



Minutes of the meeting of the Plans Committee held in the Council Chamber,
Civic Centre, Uckfield on Monday 20th February 2023 at 7.00pm

Cllr. K. Bedwell (Chair)

Cllr. C. Macve (Vice-Chair)

Cllr. J. Love

IN ATTENDANCE:

Linda Lewis – Administrative Officer

Minutes taken by Linda Lewis

7 Members of the public

1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to any item on the agenda, but none were forthcoming.

2.0 STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE CHAIRMAN'S DISCRETION

P93.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** to suspend standing Orders to allow members of the public to speak on items on the Agenda.

There were four members of the public wishing to speaking on Item No.5 on the agenda, all regarding application WD/2022/3319/MAO land south-west of Ashdown Business Park, Michael Way, Maresfield, TN22 2DU

Member of the Public 1

Wealden's draft plan of 2019 contained no proposal for a major new employment allocation. We already had Ridgewood Farm.

We now have this enormous proposal of subregional scale – 60,000sq m of development over 30ha of green fields and sensitive ecosystems.

He stated that there had been a complete failure to involve the general public in the process of selecting this site for strategic commercial development.

He listed reasons that this application would breach national policy, the policies of the Core Strategy and the Local Plan:-

- *This application was premature and completely negated the properly planned and managed provision of employment and related housing land across the District and around Maresfield and Uckfield;*
- *The application would cause unacceptable loss of agricultural land which had never been previously developed and which was outside any development boundary;*
- *This development would cause the loss of the strategic gap/buffer between Maresfield/Uckfield and the rural hamlet of Piltdown and the parish of Fletching and potentially set a precedent for other villages around;*
- *The proposal would create substantial harm to the landscape character of this part of the Low Weald;*
- *The thousands of additional vehicle movements each day would cause substantial adverse effects on the local highway network, especially the A272 and A22 which were already congested, especially at peak times;*

- *There was an excessive amount of commercial floor space which would substantially exceed development plan provision to 2027 and 2019 Plan provision. The application lacked any justification of scale and mix of uses;*
- *There was low unemployment in Wealden compared to much of the South East so there must be real doubts about the number of jobs suggested by the applicant;*
- *The design of buildings was inappropriate and lacked any contextual approach; the design was not actually defined and fixed, given the lack of binding parameter plans and design codes – anything could be built later;*
- *The power supply to such a large site would require a substantial upgrade and new routing by UKPN from Uckfield. How would the power be provided without causing substantial harm to the ecology around the west of Uckfield when new power lines were laid?*
- *The impact of this out-of-town office and business development, which would almost certainly also have retail in due course, like the existing business park, would damage the vitality and viability of Uckfield Town Centre. He urged the Council and the community to oppose the scheme.*

Member of the Public 2

They were concerned for the Climate. Uckfield Town Council had pledged to support the Climate Emergency declared by Wealden District Council and that every decision made should therefore aim to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050.

The application vaguely mentioned aspirations for energy efficient buildings, however gave no assessment of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gas emissions and stated that;

- *Operational emissions would account for only 25% of the total emissions;*
- *Embodied emissions associated with preparing and building the site would account for 75% of the total emissions;*
- *Emissions from additional car journeys will have a detrimental climate impact and also impair the Ashdown Forest;*

They were also concerned for biodiversity and how this application of 77 acres of green fields, being immediately adjacent to ancient woodland, would threaten the fragile ecosystems causing;

- *irreversible detrimental impact on the delicate ecosystems, resulting in loss of habitat to native species, leading to extinction;*
- *a detrimental impact to the adjacent ancient woodland and untouched wetland habitat known as ghyll woodland and the rare species that it supported unique to the Weald of southern England;*
- *a significant increase in the likelihood of downstream flooding from the proposed development, including run off of contaminated water from the site, over land covered in hard surfaces; roads, car parks and rooftops. No assessment has been made in this application regarding downstream flooding. The application was only concerned with the flood risk to the development itself which was insufficient for a development of this size, which would impact on the wider area;*
- *contamination to healthy soils which not only soak up and purify water, they also store 80% of terrestrial carbon i.e. carbon that was stored on the land as opposed to in the oceans. They stated there had been no assessment of the likely carbon emissions associated with soil degradation.*

The resident stated that this development would be a gross act of environmental vandalism and the adverse effects were not outweighed by short term financial gains.

