

Wellington Heath Parish Council

6 Aug 2016

To HCC Planning Mr A Prior
Copy AONB Paul Esrich
Copy Liz Harvey

Planning application 161996 Adjacent to The Farmers Arms, Wellington Heath

Dear Sir,

This site is in the Malvern Hills AONB and occupies an exceptionally prominent position in the heart of the village close by the award winning and recently restored public recreation space at Pool Piece. It contributes greatly to Local Distinctiveness and in this regard is the most important remaining piece of open land in the village, Core Strategy policies LD1 and SS6 are highly relevant.

Wellington Heath Parish Councillors oppose this planning application in its current form. However a sensitive development in this location is possible. This would require the western curtilage boundary to be drawn back and other critical issues to be addressed, including varied sizes and design, drainage, access, and conformity with the Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design. We note that land to the south of the site is not included in this planning application which is a concern.

The Landscape Assessment of Wellington Heath undertaken by Carly Tinkler CLIM in 2015 classified this site as **Landscape Capacity Low** and made the following Comments and Recommendations "Capacity potentially higher on lower, east side of parcel. Development on upper slopes would result in built form closing existing green gap between properties to north and south which would result in adverse effects on local landscape character and views. Development on the lower area could potentially be the subject of a more detailed assessment with other matters, and constraints and opportunities (such as designating the higher land as local greenspace), factored in."

This site had minority support for development at a well attended NDP consultation in March 2016 at which the Landscape Assessment of Wellington Heath was presented. Less than 30% of respondents preferred this site, in marked contrast to a larger site which gained very strong majority support. Those who supported this site adjacent to the Farmers Arms, without exception wished to restrict development to very few houses, and some amplified this by proposing that the upper parts of the site should be protected or perhaps become public space. The maximum number of houses which would gain support is 2.

Protected Green Space designation will be proposed in the NDP for a few particularly prominent and important areas in the village including the upper area of this site. It is anticipated that parishioners would welcome this and be much more likely to support the development of the lower part in this critically prominent area of the village. The proposed development hints at landscaping consistent with this objective but the landscaping proposals are not clear and are inconsistent with the ecological appraisal. Permitted development rights would allow sheds, greenhouses or even a Jacuzzi etc. on the upper area of the plots which would be very detrimental on this exceptionally prominent site and would be contrary to the recommendations of the Landscape Assessment. **It is therefore critical that the upper half of the land associated with the**

proposed developments are outside the curtilage. The land in the upper area could still be owned by the future residents even if it is outside the curtilage providing it is used for an orchard or similar use reflective of the agricultural origins of the settlement.

This planning application appears to have considered the Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design to some extent but not sufficiently. The proposal for 4 bedroom properties of identical (mirror image) design conflicts with local distinctiveness and AONB policy. Core Strategy policy and AONB guidance seeks a strong bias towards smaller houses. We would therefore propose that at least one house is much smaller with 2 or perhaps 3 bedrooms.

The Ecological Appraisal shows the planting of an orchard on land south of the proposed development, this would be welcomed from a landscape and ecological perspective but regrettably does not appear to be part of the current planning application. This area is very steep ground directly behind the The Farmers Arms which has been registered as a Community Asset. This steep bank is very prominent and an important feature of the rural village landscape and we understand that there has been slippage towards the pub. Immediately above this, on the other (west) side of Floyds Lane substantial works were recently undertaken to contain slippage.

The application states that the access road known locally as Pub Lane is adopted. This is incorrect, it is classified as footpath WH21 and as far as we know the owner is unknown. This track must retain its rural character and be reinstated after the building works and surfaced with loose crushed stone selected in accordance with the Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design. We are opposed to urbanisation and a tarmac surface at this location. The proposed 'highways standard' driveways are also a concern, driveways must be informal and rural in nature.

Springs and drainage water flowing off the proposed development site formerly ran in a pipe or culvert under Pub Lane and down to the stream on Parish Council land at the Pool Piece recreation area. This drainage does not appear to be as effective as it once was, furthermore it would probably be damaged by heavy construction vehicles (the access route is only a footpath) and would currently be wholly inadequate to take the inevitably increased surface water runoff, especially in storm conditions. The culvert under Pub Lane must be reinstated with adequate capacity.

The "relic pond" recorded in the Ecological Report is clearly recalled as a small functioning pond by older residents and permanent springs as still evident. These older members of the community also remember that drainage from Oake'y Lane WH18 used to flow through a culvert under the proposed site to the pond. However in recent years this culvert appears to have been destroyed or blocked and the water now runs down Oakey's Lane and Pub Lane causing serious erosion and avoidable ongoing expense for the Parish Council on Oakey's Lane (extensively resurfaced with loose stone in 2015) and for the residents who maintain Pub Lane. The pond should be restored and incorporated in a rainwater catchment system and wildlife area, and drainage of Oakeys lane and associated culvert should be investigated and restored.

Periodic overflow of the sewer system lower down the valley in heavy rain favours the proposed permeable surfaces, rainwater harvesting and private drainage systems but these must be effective and properly designed and able to cope with surge. Water runoff and outflow from the proposed foul drainage system is of particular concern since residents on Pub Lane have been troubled by localised flooding.

It is clear that drainage and the pond have not been properly addressed in the proposal.

The Parish Council is willing to work with the applicant to plan a scheme for display at the forthcoming Neighbourhood Development Plan consultation event planned for Autumn 2016. Representatives of the NDP Working Group have had periodic discussions with the applicant and would like this site to be presented for development at that event, plans for the positive representation of another site are well advanced although we can envisage both gaining public support.

C F Rozelaar
Chair of Wellington Heath parish council planning committee