

Our Ref : MC1646/23

Date :7th December 2023

The Head of Planning
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Chiltern District Council
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FAO Melanie Beech

By e-mail.

Dear Sirs,

Re: Planning Application Ref :PL/22/4074/FA

“Redevelopment of the site to create a new multifunctional Parish Centre with cafe, day nursery building, replacement rectory with detached garage, 2 outbuildings to provide prayer room and substation/bin and bicycle store, associated parking and landscaping etc”

The St Leonards Centre, Glebe Way, Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire, HP6 5ND

As you know we represent “Protect Chesham Bois Common and Surrounding Area Action Group”.

On behalf of the Action Group we submitted our original detailed objections to this proposal under cover of a letter dated 31st January 2023.

The Group have now seen the Planning Officer’s latest Report to the East Area Committee in connection with the application and which is due to be considered on 13th December 2023.

The Group are extremely disappointed with the cursory and inadequate nature of this Report on the SAC and the failure to deal with the important material considerations which have arisen since the previous appeal. It is right for the Committee to take into account anything not considered by the previous Inspector since these will be material considerations for the Committee to decide (Paragraph 4.2 of the Report refers). It is not correct to say “All of these issues have been addressed by the Planning Inspector in the appeal decision and in the previous Committee report”.

Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The site lies within the Zone of Influence (ZOI) of the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). An Appropriate Assessment is required of the impact of the proposal alone **and** also in combination with other proposals.

The Officers assessment is totally inadequate. It is not correct to say that persons coming to the site do so for a specific purpose (Paragraph 3.1). There is no evidence that this will be the case. In particular the café may well not be a sole destination. There is an increase in parking of some 100 cars and as we have previously pointed out the inaccessible/ unsustainable nature of this site.

Whilst we understand that the Appropriate Assessment has to be carried out by the Council it is usually informed by much more evidence from the Applicants (or the Council) before arriving at an important decision.

From the comments made by Natural England we assume that they are unaware of the intensive commercial use of the site which is being proposed. They appear to have been given the impression that this is a local facility not an open café and a building which will be available for other bodies seven days a week. The scale of the proposed commercial development has not been reported in detail. The proposed buildings far exceed a typical parish centre and would more accurately be described as a commercial conference centre with capacity for more than 400 people in two large halls; multiple offices; and a public café in just one building; plus a separate nursery building that could be used as a creche during events.

The consideration of the impact on the SAC is recreational pressure as your Ecology Officer confirms. This does NOT mean just from houses alone.

We conclude that the Officer's Appropriate Assessment of the scheme is inadequate. Further there is no evidence at all that your Officers have considered the "in combination" affects. Where are the other schemes that may provide recreational pressure that this scheme is being assessed with?

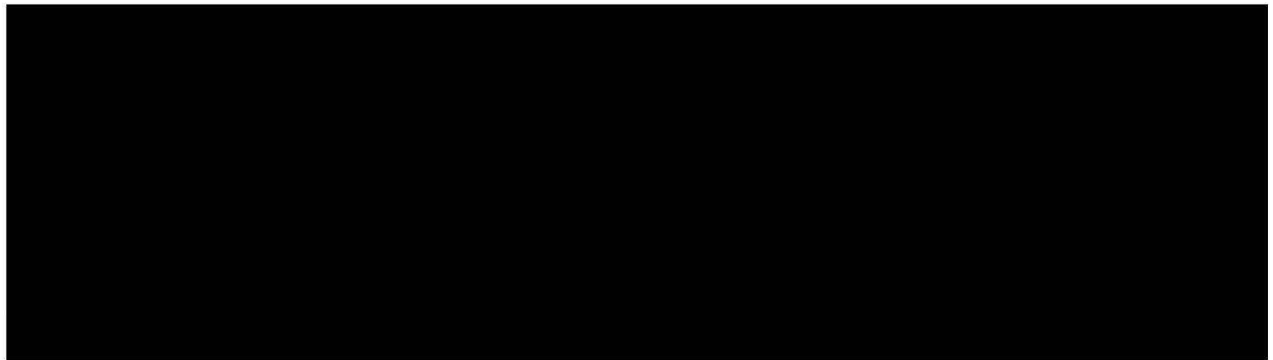
As you are aware in March 2022 Natural England announced evidence which identified significant recreational pressure on Chiltern Beechlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A large number of people will be attracted by this facility from outside the local area leading to additional recreation activity. The development will have a significant effect on the SAC. No strategy to mitigate the impacts of future development on the Chiltern Beechlands has been agreed and the application should be rejected in accordance with the Inspector's conclusions.

