



NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL

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**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING MEETING OF NORTHCHURCH PARISH COUNCIL
20th FEBRUARY 2023 AT 8.00 PM SOCIAL CENTRE BELL LANE NORTHCHURCH HP4
3RD**

Those present: Cllr's Beryl Edwards (Chair), Neil Pocock (Vice-Chair), Gordon Godfrey and Mark Somervail

86/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To approve and accept apologies for absence.

RESOLVED proposed to accept Cllr Rees's apologies of absence for the reasons mentioned in her email.

87//22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To declare an interest linked to any item on the agenda

There were no declaration of interest.

88/22 Public Participation

The Chair may at their discretion and at a convenient time in the transaction of business, invite members of the public to speak in relation to the business to be transacted at the meeting. Speeches may not exceed three minutes. If several residents wish to make a statement on the same matter, it is suggested that they agree by prior arrangement to a spokesperson to speak on their behalf.

Anyone wishing to speak is invited to contact the Clerk prior to the start of the meeting and advise on which subject they wish to talk about. Alternatively, a short statement may be read out on the participant's behalf and in accordance with the above stipulations. Statements must be submitted to the Clerk before 12 noon on the day of the meeting.

89/22 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting of 9th January 2023 and matters arising from the previous meeting that is not included as an agenda item below

RESOLVED, proposed by Cllr Godfrey, seconded by Cllr Pocock to accept the Minutes of 9th January 2023 as a true and accurate record and as such be duly signed by the Chair. Unanimously agreed,

90/22 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Nothing to report.

91/22 PLANNING APPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER.

Reference: 23/00204/FHA

Proposal: Single storey side extension

Address: 5 The Meadows Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3QX

NPC: NPC requests clarification whether the premises is used as a business or domestic purposes.

Reference: 23/00257/FUL

Proposal: Demolition of existing bungalow and construction of two dwellings

Address: Gaza 5 Dell Road Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3SP

NPC: No comment

Reference: 23/00296/FHA

Proposal: Ground floor side extension to garage and first floor extension with front and rear dormers.

Address: 8 Home Farm Road Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3SL

NPC: No comment

Reference: 21/04008/MFA

Proposal: Demolition of the existing building associated with the Golf Driving Range, and redevelopment of the site to provide a 52-bedroom care home catering for the elderly, infirm, and those suffering with dementia, including associated access and landscaping works.

Address: Berkhamsted Golf Driving Range Spring Garden Lane Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3GY

NPC: **OBJECTION (NPC would like to reiterate objection from 15th November 2021)**

Northchurch Parish Council objects to the planning application because it does not comply with the government's planning policies for England as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 20 July 2021:

- **The proposal is inappropriate development that harms the Green Belt and AONB**
- **There are no special circumstances to justify building a care home**
- **The location is isolated**
- **The proposal would result in the loss of a sports and recreational facility**

1. The Green Belt and Inappropriate Development

The proposal breaches NPPF 147

NPPF 147. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The proposed development comprises inappropriate development". The main considerations are the effect the development had on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt and the character and appearance of area and whether any harm is outweighed by other considerations which would justify the development. The review of all Green Belt in Dacorum carried out in 2013 by Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) concludes that this parcel of Green Belt strongly supports the NPPF fundamental aim. The site was fully assessed in Dacorum's Schedule of Site Appraisals (For Large Greenfield Sites) October 2017 and was dismissed for its impact on the Green Belt and the loss of recreational facilities. This appraisal

concludes that “Durrants Lane forms a hard edge for the settlement and any loss of Green Belt further west may place undue pressure on the overall integrity of the wider Green Belt in the medium to long term”. The proposed development is over 1 km to the west of Durrants Lane and lies within the Chilterns AONB wherein the general approach would be to avoid large-scale development opportunities.

The proposal directly contravenes DBC’s Green Space Strategy which says:

“Green spaces are integral to Dacorum, and important components of people’s health and wellbeing, the Borough’s economic prosperity, the biodiversity of the environment and our contribution to sustainability.”

In relation to the openness and purposes of the Green Belt, the developer's plans would "significantly reduce the openness of the Green Belt, to its considerable detriment and would amount to unrestricted sprawl, compromising, in the main, two of its purposes, thereby adding appreciably to the substantial harm by virtue of inappropriateness".