The Chairman of the Piltdown Residents Association (Member of Public 3)

He explained that the Residents' Association was also a facilitator of a new Action Group called 'Stop Ashdown Business Park Expansion', and that the residents had

commissioned a legal review of the application which had identified clear flaws. East Sussex Highways were raising serious doubts on information that had been supplied by the applicant. He referred to page 35 of the travel plan.

He was concerned about the lack of public consultation, which was minimal if any with the public and 'not good' with the parish. The action group totally opposed this application and would do everything they could to resist, to stop the development and he hoped that Uckfield Town Council would put in a formal objection.

Member of the Public 4

The resident urged the Town Council to object to the application on behalf of Uckfield which would cause harm to the Ashdown Forest and detrimentally impact Budletts Common, Uckfield, Maresfield, Piltdown and Buxted parishes.

They stated the application was unjustified speculative over-development to industrialise Sussex and did not enable us to protect the natural environment and beauty of our District or meet our climate change objectives. It failed three pillars of the NPPF - economic, sustainable development, meeting biodiversity and with the climate emergency announced by Wealden District Council.

It was said at a Maresfield Parish meeting that this had been negotiated with Wealden for over two years yet excluded 42 parishes from the submitted call for the sites for a sensitive plan-led community consulted approach to identified needs of Wealden.

They stated that the development would harm the biodiversity and countryside, cause harm, loss and deterioration to ancient woodland and habitats of principal importance.

It would also severely pollute and contaminate one of the most important freshwater ecosystems in our area and WFD Shortbridge Stream Sea Trout spawning and European Eel migration from Lake Wood via Shortbridge, leading to the Ouse.

We needed to stop the pollution of the River Ouse which was coming from Maresfield and Uckfield.

The resident called for the application to be deferred until UK Power Networks identified the route from Uckfield due to the potential impact to ancient woodlands and habitats. This application should not go forward without a coherent emerging local plan.

It was stated the application failed national policies NPPF2,8 15 and 16 and local policies Chapters 4 and 5. for biodiversity and countryside.

There was no presumption in favour of development due to National NPPF policies and local saved policies. The applicant had not published the BNG metric for full transparency, scrutiny and assessment.

It failed the Ashdown Forest which was a significant SAC/SPA habitats site which therefore meant it failed NPPF 182/185 for cumulative impact and harm.

It failed NPPF 185; planning decisions as it should also ensure that new development was 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 on the wider area impact that could arise from development. The application failed the local plan.

DEFRA had announced an Environmental Improvement Plan 2023, they had announced local nature recovery strategies, they had a Defra policy (May 2022) for ancient woodland; none of which were covered by the application.

They felt the application should be deferred because it was not known where the Uckfield Power Network would go through this site, and what additional harm this would cause.

The resident believed that Wealden had asked for this application to come forward and therefore had created their own predetermination and a conflict of interest prior to community engagement of the emerging local plan.

SANGS and the Ashdown Forest methodology were not fit for purpose in the context of the scale of this site, the anticipated increased traffic and pollution from commercial vehicles.

There was worry for mission creep and scope creep that the site could see changes in the future.

There were concerns for the impact of the roads - exacerbating the dangers of traffic on to the roads from Budletts, Blackdown and Batts Bridge roundabouts. There were concerns for the freshwater eco system.

Recent planning appeals for Mill Farm and the walled garden gave evidence for a material planning consideration against, based on rural character, appearance, landscape and heritage assets.

Many of the letters of objections were very eloquent and explained Wealden's own policies to Wealden, outside of the development boundaries Ridgewood Farm was already approved and not built.

The resident then read a summary of the Wealden policies that others had quoted in their letters of objection and stated that the presumption in favour of a sustainable development clearly did not apply.

P94.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** to reinstate State Orders.

3.0 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs. J. Beesley, D. Bennett and S Mayhew. Cllr. B. Cox was absent.

4.0 MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 30th January 2023

P95.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Plans Committee of the 30th January 2023, be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Action List

Members noted the Action List.