The Site is within the Chiltern Beechlands 12.6km zone of influence. The Inspector noted that "Point 10 - Overall there is insufficient evidence the proposal would preserve the integrity of the Beechwood SAC and consequently would be in conflict with Policy CS24 of the Chiltern District Core Strategy 2011, Para 180 of the Framework and Habitats Regulations".

Land Ownership

As per our previous objections the access is proposed to be widened using Common Land outside the Applicants ownership. In particular the provision of 2 metre pavements and sight lines outside the control of the Applicants would require consent of the Secretary of State and Parish Council. There is no indication from the Secretary of State or the Parish Council that this can be achieved. As the proposal involves Common Land the application should therefore be assessed on the basis that the sight lines, pavements and visibility splays are not achievable. The

Highways Officer should not be accepting the scheme with “Grampian” conditions in respect of access widening, pavement provision and widening and sight lines unless these items can actually be achieved.



The biodiversity net gain data for habitat creation references a potential timeline of up to 27 years to reach a ‘target condition’ and does not include any consideration for the impact of the density or use of a new development [REDACTED]

The Bucks Ecology Officer at Buckinghamshire Council Agni-Louiza Arampoglou has not responded to the additional information made available at the time of the last committee. Bats, [REDACTED] greater crested newts, other wildlife on the site are going to be adversely affected.

Thames Valley Police

The removal of the site manager’s dwelling from the re-submitted application is a cause for concern regarding security and has not been addressed. No report from Thames Valley Police was submitted for this application and issues raised by Thames Valley Police for the previous application remain valid. Although the Planning Inspector stated that “there is no evidence that the area suffers from higher crime rates”, the key point is that such a large-scale development of commercial buildings, café and car park would be expected to generate more anti-social behaviour, and this has not been addressed.

Light Pollution

There is still no detailed consideration of the light pollution impact on heritage assets or protected species in reports.

Usage

Site usage by local organisations has not been updated in the submission since the initial application was made. Community groups have moved elsewhere for a variety of reasons. Provision of worship and community space in the local area has increased since the first application, with the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre and Rectory Hill Scout Hall, whilst church attendance numbers continue to decline

Highways

The comments of the Bucks County Highways Authority are inadequate and inaccurate in a number of respects and they should be revisited.

There are parking restrictions in Glebe Way and Bois Lane, and not as noted. These would have become apparent if the site had been visited and/or the Officer had knowledge of the locality.

The Parking Control in Glebe Way has resulted in reduced site vision on the exit from the site. There is no indication that the difficulties associated with tracking and access as set out in our original objection has been placed before the Highways Officer and/or assessed. This does need to be considered and commented upon.

Furthermore our swept path traffic flow plans clearly demonstrate that the applicant's traffic flow plans do not work particularly in connection with Refuse, Commercial vehicles and Fire engines visiting the site.

As we have previously pointed out the inaccessible/unsustainable nature of this site means that maximum parking is required. It appears the Highways Officer accepts there an under provision of parking and the size of the proposed parking bays does not comply with current parking requirements.

The Chilterns Cycleway includes the small roads adjacent to the site, (Bois Lane, Glebe Way and North Road) enjoyed by cyclists at weekends when the sale is expected to be the busiest.

Heritage

The Bucks Council Heritage Officer questioned the need for the proposed scale of development in March 2023 and this had not been addressed.

Lastly, in addition to the changes since the previous decision set out above we believe the Inspectors consideration of amenity and heritage assets was inadequate. The proposed scale of development would inevitably impact the quality of life of residents in the adjacent Grade II listed property. The suggestion that there would be no material impact on their property and quality of life possibly arose because of the lack of detail provided and lack of adequate scrutiny. The proposed car park at the boundary of the house; fire pit with surround seating; site capacity; and long hours of operation would inevitably generate noise and light pollution which would impact residents of the house. Also: the site is adjacent to an Established Residential Area of Special Character (ERASC).

Although the proposed metal/glass design of the largest building on site could be deemed acceptable on exceptional, subjective grounds, it conflicts with the traditional design conditions imposed on the current rectory built in 1983 and even the proposed new rectory.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Carter

Mark Carter

for Carter Planning Ltd

On behalf of The Protect Chesham Bois Common and Surrounding Area Action Group