

Southleigh Park House Tree Felling

As with all planning applications, our Council should be aiming towards granting requests for sustainable development, and refusing those that do not meet this bar. This application, which in essence decouples the felling of trees from the rest of the re-development of Southleigh Park House, does not appear to meet this test.

I am aware that in granting the application for the redevelopment of Southleigh Park House there were many concerns from residents, our officers and members of this committee about various aspects. But when looking at all aspects taken as a whole, the positive aspects of the application outweighed the negative – the planning balance – and therefore the application was permitted with some further conditions.

There are many examples of planning applications around the Borough where the planning balance was a difficult decision, and this application is one such site. In other examples, the Council has been very clear that we expect to see all aspects of the site progress simultaneously in order that sustainable development is achieved; so that the detrimental impacts do not take place without the assurance that the positive aspects are to quickly follow.

I would like to see Southleigh Park House redeveloped to contribute to our housing need, and particularly for the affordable housing it will provide, but this does not overrule the need for environmental concerns to be taken fully into account. There has been much press in recent years about the importance of trees to our natural environment, and a full landscape strategy was approved, in order to ensure replanting took place to counterbalance the felling needed. I believe that we need to see that strategy delivered, rather than separating out the felling element.

In summary, in order to maintain a sustainable development on this site, I believe all aspects need to remain as a package, and therefore this application should be refused at this time. The applicant should be encouraged to bring forward a reserved matters application that meets the NPPF and Local Plan policies, and demonstrates how the development will balance environment with commercial concerns. I will expand on these points during my verbal deputation to the committee.