

Deputation by Councillor Gary Robinson

Members, we all know that we need additional housing, I fully understand the pressure being exerted on this Council by our Government to meet the quota demanded of it but what I do not understand is the need to build on this site. This is the 3rd time in less than 12 months that this application has been before this committee. Bedhampton is happy to play our part in meeting the demand but we do not believe that this site is the one to do it on.

Last time this application came to this committee you will recall that deputies, myself included asked you to consider reasons this site is unsuitable for development, these included the agricultural land grade, Biodiversity, Highway safety and the impact on the Old Bedhampton Conservation Area.

I know that we, as a council, have last month published our 5-year land supply position and this falls short of the government target, but this should not be the beating stick to allow us to approve applications that have recently been refused and committee members feel are unsuitable

The landowners and developers of this site have tried to promote it in the past several times. Originally at 250 dwellings and then suggesting that 50 would be suitable in the final throws before the previous examination in Public by Sue Turner (Planning Inspector) in July 2014. The planning inspector dismissed the Lower Road site and it was omitted from the current adopted Local plan. Her report said.....

However it is clear that the sites proximity to Old Bedhampton Conservation Area is a strong factor weighing against development. This, together with uncertainty of impact on biodiversity and agricultural land, justify the non-allocation of this site.

I cannot now understand why we would try to go against that inspector so soon after her report was quite clear that the relationship to the setting of the Conservation Area was a fundamental factor in the outcome of the reason it was not approved as a potential site back then for our current, adopted local plan.

When we look at what has changed since this report in 2014 there is only one thing and that should mean we are more against development than in favour of it. The recent amendment to the conservation area of Old Bedhampton...you will recall that this was unanimously agreed and unchallenged at the meeting of Full Council. This was not the only recent unanimous decision by a committee regarding Old Bedhampton as the last time this committee saw this application it was also a unanimous decision to reject it.

Many points were covered in the last debate relating this application. In fact, the meeting was unusually adjourned in order to seek clarification and ensure that members arrived at the right outcome, which I believe they did. I understand that in order to keep a fair and consistent approach as a local planning authority the main consideration for this 'new' application is the relationship to the conservation area so, I would like to ask you just one question?

What has changed....?

I support the planning system and the opportunity for an applicant to submit their 'free go' once they have had an opportunity to review the feedback and decision notice from their first application.

So members, when you first saw this 'new' application I can imagine that like me you were interested to see what has changed, or what will be different.

The first place for me was the number of dwellings and this was the same.

So then I looked at the new plan and struggled to see an amendment so I asked the case officer for the overlay plan that you see in the pack now.

Then I look at the overlay plan and began to see the minor changes. Effectively the properties close to the Manor Farm Buildings have moved around 5-7 meters.

I thought that we would have seen these dwellings be removed at the very least from the site completely but instead an area of open space has been reduced to allow the same number to fit in this site

You can make your own judgement on whether you believe that we are looking at a 'new' application or the old application with a small, insignificant, gap added in one area of the site.

As the 2036 plan emerges, we have been told as members to trust the process. In Bedhampton that is what we did. We did not table any amendment to the plan accepting that the planning process would then manage unsuitable sites. However, that is not happening on this site. You have rejected this application once.

You are aware there is an appeal scheduled for less than 4 weeks away. That is the democratic process that we have in the UK. This application has made it through the planning department at a very high speed and surely you must wonder why? Since the Site Viewing party was planned there have been over 40 additional comments and consultee responses which have been received.

We are advised that 'we do not want planning by appeal' but this committee made the decision back in March and this appears, in my opinion to be a speculative attempt to bulldoze an application through before the appeal inspector can rule on a definitive outcome.

The previous inspector in 2014 agreed that this site should not be an allocation for the current plan because it is simply not suitable. To date, we have not had an opportunity for this to be tested with the emerging local plan because the developer wants to jump the gun before the 2036 plan is examined in public. If they were that confident, they would be successful, then I believe at this stage they would wait for that examination.

Stay strong and PLEASE do not allow pressure of appeal costs force you to make an irreversible decision for just 50 homes. Several other local authorities near to us have successfully defended the decision of their councillors at committee when the officer has recommended approval and this site will be the same.

This development should not be approved for the same reason as listed on the previous decision notice and I am hopeful that you cannot see any reason why this application is significantly different and should be approved?