The proposal breaches NFFP 174 and 176

NFFP 174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

NFFP 176. Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues

The visual appearance the development would have on the surrounding area is significant especially as it is located on higher ground. The planned care home would not integrate with the existing landscape, being out of scale and character with the surroundings. It would unacceptably intrude into the open character and appearance of the countryside landscape and would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the countryside.

The proposal breaches NFFP 149

NPPF 149. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt.

The developer’s claim that the application “falls within the definition of previously developed land” is not correct. The field on which the proposed care home lies was originally used to extract clay for bricks: it was a large hole in the ground. The kilns and related buildings lay on an adjacent field. When the brickworks closed, the large hole was used for landfill. About 30 years ago, the council landscaped the site with topsoil and grass for football pitches. They later sold the land to the current owner for use as a golf range.

The proposed development is far bigger than the existing golf range. The wooden bays golf bays are a single-storey open-fronted structure with a small footprint very similar to stables and barns common to farms in this area. Neither the bays nor the range are “previous development” In contrast, the proposed development would be many times as large, much taller and made of brick.

2. There are no “special circumstances”

There is no policy evidence that care homes need to be in Green Belt land and therefore this gives little positive weight as a consideration. The applicant has claimed that the residential housing market is strong and therefore they are inevitably outbid on sites. This is not a special circumstance. The difficulty that Barchester Homes has found in obtaining sites is a consequence of their business model: they need to attract extremely wealthy clients. Barchester Healthcare's stated criteria for sites are restricted to those with an "ability to achieve a high-quality environment for the residents [...] the redevelopment of semi-industrial areas usually result in a low-quality environment for the residents and are not suitable". However, other care home providers have succeeded in finding suitable land e.g. two recent, local planning applications for an additional 122 care home beds have been granted permission.

There is no deficiency in Dacorum Borough Council's provision of land available for C2 housing that would justify building a care home in the Green Belt. The provision of good quality care homes in Dacorum is above average. Within the market catchment area, there are 11 care homes, providing 403 registered bedspaces, 376 of which are equipped with an en-suite. This equates to 93 per cent of registered bedspaces meeting the criteria of 'market standard', which is above the national average of 70 per cent.

The quality of existing provision is similar within the assessed council catchment area where there are 15 care homes, providing 869 registered bedspaces, 822 of which are equipped with an en-suite. This equates to 95 per cent of registered bedspaces meeting the criteria of 'market standard', which is also above the national average."

In September 2020, the Care Quality Website contains 107 residential care homes within 10 miles of the proposed site and 313 residential care homes within 15 miles of the proposed site. These care homes have obtained their buildings and land on the free market

Taking any benefit of the proposed development into account, the harm to the Green Belt has not been "clearly outweighed", and very special circumstances do not exist to justify allowing the inappropriate development".

3. Isolated location

The proposal breaches NFFP 80, 81 and 92.

The location of housing is a key consideration for older people. Factors to consider include the proximity of sites to good public transport, local amenities, health services and town centres. However, this site is isolated and does not comply with NPPF 80, 81, 92 and 105.

NPPF 80. Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside

NPPF 81. When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre.

NPPF 92. Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;

c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

NFFP 105. The planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

The site of the proposed development is neither near nor easily accessible to public transport, local amenities, health services or the town centre.

DBC's Green Belt Review highlights the site's "low accessibility" noting that the proposed development is located at a relative distance from local services and facilities. The nearest shop (Tesco Express) and bus stop are 1200 metres away at the far end of Darrs Lane. This takes 25 minutes to walk downhill and much longer uphill. From here, it is a further 4.5km to Berkhamsted Town centre. The route along Spring Garden Lane, Shooters Way and Darrs Lane is unsafe and unsuitable for pedestrians and cyclists. Spring Garden Lane, the access road to the proposed development, is only single track and has no pavement. Shooters Way has a 60 MPH speed limit and no pavement. Darrs lane is one of the steepest hills in Dacorum, with long stretches of narrow single track with some sharp, blind bends and no pavement. There are no other pedestrian routes so there is nowhere for residents to walk in safety.

There will be insufficient parking spaces. The existing carpark served visitors to the golf range and nursery and was frequently used as an overspill carpark by the Hospice. It was often full, and cars were obliged to park along Spring Garden Lane. Some elderly residents will have their own cars as will staff and visitors. In terms of cycling, the proposed development is on the top of a hill which only a very fit cyclist could manage. As a consequence, it is rare to see a pedestrian or cyclist visit any of the premises at the top of this hill. Staff and visitors would come from all directions and a variety of locations. It is not feasible for one minibus to meet their travel needs. A steep hill, unsafe roads and isolated location would prevent residents, visitors or staff accessing the proposed care home by foot, bicycle or bus. Their only realistic access to the proposed development is by private car.