5.0 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

WD/2023/0114/FA CHINTHURST COTTAGE, PUDDING CAKE LANE, UCKFIELD, TN22 1BU

Removal of condition 4 of WD/2008/1166/F (replacement of cowshed with residential dwelling) to allow the annex to be privately rented.

Members raised concerns that once rented as a separate entity, there would be only one short step to selling it as a separate dwelling to which they would strongly object.

P96.02.23 Members felt that the original condition No 4 was still viable and because of the above concern, they subsequently **RESOLVED** to object to the application.

WD/2022/3319/MAO LAND SOUTH-WEST OF ASHDOWN BUSINESS PARK, MICHAEL WAY, MARESFIELD, TN22 2DU

Extension of Ashdown Business Park into land to the west, providing for up to 60,000m² of gross internal floor area for class e(g) mixed use classes plus B2 and B8 with ancillary storage and office use.

Members spoke individually on the application at length and each raised various points, much of which also supported those of the members of the public present.

One member did state that the application could be beneficial to the area to provide local employment for the growing population, and would reduce commuting distances. Although there would be traffic movements into the estate this would be mitigated by less traffic going out of Uckfield to reach employment elsewhere.

The Chair accepted that this application would also supply infrastructure ahead of the high amount of housing that was coming to Uckfield, but questioned if this was the right infrastructure.

Another member queried whether Wealden District Council had looked at extending the proposed industrial estate on the Ridgewood Farm Site, which would cover all aspects and negate the need for this business park.

P97.02.23 The Chair then summed up the comments of members when it was subsequently **RESOLVED** to strongly object to the application on the following grounds:-

- Lack of consultation with the Maresfield Parish Council and those nearby and lack of public consultation. The Town Council also felt that it was unacceptable that they were missed out of the original list of consultees;
- The development fell outside of the development boundary and was not included in development for the area and must be decided by everybody and not just Wealden District Council;
- Concerns for the loss of agricultural land;
- Concerns on encroachment on the natural greenfield site;
- More information was needed on the link up to UK Power Network and mains connection to the site, and would urge that the developer and UK Power Network make contact with Uckfield Town Council immediately to ascertain whether they needed to connect to the Uckfield sub-station or to Newick sub-station and the plans and timescales involved in advance;
- Ashdown Business Park at 77 acres would change the visual impact and rural nature of the surrounding environment of low Weald. This was contrary to WDC adopted Local Plan 1998 Chapter 2 4.4,4.5 (2,3,4,5).
- Drawings supplied were indicative and not detailed enough;
- Concerns on the lack of information of traffic movements, traffic plans, surface water management and its potential impact on the River Ouse further downstream;
- Would request that a further ecological study of Batts Bridge Stream be carried out, specifically in relation to its adjoining with Shortbridge Stream. Shortbridge Stream was a trout spawning stream. Downlands Farm Scoping Opinion, letter from Environment Agency and one other said that harm to headwaters upstream could have significant impact from changes of the Mockbeggars Headwaters to the Shortbridge Stream catchment area. Therefore, any change of surface water would increase flood risk and potentially cause impact to the endangered species;
- Concerns for the danger to the demise of the European Eel which had been recorded on Budletts Common. They accessed ditches at Budletts and had been seen in Ridgewood Stream and Shortbridge Stream and were likely to use Batts Bridge Stream as part of their migration route. Their significance could not be overlooked or mitigated;
- It was felt that provision had already been made in the SHEELA document for expanded industrial space at Oakwood Park (brownfield site) and Ridgewood Farm. This was enough to fulfil the requirements of the current housing supply. Wealden had the lowest unemployment rate in East Sussex at 3.3% which was lower than the average of 3.8% across the UK;

