

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Extraordinary Planning Committee held on Wednesday 29th November 2021 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall (Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Council)

Present: Cllr Paton - Chairman
Cllrs Adams, Anstey, Hale, Goldsmith, Jackson, Lewendon, Mouland and Wilson

In attendance: Paul Goddard, Town Clerk
Mrs R Edwards, Asst Town Clerk
36 Members of the Public

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Earth, Perkins and White and Cllr Bellows (NFDC).

2. To receive any Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

3. To receive any matters raised by Members of the Public

No matters raised.

4. To consider new Planning Applications

21/10052	Land To West Of, Whitsbury Road, Fordingbridge	Pennyfarthing Homes Limited
Residential development and change of use of land to Alternative Natural Recreational Greenspace and all other necessary on-site infrastructure (Outline planning application all matters reserved except means of access only in relation to a new point of vehicular access into the site)		
<p>Cllr Paton presented this application for 403 properties. She reported that the illustrative master plan shows the proposed layout for this site but there is so little detail that it would be difficult to make comment on this.</p> <p>Cllr Paton reported that the environmental design report states that the mitigation outlined is enough for 290 homes; if the SUDS area is included as ANRG then the number could rise to 366. However, this number is still 37 fewer than proposed. She said that the developer is using the SUDS area as part of the ANRG, however this is only possible at the discretion of the Local Planning Authority. She recommended that the LPA do not agree to this; the SUDS on Augustus Park are certainly not usable or attractive ANRG.</p> <p>Cllr Paton said that there are many reports still outstanding and issues not yet resolved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mitigation for flood water must be fully implemented before any development takes place• No sustainable lifestyle or energy mitigation• Access to green areas not suitable• Compensation for loss of open spaces (ANRG) not shown• Biodiversity net gain is not additional, should be +10%• Wanting to use Site 18 to offset the biodiversity net gain as Site 17 does not fulfil the obligations. This won't all be developed at the same time.• Biodiversity Net Gain has been addressed using both sites and only providing a minimum ANRG and habitat creation. It could only be boardwalks not full access; the area has to have minimal use in order to provide natural habitats. <p>Cllr Paton said that at present the priority is for drivers and vehicles and that this development will have too big an impact on the area. It will no longer be a country lane and instead will be</p>		

large expanses of hard standing, lighting and domination of traffic. Even now the access is difficult for pedestrians using the play area, walking to town and accessing the ANRG.

The bridge has too big an impact on the area, affecting the landscape character, the existing ANRG and the character of Whitsbury Road. The bridge needs changes to ensure that the access underneath is clearly discouraged for safety reasons.

All these issues have been raised in recent reports from Ecology, the Environmental Agency and the Environmental Design Team. Other reports are still awaited.

Cllr Wilson reported that the biodiversity net gain on site 17 would be just 5.975% but should be more than 10%. She said that the attenuation tanks have not been approved by Wessex Water and could harm houses on Avon Meade. Cllr Wilson said that groundwater could not continue to be pumped into Sweatfords Water as it could not cope with it and flooding would ensue. A Groundwater Assessment is needed. Cllr Lewendon reported that the town's flood defences are inadequate for this development.

The Chair opened the meeting to the public for comments; three members of the public spoke as follows.

Member of Public 1

"I object wholeheartedly to this development on many grounds but for two main reasons.

1. "The NFDC local plan projects 870 houses to be built in and around Fordingbridge – 140 at Ashford, 330 at Whitsbury Road and 400 at Burgate. Plus the recent development of 120 houses at Augustus Park and the proposed 64 at Tinkers cross. It has also been advised that the actual housing that can be expected in Fordingbridge could be up to 1500. Based on just the local plan numbers of 870, this means that 48% of the new housing in the Avon valley will be in Fordingbridge and 15% of the total housing in the NFDC area.

"Fordingbridge has a population of approximately 6,000 people. This level of new housing will almost double the population and is an increase in housing of approximately 50%. This is an astonishing increase in housing in a very short time and this particular development should be seen in the context of the whole picture, which is being slipped under the radar without us noticing. Do Fordingbridge residents really understand the scale of this projected housing on medical services, education services, traffic, social care?

"The foundation of the NFDC local plan is that housing 'should address local need'.

I believe the current inhabitants of the town deserve to know exactly what local need is being served by these houses before the plans are approved. Until this local need has been explained satisfactorily to all of us, then the Town Council should reject these plans. There are 14 key issues that must be addressed to identify areas for development. I will not list them here but not a single one defines a need in

"Fordingbridge that this level of housing solves. I certainly do not see 2,000 unfilled job vacancies in the town, empty classrooms at the schools, GPs and Dentists twiddling their thumbs for lack of patients and large swathes of empty road just waiting to be used by Juggernauts.

"Page 18 of the local plan talks about Housing provision – I quote 'to help meet the needs of the district within the Southampton, Bournemouth and Salisbury housing market areas, directing larger scale provision to the main towns and larger villages'. Fordingbridge is one of the smaller towns yet is being allocated more houses than anywhere else in NFDC apart from Fawley and Totton with the specifically stated aim to be a dormitory housing estate for Southampton, Bournemouth and Salisbury. Is this what we want this town to become?

2. "I believe others will talk about the general environmental and biodiversity issues, so I'd like to mention energy and CO₂.

"We are in a climate emergency, acknowledged by both the New Forest National Park and also NFDC as well as Hampshire County Council. Fordingbridge Town Council has yet to acknowledge this, but I understand is working on it. What the climate emergency means is that the world is going to be a very unpleasant place to live in unless the average global temperature increase is kept under 1.5 degrees compared with pre-industrial levels at the end of this century. The global increase in temperature is already 1.1 degree above pre-industrial levels, we have no room to keep increasing CO₂. This means that all burning of fossil fuels should stop, NOW. This minute. Not in 10 years time but now.

"None of the projected housing is expected to be anything other than bog standard minimum building regs quality, with no plans to make them zero energy. They will be fitted with gas boilers and will leak heat and CO₂ until such point as the buyer must pay tens of thousands of pounds to retrofit them to be carbon neutral. We can reduce our waste, put solar panels on our roof, even fit an air sourced heat pump on our house, we can stop driving our cars, and compost our food waste but one single new house that is not zero energy will blow that all out of the water. These houses must not be built unless they are zero energy.

"So, I say, these plans must go back to the drawing board – local needs must be properly explained and if not satisfactorily so, then the plans revised so that housing truly meets local need. In addition, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, these houses must be zero energy – right now."

Member of Public 2

"The Lighting Assessment assumes the proposed development to be in Environmental Zone E2. This is incorrect. I have taken SQM (Unihedron SQM-L) readings and consistently get values of 20.11 magnitudes per square arcsecond or darker, which is consistent with the classification for Environmental Zone E1. The proximity of the proposed development to the International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR) on Cranborne Chase AONB reinforces the E1 classification.

"It is concerning that the Lighting Assessment, the Environmental Impact Assessment, and the Ecologist Comments make no reference to the IDSR. Do their authors know that it exists?"

"NFDC sits on the Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership Board, where it has agreed to preserve and enhance the intrinsically dark skies of the IDSR. This is now a statutory responsibility under Section 89 of the CRoW Act. Light does not recognise civic boundaries and Artificial Light at Night (ALAN) from this development **will** impact upon the IDSR. NFDC must therefore ensure that the lighting of this proposed development is compliant with International Dark-Sky Association criteria for outside lighting and that restrictions meet or exceed those of Environmental Zone E1. In particular, all outside lighting must be fully shielded, must have a correlated colour temperature (CCT) of 2700K or less, and must be of limited duration (ie controlled by timers and/or PIR motion detectors). This means that there need to be clauses that remove domestic outdoor lighting from permitted development and require that it is compliant with IDA criteria. Consideration must also be given to mitigating light spill from windows and roof/sky lights, particularly the latter, which must be fitted with automatic dusk-to-dawn blinds.

"The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 185) specifically states (my emphases):
"Planning policies and decisions should also **ensure** that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the

site **or the wider area** to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:

[...]

(c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation."

"ALAN is one of the four main drivers of the "insectageddon" aspect of the biodiversity crash, on a par with (and possibly exceeding, according to some recent research at Exeter University) climate change, pesticides, and habitat loss. Any responsible lighting policy will take this into account. The Lighting Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment make no mention of CCT, despite the overwhelming evidence that this is key to mitigating the biodiversity harm caused by ALAN.

"I also note that the Environmental Impact Assessment makes no mention of Bechstein's bat (*Myotis bechsteinii*), which has been recorded in the region of Marl and Puddleslosh Lanes. This is one of Britain's most endangered species, and I wonder if the bat surveys were conducted at the key times (April and September/October) as designated by the Bat Conservation Trust."

Member of Public 3

"You have already heard about the connection to the local need and also the carbon neutrality of future building. I am here to urge you to reject the planning application because of how it will negatively impact the ecology and environment of our local area, and how this in turn will have a direct impact on the mental well-being of the humans who also live here.

"I understand that what we are experiencing in Fordingbridge and in The New Forest is a national problem. Communities up and down the land are having these developments foisted upon them with little or no consideration for the impacts on the settlements, their sustainability or the environmental damage that they will have on the local ecology. Whilst we understand that there is a need for housing, we have a duty and responsibility to ensure that it is the right kind of housing in the right kind of area. We have a duty to respond to the climate emergency in all that we do.

"I have read lots of the associated documents that respond to the planning application and in particular the ecological responses. I do not think the ecological reports and mitigation that will be put in place will in any way stop the collapse of the food chain in the area of the development. The report states that there's no clear evidence of bat roosts but a local ecologist responded to the report by stating "The main reasons for the prevalence of bats (of county significance!) is, clearly, there must be suitable roosts nearby and availability of insect species, especially moths and other night flying insects. That is indeed the case. Moth traps run in Avon Meade, adjacent to the field, produce many moth species per evening, often in large numbers, as well as other night flying insects, all suitable food for Bats."

"He continues by stating that "The insect population as a whole is plentiful and diverse with several Red Data Book species recorded locally. The reason for the insect diversity stems from habitat diversity of the area, of which the semi-improved tussocky grassland of both the field north of Avon Meade and west of Marl Lane are an important component, which needs to be conserved. Vegetation of this type is becoming increasingly rare in South England, from loss to building developments, agricultural "improvements, amenity pressure, etc.

"Insect diversity leads to small mammal and bird diversity, including many more breeding species than indicated by the nesting survey in the Phase 2 Ecological Report. The bird of prey population is diverse, including Barn Owl (observed hunting in the area!), Tawny Owl, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Red Kite, Peregrine Falcon and Hobby. The first three rely on a healthy small mammal population.

“The mitigation proposed is to put a percentage of bat boxes, bee boxes and even swallow boxes on the new development. But the tussocky grassland that is becoming increasingly rare will have been destroyed. Therefore you won’t need the boxes because the food source will be no more. There won’t be food for the top predators because there won’t be a healthy small mammal population any longer. There won’t be food for the insectivorous birds and mammals like the swallows and the bats because there won’t be the grassland and the flowers. Providing bat boxes and bee boxes and bird boxes is a bit like building houses for the recently deceased; It’s as if there’s a fundamental lack of understanding of how ecology works. In order to respond to the climate emergency we have to stop eating away at our wild areas both nationally and internationally. People need to connect with nature for their own mental well-being and I don’t mean the little scraps of land that have to be given over when a development is built. Yes, they are fine for a dog walk or a bit of fresh air but it’s not the same as when you walk near those meadows on warm afternoon and it’s alive with buttercups, wild flowers, insects, butterflies and the hum of thousands of crickets and you look up and you see the kite and the buzzards and the swifts. It’s a magical spot.

“The local ecologist cannot be here this evening but his thoughts are that NFDC should reject this application “until as such time as the full requirements of the Environment Bill are known, a proper discussion of the Fordingbridge Nature Recovery Plan has taken place and several other matters relating to the phosphate situation and flood alleviation have been fully explored and the correct remediation measures have been identified. Approval now will lead to problems in the future.” This application is premature and we urge you to reject it. Not never but not now and not this way.”

End of Public Comments

Cllr Hale proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Mouland and therefore **RESOLVED** to recommend REFUSAL under PAR4, as there reports outstanding and issues not yet resolved, including the environmental matters raised this evening.

The reasons for the recommendation were as follows:

- Pedestrian links need resolving - They are not adequate at present including having to cross the road at a roundabout
- The roundabout is too intrusive
- The bridge is not in keeping
- Flood risks have not been addressed
- There is a lack of usable ANRG
- There are concerns about the effectiveness and attractiveness of the suds
- The density of houses is too great
- The biodiversity net gain target has not been reached - The Town Council is not happy to consider net gain across more than one site
- Any standards that need to be met should be in excess of the bare minimum. The developer needs to look to the future regarding sustainability.
- There are concerns about lighting affecting biodiversity
- Ecology and nature recovery needs much more thought - Merely providing bat boxes etc. is not sufficient, especially if creatures have already moved on because of the development as that is too late.
- The phosphate issues have not been addressed
- There is no updated HCC traffic report - This is in the context that it is felt there is inadequate information in relation to a number of issues, without which the Town Council can only recommend refusal.

All in favour.

Councillors were also in agreement that no roundabout should be built or development to the west of Whitsbury Rd begun until the sites to the east have been finished with the road to A338.

Cllr Goldsmith asked if the Local Plan could be overridden. Cllr Paton replied that it could not, however applications can be refused if issues are not addressed.

5. To receive a report from the Clerk or any other relevant planning business

Cllr Jackson reported on planning application 20/11469 | Erection of 64 dwellings, change of use of land for Alternative Natural Recreational Greenspace, new accesses onto Whitsbury Road, and all necessary on-site infrastructure | LAND AT TINKERS CROSS, WHITSBURY ROAD, TINKERS CROSS, FORDINGBRIDGE SP6 1NQ, saying that the case officer had written a letter of recommendation to the agent on 25th November 2021, stating that unless the matters listed in that letter were satisfactorily resolved by 10th December or satisfactory assurances given, then he would draft his report with a recommendation for refusal.

Cllr Wilson reported that the Site 16 application is still being pursued by the applicants, despite this application being fraudulent.

Action: Clerk to report to NFDC Case Officer that the land for Site 16 is not owned by the person listed in the application and ask for the application to be withdrawn.

6. To note the date of the next meeting as Wednesday 8th December

The meeting closed at 8.03pm.