

OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION (14/02212/OUT)

FOR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF UP TO 50 DWELLINGS ON

LAND OFF BASSETT ROAD & EAST END ROAD, BASSETT ROAD, NORTHLEACH

As District Councillor for Northleach and in the light of the detailed and well-reasoned objections to this application from the Town Council and the Cotswold Conservation Board I wish to add my support to those objections.

The quality of what is proposed, the density of it and the amount of affordable housing proposed find favour with neither the Town Council, nor the Cotswold Conservation Board as is apparent from their objections and for perfectly sound reasons. As the Board's position statement on Housing and Development published in 2007 and revised in 2013 makes clear, *"Developments should integrate well into the historical pattern or character of the settlement...[and] building style should reflect the local tradition. Inappropriate, particularly urban styles and materials should be avoided. Where new building is required it should be to a high standard of design as befits a nationally designated landscape"*.

The application fails to take account of the local heritage in its indicative layout and in the suggestion at 4.2.1 of the Design and Access Statement that some artificial stone may be acceptable in this location. It also wholly fails to suggest any form of layout or indicative street scene which would reflect the historic buildings or layout of the town, with its medieval burgage plots with gardens facing South down to the River Leach. Instead it turns in on itself and suggests a mix of uniform standard house types.

The indicative street scene similarly fails to live up to the stated aspiration to reflect local heritage and variety. And the proposed layout, on a site outside the development boundary, in the AONB, fails also to ensure a gentle merging into the local countryside. Indeed, it simply provides the "hard edge" to which the application refers as something to be avoided.

The application also fails to deal with the question of access which has been thrown into doubt as a result of local comment as is apparent from the Statement of Community Engagement. It is clear from 5.1 of the Design and Access Statement that *"Vehicular access to the site does not form part of this application and is reserved for subsequent approval at Reserved Matters Stage."* The reason for this is the constraint on the capacity of Bassett Road to serve two developments where car ownership will inevitably be high and most occupiers will require 2 cars for work and where there are already access issues as is obvious from the photographs accompanying the Town Council's objection.

The application does not take account of possible additional or alternative access points nor does it advocate any access point. It merely provides an indicative layout. This is made clearer by 1.5 of the Planning Statement in support of the application which states *“All matters are reserved for submission and approval at the detailed stage. An illustrative layout plan however, is submitted with the application for information purposes in order to demonstrate that it is **possible** to develop the site in the manner outlined by council officers in pre-application discussions. The illustrative plan also demonstrates how access **could** be provided into the site, and that a suitable layout can be achieved”*.

The application therefore fails to meet the requirements of 4(5) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010 (“the Order”) which states that *“Where access is a reserved matter, the application for outline planning permission **shall** state the area or areas where access points to the development **will** [not “could” as stated by the applicant] be situated.”*

There is therefore an obligation to put forward a firm proposal for appropriate access which this application fails to do.

Although the layout is said to be indicative there is a real fear that what has been suggested might be what is implemented. The Order states at 4(3) that *“Where layout is a reserved matter the application shall state the approximate location of buildings routes and open spaces in the development proposed”*. If this layout becomes reality, this development is likely to be no more than a repeat of the existing adjacent development, described in the White study some years ago as a “homogeneous block”. This application wholly fails to recognise the local heritage in terms of shapes or orientation of plots or to make use of the south facing elevation and the views towards the river. It would also singularly fail to provide the “soft edge” it aspires to.

Turning briefly to the issue of affordable housing, it can be seen that in excess of 30 affordable houses are already in the pipe-line given the planning applications and permissions in respect of the Fortey Road site (under demolition) (22) the Chequers site (demolition completed) (5) and the Sly Trust, of which I am a Trustee, (to be let at 80% of market rent or less and nearing completion), (6). Fortey Road proposes no market housing.

The result is that in order to accommodate the expected 130 houses between now and 2031 no site requires more than 33% affordable housing in order for the town to provide an average of 50% affordable housing across all its developments. An over-supply of affordable housing in a rural community with limited job and transport opportunities is hardly “sustainable” for those on low incomes. The lack of employment opportunity and the town’s role as a “dormitory” town is recognised in the District Council’s own Development Strategy Evidence Paper dated April 2013 at page 79 para 275. Pages 81 and 83 recognise the *“currently modest need for affordable housing in the Northleach area”*. If that evidence

paper is to mean anything its findings should be reflected in the planning decisions that follow it. The recognised “*modest*” need can easily be met and the District wide target similarly met with a 33% allocation.

I will not go on to repeat the remaining aspects of the objections lodged but reiterate my support of them. This application however clearly constitutes “*major development*” as defined in the Order and as such, as it is outside the development boundary, should be refused “...*except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated [to be] in the public interest*”. The public interest test also requires there to be consideration of “...*any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities and the extent to which that could be moderated*”. (NPPF 116)

This is a two stage test. What are the “*exceptional circumstances*” in the context of this application? And, if that test is passed, how is it in the public interest to allow development of a quality, density and probable layout which is of lesser quality than the best and where the indicative design does nothing to moderate its effects? There is nothing to suggest either of these tests has been passed or that this application is likely to lead to anything more than another speculative development by an ordinary housebuilder, further diminishing our landscape and scenic beauty.

This application ought to be refused for all the reasons put forward and if not refused it ought to be deferred pending the receipt of clear access proposals and improvements to the indicative layout, density, street scene and proposals for materials.

That said, it is recognised that this is a site which is appropriate for some development. A revised scheme;

providing affordable housing reflecting both local and District need rather than simply to a formula which results in anomalies,

which provides suitable access;

of no more than 20-30 houses ,

providing plot sizes and open spaces commensurate with the surrounding open countryside and the rural environment,

built to high quality architectural design and of local materials,

using as inspiration the local historic heritage and providing a soft edge merging into the surrounding countryside,

would almost certainly find favour with the town as is clear from the views expressed in the process of preparing the town’s Neighbourhood Development Plan. It would also better

meet the requirement that in any application, *“Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in....Areas of Outstanding natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.”*

Cllr Chris Hancock