

Briefing Note on application 18/07194/OUT: Outline application (including details of access and layout) for erection of 101 dwellings with all other matters reserved (amended plans received) at Tralee Farm, Wycombe Road, Holmer Green, HP15 6RY

This note has been prepared following a review of both the report by case officer Declan Cleary to Buckinghamshire Council's Strategic Sites Committee on 24 March 2022; and the subsequent report for 12 May 2022.

Summary

Hazlemere Parish Council (HPC) has previously objected to this application, and continues to object.

There were sound reasons why the application could have been refused in March, for example the lack of infrastructure and the quality of the design – it was not necessary to defer for a development brief.

A development brief remains essential to deal with the unresolved matters in policy HW8, but that brief does not need to be in place before the application can be determined.

There are two material considerations which have not been taken into account. When these are taken into account, it is clear that the current application must be refused.

First, that Figure 14 accompanying HW8 of the Wycombe District Local Plan is out of date. Land adjacent to HW8 in the former Chiltern District was not allocated for development. HW8 (rightly) requires open space to provide a sense of separation between Hazlemere and Holmer Green. Figure 14 shows this across the middle of the site. It makes no rational sense for it to be in this location when the southern part of the site must now be part of Hazlemere as it cannot connect into Holmer Green.

Second, that the access proposed from Wycombe Road does not meet the standards set out in the Housing Intensification Supplementary Planning Document. This document applies to the former Wycombe area, and sets out national design standards now articulated in the National Planning Policy Framework and Designing for Healthy Life.

It might be argued the document does not apply, as the access road falls within the former Chiltern area. This would fail to take a comprehensive approach to the site as a

whole. In addition, the national standards apply across the whole site, and, further, the former Chiltern policy regarding housing net loss has been assessed against the site as a whole.

Taking these material considerations into account, there are clear reasons for refusal.

1. The application prejudices the delivery of policy objective HW8 (1)(c) because it fails to demonstrate that the comprehensive development of the whole HW8 site can be delivered in a way that achieves all the objectives of the policy.
2. The layout of the site fails to achieve high standards of design, by reason of the location of the open space which is designed to achieve a sense of separation to meet policy objective HW8(1)(a), and which therefore isolates the southern part of the site from Hazlemere, contrary to DM35 (policy 3(e)), the Wycombe Residential Design Guide, the National Planning Policy Framework (para 130) and the principles set out in Building for a Healthy Life (Homes England's measure of design quality).
3. The design fails to achieve high standards of community safety because the paths across open space have inadequate levels of natural surveillance from surrounding houses so that they will not be perceived to be safe by all sections of the community, especially after dark, contrary to policy DM35, the Wycombe Residential Design Guide (Section 2, especially 2.2 and 2.3), the National Planning Policy Framework (para 130) and the principles set out in Building for a Healthy Life – Homes England's measure of design quality (particularly the principle of natural connections within integrated neighbourhoods) and, further, prejudicing the ability of the remainder of the site to meet policy objectives HW8(2)(c)
4. The access to the site from Wycombe Road fails to achieve high standards of community safety for pedestrians because of inadequate natural surveillance from surrounding houses such that the access will not be perceived to be safe by all sections of the community especially after dark, and is incompatible with the character of the local area. It therefore fails to meet the requirements of HW8(2)(b)&(c) and contrary to policy H3 of Chiltern Local Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework (para 130), the principles set out in Building for a Healthy Life – Homes England's measure of design quality (particularly the

principle of natural connections within integrated neighbourhoods), and the guidance set out in the Wycombe Housing Intensification Supplementary Planning Document.

HPC has been waiting to engage with Buckinghamshire Council on the development brief because that would have allowed Fig 14 to be updated, as anticipated in the supporting text to the policy HW8. HPC has now taken on that task as part of the work on its Neighbourhood Plan, which will be issued for regulation 14 consultation in a matter of weeks. The Parish Council is fully aware that the site will be coming forward for development and the Council's concern is that it is developed in the best possible way for the community.

Further information

Why is Figure 14 not up to date?

Being 'up to date' is not a matter for the date of the adoption of the Wycombe District local plan. Instead, the assessment is based on whether circumstances have changed since adoption, and the impact of those changed circumstances. It is therefore possible to have an 'old' policy that remains up to date, and a recent policy that is not up to date, depending on whether circumstances have changed or not.

