional 12 houses over the plan period can be approved/built. This also means that only 3.6 dwellings can be approved every 5 years.

Since November 2016, the following have been approved/built: Chilcombe House, Trendle Lane (3/01/16/004), Quantock Moor (3/01/15/011) and a barn conversion at Chatterwood (ABD/01/17/001). It is therefore argued that these need to be taken into account within the 3.6 house figure in the Plan period, therefore reducing the number of further houses in the 5 years from November 2016.

Appearance and siting was discussed in relation to WSC2016 and the current Village Design statement.

WSC2016, POLICY SV1: DEVELOPMENT AT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY VILLAGES
Development at primary and secondary villages should be designed to form an integral, harmonious addition to the settlement's existing character.

It was mentioned that WSC2016 went on to state:

'New development should create a sense of place with a distinctive character, which clearly demonstrates how it has responded to its local context.'

Also POLICY NH5: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER PROTECTION

'Within the identified landscape character areas, as shown in figure 2, development should be located and designed in such a way as to minimise adverse impact on the quality and integrity of that local landscape character area.'

Some communities have produced Village Design Statements which help to define the character of the locality and identify important local features.

Parish Councillors said that the village design statement should be referred to, especially: Village Design Statement: <https://www.bicknoller.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Village-Design-Statement.pdf>

Infilling has not enhanced the look of the village. Small plots, and houses with garages which occupy too great a proportion of their plot, are the main culprits

7.3 Any future development in the village should be critically examined to ensure the protection of the local environment and to avoid the destruction of wildlife.

7.12 Any new development/alteration should have regard to the (mainly) low density of buildings in the parish, and consequently the need for adequate space to be provided between buildings

7.13 In the light of 7.12 above, each planning application for a new development must state the size of the plot, the Percentage of the plot being built upon, and the distance to the closest boundary

7.14 In the light of 7.12 above, each planning application which changes the external dimensions of an existing building, must state the percentage of the plot that will be built upon and the distance to the closest boundary if the application is successful
7.16 The height and pitch of roofs should be in sympathy with surrounding buildings (4)
7.17 Developments/alterations should not interfere with existing culverts, streams, flood plains or land drainage. They should also be able to cope with the overflowing, or temporary, watercourses which result from extreme weather conditions. This is of benefit to both properties and wildlife.
7.18 Preserve the natural, winding character of parish lanes whilst ensuring that they can be safely negotiated

Parish Councillors did not think that the proposal reflected these design statement items or policy statements in WSC2016 at all.

The drainage of water on site and the nature of the ground was a concern and how development would have negative consequences.

POLICY CC6: WATER MANAGEMENT:

'Development that would have an adverse impact on: • the availability and use of existing water resources; • the existing water table level • accessibility to existing watercourses for maintenance and, • areas at risk of flooding by tidal, fluvial and/or surface water run-off Will only be permitted if adequate and environmentally acceptable measures are incorporated that provide suitable protection and mitigation both on-site and through displacement to adjoining land.'

West Somerset District Council letter reference Eng/DCT/BMR/P14 dated 25 November 1994 states:

The site, in contrast to the other part of the same field is very marshy and acts as a water carrier for the higher ground to the watercourse on the western boundary of the site. I, therefore, consider it inappropriate to develop this area.'

'Marshy/wetland habitats are becoming increasingly rare and, therefore, development on them should be resisted.'

POLICY NH14: NATIONALLY DESIGNATED LANDSCAPE AREAS

Within the identified landscape character areas, as shown in figure 2, development should be located and designed in such a way as to minimise adverse impact on the quality and integrity of that local landscape character area

'Applications for development should have regard to location, siting, orientation and landscaping to achieve high quality design and to ensure that the proposals conserve or enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, cultural heritage and tranquillity of the AONB or the National Park and their settings. Development which would conflict with the achievement of the statutory purposes of the AONB or the National Park, or their settings or which would adversely affect the understanding or enjoyment of the national park's special qualities, will not be permitted.'

'Where development is considered to be necessary and acceptable, particular attention will be paid to the design taking account of; siting, scale, form, height, massing, detail and/or use of local materials as appropriate.'

Again, Parish Councillors did not think that the proposed development met these criteria, [as has previously been mentioned regarding other comments regarding siting and appearance].

This was also the stated opinion in document T/APP/H3320/A/95/248622/P8 dated 26 June 1995 section 7 dismissing an appeal on a planning refusal on the site:

'I am of the opinion that the partial development of OS419, outside the existing well defined limits of development on this side of the village, would be harmful to the appearance and character of the AONB'.

The development is contrary to Policy NH6 – as the site is a designated County Wildlife Site and insufficient ecological biodiversity enhancements are proposed. The ecological survey was undertaken in September 2017 for the 2018 application so is over 2 years out of date. It is generally acknowledged that these reports are out of date after one year unless something else is specified in the report. We refer you to comments made by Simon Briggs of Somerset Wildlife Trust and are appalled at the desegregation of the site caused by grazing.

On a practical matter, there is mains sewerage that runs through part of the site, regarding which a document within previous planning files states that no works should take place within 3m of the sewers.

Bicknoller Parish Council further confirm that they object to the development proposals and consider that they fail to meet West Somerset Local Plan Policies SC1, SC4, NH6, NH15 and SV1. The proposals also fail Paragraphs 7, 115 and 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

It was understood that new housing was needed; however, this proposal was not the correct way of providing it. Infill and smaller, sympathetic developments would preserve the character of the village and AONB.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm.

Signed:
Chairman

Date: