

**SODC Planning Committee 10 June 2020 –
Application reference: P19/S2380/RM**

Submission from Pyrton Parish Council:

Pyrton Parish Council is concerned at failures of due process in relation to the final determination of this important application by SODC's Planning Committee. Our grounds for concern are:

- a. The Parish Council is not being allowed to address the Committee or answer any questions its members may wish to raise. We are instead required to supply a written statement at short notice, which members of the Committee will have had little time to read. We question why the Parish Council, representing the people of Pyrton, should be excluded in this way. Other district councils have not imposed the same restriction, despite the constraints of lockdown. We have investigated the suggestion that this might be due to technical or security issues, but this does not stand up to scrutiny.
- b. When the Parish Council was informed a week ago that the application had been placed on the Planning Committee agenda for 10 June, we were told that the Planning Officer was recommending that the application be refused. At that stage we did not receive access to the officer's report. It was not until we finally obtained sight of that two days later that we discovered she was in fact recommending approval.
- c. The site at issue in this application is a sensitive one at an ancient crossroads next to the Chilterns AONB and alongside Shirburn's Conservation area and Historic Park and Garden. It is inappropriate for the Committee to rule on it while members are not in a position to visit the site because of the lockdown and social distancing requirements.

In our view, the above considerations make it inappropriate for the application to be considered at this meeting or until points a and c above have been addressed.

As a brownfield site, PYR1 is earmarked for development in the Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan, which requires that any development should take account of SODC's 2015 Landscape Capacity Assessment. The Assessment stipulates that the height of any new building should not exceed those that were there previously, and

that the mass and scale of the built form should be reduced. This application fails on both those counts.

After considerable effort by the council's planning officer, the applicants have finally made a reduction in the height of the buildings. We welcome that, but the tallest building will still exceed the height of the previous structures by over two metres. Meanwhile, the building mass significantly exceeds rather than reduces what was there before. We have no problem in principle with the site being given over to a care home, but object to the number of houses attached to it. This is making the development overcrowded and raises serious issues of sustainability.

If you read the summary of the Parish Council's objections to the proposals in the officer's report, you might find them repetitious. However, this simply reflects the numerous variations in the applicant's plans that have been submitted to try and get round the uncomfortable issue of mass. Regrettably, none of the variants have addressed the fundamental problem: that there are too many dwellings being squeezed into the site, and too many parking spaces (no less than 87 at the last count) required in consequence. The car parking will have more capacity than Watlington's town car park.

When the Planning Committee approved the outline application for a Care Home and *up to* 37 assisted living units last year, we raised the issue of density and were told that this was not for consideration at that stage but would be discussed when the Reserved Matters came to committee. Unless the Planning Committee wishes to be excluded from considering the issue of scale, we would suggest it debate it now rather than let the current plans go through on the nod without proper scrutiny.

You will note that the officer's report acknowledges in Para 6.26 that the development *will* harm the setting of the AONB (which is what the Chilterns Conservation Board and SODC's own Landscape Officer have said previously). However, this is glossed over in the conclusion which reiterates that the scale of the development needs to be "appropriate to its setting" (Para 7.2), and then simply declares that the scale, appearance etc "are acceptable" (Para 7.4).

No justification is given for this subjective assessment – which may reflect the difficulty of providing one since the building mass does not simply exceed what was

previously on the site, but has been crammed into a site that is considerably reduced in size. The 2015 Landscape Capacity Assessment made its recommendation on the basis of the site also including the area marked in blue in the report. That has now been given over to a new road and roundabout, without any consultation with the Parish Council or local residents. This will add further to the urbanization of this sensitive rural location surrounded by the AONB and two conservation areas.

The inflated number of retirement dwellings exacerbates other environmental and sustainability issues, and highlights the third issue to which Pyrton Parish Council has persistently objected: the increase in traffic movements that the development will cause. We understand that Policy H13 of SODC's emerging Local Plan may be amended by the inspector to require that specialized housing for older people be "in locations with good access to local transport and local facilities". There is no public transport serving this site, and we question how many elderly or infirm residents will walk 1km into Watlington to use the shops and transport services there. Instead they will use their vehicles, thereby adding to the traffic and air pollution problems in the area. The parking allocation in the plans indicates that all those living in the retirement units are expected to use cars.

Our final concern is with lighting, and the impact that the development will have on the "dark skies" of the neighbourhood. Although the officer's report is less than clear on the matter, there seem to be restrictions in place that will limit the impact of any exterior lighting, but no account seems to have been taken of the "spill" that will emanate from such a high number of separate dwellings.

As Pyrton Parish Council has made clear throughout this planning process, we welcome an appropriate development of the site, but we believe the current proposals overdevelop it and should therefore be modified. There are ample policy grounds for doing requiring this. These include not merely the Pyrton Neighbourhood Plan but also SODC's Policy CSEN 1, which states that priority that should be given to preserving the AONB and its setting in line with the duties imposed by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

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