- Concerns that the development would cause the loss of the strategic gap/buffer between Maresfield/Uckfield, the rural hamlet of Piltdown and the parish of Fletching and potentially set a precedent for other villages around;
- Would strongly oppose to any of those units being used for retail. Members felt strongly that out-of-town retail could impact on the High Street/Uckfield Town Centre. Retail in the development would further increase traffic movements also;
- Visitors were unlikely to use cycle routes or walk ways to access the business park and this would mean a higher use of vehicles which would be contrary to WDC climate change policy;
- The application would work against the commitment of Wealden District Council to protect and improve the natural environment, and would be contrary to becoming carbon neutral;
- Concerns for flood risk-
It was no longer possible to look at flood risk for major applications in isolation. Currently in Uckfield apart from the applications already approved (Harlands Farm and Eastbourne Road) we had Horsted Pond Farm, Land North of Eastbourne Road, Downlands Farm, and Bird in Eye Farm all awaiting planning decisions and all had surface water drainage proposals into streams that fed directly into the River Uck and River Ouse. Until more was understood about the cumulative impact on all of these developments, when members were seeing above average rainfall year on year and flood defences already under pressure, it was felt flood reports could not be looked at in isolation;
- The Town Council believed the application was contrary to planning policies: -
WDC adopted Local Plan 1998 Chapter 2 4.4,4.5 (2, 3,4,5)
Wealden District Local Plan Core Strategy saved policies; SP1,4,7,9,19,12,14
Wealden District Local Plan 1988 – saved policies BS 10,
EN 2.8.27 GD 2, TR 3
WDC Environment Policy Chapter 4 EN17
NPPF update Sept 2020 paragraph 90
- Concern that the development would detrimentally affect the ecology of site and surrounding areas, cause harm to biodiversity of habitats of native species and contaminate water courses, affecting fresh water eco systems;
- Concerns that the development would exacerbate the dangers of traffic on to the roads from Budletts, Blackdown and Batts Bridge roundabouts;
- Concerns for contamination of soils;
- Would support the eloquent objections raised by residents.

Members of Plans Committee objected to the insufficient evidence in the proposal to make a decision. Questions raised by other consultees and comments on a rushed proposal would suggest that this application needed to be reconsidered, that time needed to be taken to consult with parish and town councils, especially in review of UKPN's power supply, the lack of knowledge of the current status of solar panel farm, impact on Uckfield and their surrounding communities, the lack of statement of common ground and details on proposed development outcomes.

It was noted that many essential reports were still waiting to come in which would be essential when looking at an application of this size. A lot of information was still outstanding and required by consultees.

These included: -

- East Sussex Highways – queries in pre application letter;
- Bus Improvements Service plan needed to be looked at and the costs;
- No details for walk-cycling distances;
- No provision of a crossing point from the A22 to the site – this needed a road safety and traffic assessment for crossing points;
- Traffic assessments needed to look at the wider picture of safety and travel;

- needed to assess the walking and cycle routes from London Road to Budletts roundabout into the site, and also assess routes into Maresfield up into the Batts Bridge roundabout and look at travel and safety assessment of those and the same for Piltdown and Newick;
- Consultation with Queens Drive residents needed, re. left turn in and out;
- Consultation with businesses regarding noise issues and how the development might affect their businesses;
- Conservation consultation;
- arboricultural and landscape reports – this was very important as ancient woodlands were adjacent and located on the site. In NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development did not apply where the plan or the project was likely to have significant effect on habitat sites;
- information needed regarding a connecting footpath between Batts Bridge Stream to public right of way 67D. Consultation was needed to ensure East Sussex Rights of Way were satisfied;
- More information was required regarding drainage;
- Sussex Police needed to be approached for them to advise how the current anti-social driving behaviour from the site, that the Town Council have been working with them through the PSCO's, would be addressed for this site going forward;
- Southern Water requested further information, and
- ESCC Risk Management needed further essential information.

WD/2023/0331/F 34 FRAMFIELD ROAD, UCKFIELD, TN22 5AH
REAR GROUND FLOOR EXTENSION

Amendments to approval WD/2022/0190.

P98.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** to support the application which was largely in accordance with the original approved application.

WD/2022/3086/F TESCO STORES LTD, BELL FARM ROAD, UCKFIELD, TN22 1BA

Installation of a key cutting, shoe repairs, watch repairs, engraving, phone repairs, photo processing and dry-cleaning kiosk, alterations to the set down point and 5 x ramraid bollards.

Description amended 10/02/2023.