At the time of the adoption of the local plan, it was uncertain if the land in former Chiltern District would be allocated for development or not, and the policy and accompanying text of HW8 allows for 'with/without' options.

However, the layout shown in Figure 14 that accompanies HW8 can only relate to the 'with' scenario – where the adjacent land is allocated.

It illustrates a green infrastructure corridor across the site which provides the 'sense of separation' required by Policy HW8 1a. The lower portion of development is clearly therefore perceived as part of Holmer Green, connecting across the adjacent land, and from there through the existing network of streets into Holmer Green. As the adjacent land has not been allocated, the southern site cannot connect in that way.

This means that if Figure 14 is implemented through planning applications, any development of the southern parcel would both be isolated from Holmer Green – because the adjacent land is not allocated for development – and also isolated from Hazlemere, because of the open space designed to achieve the policy requirement of a sense of separation between the two settlements. Development in this location cannot therefore be compliant with the local plan taken as a whole.

Figure 14 is therefore not up to date.

Why does Inland Homes prejudice the comprehensive development of the site?

The southern parcel of land cannot come forward in a way that meets the requirements of the development plan. It will be an isolated area of development, not connected into existing neighbourhoods.

As there is no land allocated adjacent to the built-up area of Holmer Green, the whole of the development of HW8 must now connect into Hazlemere. HW8 policy 1(a) requires a sense of separation between Hazlemere and Holmer Green. The location of the open space required to achieve this must, therefore, be relocated from the position shown in Figure 14 and the Inland Homes planning application.

To permit the Inland Homes scheme locks in the location of some open space. This has a number of consequences.

The Inland Homes planning application is for 101 homes. That capacity is constrained by the location of the open space required to achieve a sense of separation. But, as is explained above, this is no longer the logical place for this open space. If it remains in this location, more space will be required in addition elsewhere. The site as a whole will not therefore result in the efficient use of land, reducing the capacity of the site.

In addition, because some open space would already be locked in, it could result in the additional area required to achieve the sense of separation (HW8 1(a)) failing to be of a meaningful size.

Further, HW8 Policy 2(c) requires that development of the site improves access to existing bus routes. The most direct pedestrian route from the southern part of the site to achieve this is via Wycombe Road and the Inland Homes scheme. However, if the Inland Homes scheme is permitted, that will be across a greenspace designed to achieve a sense of separation. The route will therefore fail to achieve the standards of surveillance required to make this route safe to pedestrians required by DM35.

Finally, Policy DM35 requires good placemaking, and that all developments improve the character of the area and the way it functions. This includes connecting new developments into existing neighbourhoods. This is supplemented by the Residential Design Guide which has a number of objectives regarding connectivity. Any development of the southern part of the site will be unable to achieve these policy requirements as it will be isolated from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

The access road from Wycombe Road into the site

The access road is within former Chiltern District, although the site itself is in former Wycombe District. Different Local Plans, and supplementary planning documents therefore apply.

Former Wycombe District has a Housing Intensification SPD. This sets out standards for roads inserted into existing streets to provide access to land to the rear. The access road in the Inland Homes application fails to achieve the standards set out in the Housing Intensification SPD. It has insufficient surveillance, undermining the safety of the street for pedestrians.

The Housing Intensification SPD cannot be given the same weight in the former Chiltern District that it has in former Wycombe District. But that does not mean that it should be accorded no weight. It must be a material consideration with some weight given that the access road in question is accessing land in the former Wycombe District.

In addition, the Housing Intensification SPD is articulating national policy, and that national policy applies equally to land in the former Wycombe and Chiltern Districts. That policy can be found at para 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and within a guide produced by Homes England, called Design for a Healthy Life.

The role of a development brief

HW8 refers to the need to prepare a development brief to ensure the comprehensive development of the site.

A development brief does not need to be prepared by the local authority. It can be prepared by developers, so long as the final content is agreed by the local planning authority and adopted by them.

The preparation of a brief would have been the vehicle by which layouts could be prepared to meet the requirements of the policy, and conform to the policy requirements. These would have been tested through public consultation. Once adopted, Figure 14 would have been accorded considerably less weight, and planning applications would have been expected to come forward in line with the development brief, not Figure 14.