In September 2020, the front page of the Alzheimer's Society website emphasises the importance of regular visits by family and friends:

"For many care home residents with dementia, family and friends provide more than just visits. They play a significant role in a person's care, whether it's interpreting their needs to staff, or providing personal care.

Regular family contact is also important for maintaining mental and communication skills. Visits are key to the health and wellbeing of a person living with dementia in care home."

As many service users of the proposed care home may move significant distances, they are less likely to benefit from regular visits by family and friends.

4. Loss of Recreational Facilities

The proposal breaches NFFP 99 and 99 and other health policies.

98. Access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.

99. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits

of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.

In addition to the NFFP, the Government, Public Health England and DBC are actively supporting the need to increase recreational facilities to improve both the physical and mental health of the population. In its "Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus (COVID-19)", the government advises "maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your mental wellbeing" and recommends exercising and using, "outdoor sports courts or facilities, such as a tennis or basketball court or golf course."

The applicant incorrectly states that the driving range did not reopen after lockdown and is not economically viable. As a result, it is in a state of disrepair. None of this is true. The driving range reopened after lockdown and was thriving. Attendance numbers were significantly rising year on year. The range had the best facilities in Dacorum, but the range owner could not carry out long-term repairs to the wooden structure because the landowner would not provide security of tenure.

Berkhamsted Golf Range enabled Dacorum residents of all ages to maintain relationships and exercise with people they trust in safety. In the 12 months before the landowner gave the driving range owners four weeks' notice to leave, the range had over 70,000 visits.

The proposed care home will provide little benefit to people in Dacorum. As homes in the proposed development will be extremely expensive, most residents will come from affluent regions outside Dacorum area. So, the proposed care home will be beyond the needs of most Dacorum residents and downsizing will not free housing in Dacorum.

The applicant is likely to employ previously used construction companies from outside the Dacorum area so the construction will not benefit local construction companies. Looking to the future, Northchurch Parish Council would like this land to be designated under NFFP 101 as Local Green Space as part of Dacorum's new Local Plan. NFFP 101. The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.

This land has been used for sport and recreation for over 30 years and has made a major contribution to the physical and mental health of residents in Dacorum. The wooden structure could be repaired, and a golf range is financially viable.

5. Conclusion

This planned development would harm the Green Belt and the CAONB, and permanently remove a recreational facility that makes a significant contribution to the physical and mental wellbeing of Dacorum residents. There are no exceptional circumstances: the site is not previously developed land and there is no planning policy that justifies building a care home on the Green Belt. The site is isolated, unsuitable for elderly residents and would create additional vehicle journeys. Other developers have succeeded in obtaining sites for local care homes and there are no "very special circumstances" that would outweigh this harm and justify giving special privileges to one developer.

92/22 Planning Appeal Town & Country Planning Act 1990

Ref No: 21/04770/FUL

Proposal: Demolition of existing buildings to form five residential units alongside, access, parking and landscaping.

Address: Hamberlins Farm Hamberlins Lane Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3TD

An appeal in Progress (NPC: No comment)

93/22 PLANNING DECISION

Reference: 22/03667/TPO

Proposal: Works to tree - TPO 40

Address: 61 St Marys Avenue Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3RP

DBC: Granted (NPC: refer to Tree Officer)

Reference: 22/03122/FUL

Proposal: Demolition of existing two storey four bedroom house and construction of new two storey five bedroom house.

Address: 2 Bridgewater Hill Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 1LW

DBC: Refused (NPC: No comment)

Reference: 22/03779/FHA

Proposal: Demolition of existing single storey side garage and utility room.

Construction of 1st floor rear extension. single storey side and front elevation. creation of additional hardstanding to frontage of property. fenestration alterations and change of roofing materials.

Address: Lindum House Dudswell Lane Dudswell Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4 3TQ

DBC: Granted (NPC: No comment)

Reference: 22/03318/FUL

Proposal: Two storey front extension and alterations to fenestration and wall cladding.

Address: Northchurch Social Centre Bell Lane Northchurch Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP4

DBC: Granted (NPC: No comment)

94/22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next planning meeting will be held on 13th March 2023 7pm at Social Centre Bell Lane Northchurch HP4 3 RD

The meeting concluded at 20.14