

APPENDIX F.1



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BY EMAIL ONLY FOR THE URGENT ATTENTION OF BUCKS. COUNCIL PLANNING OFFICERS

Date: 7th December 2023

Ref: PL/22/4074/FA, St. Leonard's Parish Centre, Glebe Way, Chesham Bois, Bucks., HP6 5ND. Redevelopment of three parcels of land to build a new multifunctional Parish Centre with cafe, separate day nursery building, replacement rectory with detached garage, two outbuildings to provide a prayer room and substation/bin and bicycle store, associated parking, fencing and landscaping, to include a footpath leading to a fire pit with surround seating.

Following the meeting of the East Bucks. Area Planning Committee (EBAPC) on 17th October, Chesham Bois Parish Council resolved to instruct independent consultants to provide more detailed information about specific aspects of the above referenced planning application which have not been addressed. The action was taken because of the significant impact the proposed development would have on the Chesham Bois Conservation Area, as well as Chesham Bois Common which surrounds the site, and in consideration of the ongoing concern of the majority of residents about the enormous scale of the proposal.

An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Parish Council was held yesterday, on 6th December, to consider the consultant reports as well as the recently published documents on the agenda for the next meeting of the EBAPC on 13th December at which the planning application will be considered. We wish to draw your attention to five, material and new, planning matters listed below.

1. Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation, (CBSAC). This planning application was last considered at a meeting of EBAPC on Tuesday, 17th October. Discussions arose in relation to the potential impact on the CBSAC and a decision was made to defer further debate pending a request for Planning Officers to provide an impact analysis with high, medium and low risk scenarios.

- Appendix D in the papers published for the meeting on 13th December, is an undated document entitled 'Appropriate Assessment' with no criteria to provide a rationale for the selection of impact scenarios which lack detail with regard to visitor numbers and potential behaviours.
- Importantly, no 'high risk' scenario has been provided, i.e. a full capacity event, perhaps using the applicant's own published activities as an example such as hosting three day conferences for national members of its organisation. Assumptions regarding visitor behaviour do not reference the fact that the site is on the Chiltern Cycle Path and those visiting Chesham Bois Common to cycle or walk in the area, are those most likely to visit other recreational sites in the area as well.
- Appendix B referenced in the 'Assessment' document is a letter from Natural England which references a consultation with Planning Officers on 19/10, two days after the EBAPC meeting was held, at which point no risk analysis had been completed. NE state that its opinion is based upon 'plans submitted' and, importantly, qualifies its 'no objection' statement by referencing additional environmental issues, (see ecology section below).

Note: *The Planning Inspector considering the appeal in 2022 was not provided with detailed information about site capacity; baseline or maximum traffic generation or ecology. Their Appeal Decision report dated 29/4/22 states:*

'8. ...The zone of influence (CBSAC) has been drawn to capture the site despite the potential presence of other recreational opportunities...

9. Consequently, it is clear that an appropriate assessment under the Habitats Regulations is required.'

(At this date, advice was emerging from Natural England.) And concludes: ' 57.... the proposal would conflict with the development plan as a whole' and 'furthermore the Framework and Habitats Regulations are clear that planning permission must not be granted given the circumstances that are present in this case...'

A view that does not refer only to the removal of one dwelling, as is the case for the re-submitted planning proposal.

2. Scale. The capacity of the proposed development was not provided for the Planning Inspector on appeal and has not been detailed in the re-submitted application. Just one of two proposed meeting halls in the main conference centre building has a capacity of 275, similar to the Elgiva Theatre, Chesham. The proposed main building appears to have a capacity in excess of 400 and there is additional capacity in a separate nursery building which could act as a creche during conferences.

- The issue of scale was raised by the Heritage Officer in March 2023 and has not been addressed. The potential impact on the local environment, and Chesham Bois Common in particular, is reported in a new ecology report, referenced below.
- The applicant's project manager was asked about capacity requirements at the meeting on 17/10 and referenced 120 as the likely maximum number for 'all together' worship events.
- Submitted transport statements do not reference site capacity events, (see below), although they include proposed, typical requirements for up to 50 and no more than 150 on occasion, which may have misled the Planning Inspector. It is clear that the need for such a large building has not been proven.
- The proposed, extended hours of operation for events together with a significant, (c. 500%), increase in capacity would irrevocably impact the tranquil nature of the Conservation Area.

3. Ecology. Important ecology and biodiversity matters were not provided for the Planning Inspector and, although these matters are of increasing importance, the potential impact of the proposed development on the local environment was not discussed on 17/10.