P99.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** to object to the application on the following grounds:

- The introduction of the kiosk would create a loss of parking spaces – which would fail to support the population growth in Uckfield, and demand on use of the supermarket. There would be greater demand for parking spaces, and spaces had already been reduced due the introduction of the click and collect bays and electric charging bays. This car park was already often at capacity on weekdays and weekends.
- Due to loss of parking spaces, there were concerns that traffic would likely build up and cause congestion at the mini-roundabout, which was the only entrance route into the store. This would also further cause congestion along Bell Farm Road;
- concern on the close proximity of the proposed pod to the electrical sub-station and concern for staff being exposed to the EMF radiation over prolonged periods. This sub-station was an intermediate sub-station producing electrical fields similar to National Grid sub-stations, although emitting lower voltages;
- concerns that the close location of the pod to the fencing around the sub-station could lead to anti-social behaviour and access into the sub-station site, from the roof of the pod;
- the corner being frequently used by users of the supermarket for drop off and collection. The placement of the pod in this location could result in further congestion and difficulties for vehicles, taxis and overall traffic flow, thus increasing risk to pedestrians;
- the increase in additional vehicular visits to the site;
- no prior public consultation;

- support to the town's thriving High Street and independent retailers, to which this application and proposal would pose competition and risk their livelihood, although it was noted that this was not a planning reason for objection.

WD/2022/3015/AI 100 HIGH STREET, UCKFIELD, TN22 1PX

Externally illuminated fascia sign and externally illuminated projection sign. Planning Officer requests revised consultation following Amended Plans and Description. (i.e. externally illuminated and not internally illuminated).

P100.02.23 It was **RESOLVED** to support the application, as the Conservation Officer was now happy with the proposal.

6.0 DECISION NOTICES

Approved:

WD/2022/3179/F

TWO STOREY SIDE AND REAR EXTENSION FOLLOWING DEMOLITION OF EXISTING SINGLE STOREY SIDE AND REAR GARAGE. REPLACEMENT FRONT PORCH.

CHERRYWOOD, 26 CAMBRIDGE WAY, UCKFIELD, TN22 2AD

WD/2022/2948/LB

REPLACE RAILINGS AND HANDRAIL TO FRONT OF HOUSE
RED TILES AND PEERLAND HOUSE, 125 HIGH STREET, UCKFIELD, TN22 1EH

WD/2022/3275/F

EXTENSION OF GARAGE TO FRONT AND REPLACEMENT PORCH
7 THE POTTERIES, RIDGEWOOD, UCKFIELD, TN22 5TQ

Refused:

WD/2022/2048/LB

CONVERSION OF EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUILDING AND OUTBUILDING TO PROVIDE FOUR RESIDENTIAL FLATS WITH ASSOCIATED WORKS INCLUDING CYCLE AND BIN STORAGE

101 HIGH STREET, UCKFIELD, TN22 1RN

WD/2022/2047/F

CHANGE OF USE AND CONVERSION OF EXISTING COMMERCIAL BUILDING AND OUTBUILDING TO PROVIDE FOUR RESIDENTIAL FLATS WITH ASSOCIATED WORKS INCLUDING CYCLE AND BIN STORAGE

101 HIGH STREET, UCKFIELD, TN22 1RN

Members noted the Decision Notices.

7.0 TO ADVISE ON THE TOWN COUNCIL'S OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS OUTSIDE THE USUAL CYCLE OF MEETINGS

WD/2022/3330/F DERWEN LODGE, NEW PLACE, UCKFIELD, TN22 5DP
PROPOSED DETACHED CARPORT

Uckfield Town Council object to the application as despite being in keeping with the style of the building, we had the following overriding concerns:

- It would detrimentally affect the street scene;
- Cause blocking of the property windows;
- Would cause overshadowing to the property on the left to the westward side of the Lodge.

Members noted the report.

8.0 TO COMPILE A RESPONSE TO THE LEVELLING UP AND REGENERATION BILL: REFORMS TO PLANNING POLICY CONSULTATION

The Chair read through the questions and the proposed responses from each of the members present, and from those available from those absent.

It was subsequently agreed that the clerk would collate the responses and circulate for agreement of the committee. Once agreed responses would then be uploaded to the consultation portal by the closing date of the 2nd March 2023.

The meeting closed at 8.41pm.