Chesham Bois Common surrounds the proposed development site. It is widely used for recreation and is comprised of ancient and mature woodland, designated Priority Habitat; open areas of grassland; various ponds; and acts as a wildlife corridor being within 500m of the AONB and ancient woodland. Given the concerns about the potential impact of the proposed development, with reported 'target recovery' times post development of up to 27 yrs., Chesham Bois Parish Council resolved to instruct an independent ecologist with local knowledge to review reports and consider the impact on the Common. The report produced by Future Nature WTC, a wholly owned trading subsidiary of Berks. Bucks. & Oxon. Wildlife Trust, is attached for your information. Key findings include:

1. A significant increase in visitors to this site creates the potential to damage the adjacent Common and sensitive Priority Habitat through extra footfall, noise and disturbance to flora and fauna.
2. A new Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide was published in November 2023, revising the impact of trees. Taking new guidelines into account, specific BNG metrics would not meet requirements.
3. Natural England advice requires that suitable waterbodies within 500m of a development site should be considered for the presence of protected species. Three ponds located within range on the Common were not included in the submitted surveys. Also, other amphibians were not considered and planning authorities are required to ensure that species of principal importance, (e.g. toads), are protected from adverse effects of development.
4. A proposed green roof would not replace habitat suitable for the local fauna and the design of the main building could result in bird collisions with regard to the use of extensive glazing.
5. Bats: Extensive glazing in the design of the main building is not as suitable as the current building design, due to light spill. Also, the proposed new roosting provision in the new rectory on the north side of the site would require bats to pass over new buildings and car parking, which would potentially reduce the uptake of the new roosting provision.

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
7. The proximity of a proposed fire pit to adjacent vegetation at the boundary with the Old Rectory provides a risk of fire and spread to woodland.
 8. Ground flora details were not included in reports.
 9. No species record search or other survey work in respect of bird assemblage at, or in close proximity to, the application site has been undertaken to ascertain the potential for adverse impact.
 10. New fencing is proposed which will form barriers to fauna which utilise the woodland and the application site for foraging.

Note: Policy CS24 of the Core Strategy states that the Council will aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity within the District. And NPPF (2021) Paragraph 180a states: "When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the

following principles: a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.”

It is also important to note that proposed mitigation measures, such as restricted lighting, are not consistent with the proposed use of the development.

4. Traffic generation. No baseline traffic surveys were carried out and no traffic impact considered for site capacity events, so Chesham Bois Parish Council arranged for Bucks. Highways to install traffic monitoring equipment in November and instructed an independent consultant to review submitted reports and provide information about a full site capacity event.

- For the initial planning application, (which is largely unchanged), the consultant reported that the scale of the proposed development would be equivalent to building 100 houses on the site.
- For a full capacity event, the consultant reported that there is the potential for 162 vehicles to attend, which would exceed the proposed 114 on-site parking space.
- Traffic monitoring baseline data was recorded for both Glebe Way and the vehicle access to the existing Parish Centre. The data served to highlight that vehicle movements in/out of the existing site are even lower during weekday peak hours than the reported, estimated volumes and negligible, single digit movements on Sundays. (Copy data enclosed for reference).

The proposed scale of the development would result in a significant uplift in traffic on the small roads adjacent to the site, which have minimal street lighting, no pavements, and are one-way when parking bays are occupied. New traffic generation would impact the tranquil nature of the Conservation Area, in particular at week-ends when the area surrounding the site currently has the most visitors for recreational purposes. The Common is also used to provide Forest School facilities for local schoolchildren during the week and there is a greater risk of accidents with increased traffic. As you know, the proposed development would require site access to be widened across land owned by the Parish Council, which it is not minded to permit.

5. Impact on immediate neighbour. As referenced above, the Planning Inspector was not provided with detailed information about full site capacity associated traffic generation or fire risk arising from the proposed location of a fire pit immediately adjacent to the Old Rectory Grade II listed house, which would be materially impacted by noise, vehicle movements, light pollution and, potentially, anti-social behaviour. The existing boundary fence is a simple, open metal bar design with occasional trees and shrubbery. Enquiries by the Parish Council have recently established the location of a cesspit soakaway and associated waste drains which run from the Old Rectory beneath the glebe land, an undulating area, (possibly due to the cesspit), which would be cleared of shrubbery, levelled and covered with ‘grass-crete’ to build a large car park. Access to the drains and cesspit for maintenance is required and it’s not clear that the area would be suitable for any excavation or development.

In summary, we trust that you will support full consideration of all aspects of the re-submitted application at the committee meeting on 13/12/23. Please pay particular attention to the content of the ecology report provided by Future Nature WTC and give due consideration to our continued concern about the potential impact of the enormous scale of the proposed development on the Chesham Bois Conservation Area and the surrounding Chesham Bois Common.

On a final note, we wish to request an opportunity for a representative of Chesham Bois Parish Council to speak at the EBAPC meeting on 13th December in relation to the new information that we have provided. Our Chair, Lesley Winrow, is available to attend the meeting.

A Dealey

Annette Dealey

Clerk, Chesham Bois Parish Council

Encl.

Future Nature WTC Ecology Report

Bucks. Highways Traffic Monitoring Data