



Arborfield & Newland Parish Council

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Full application for the proposed construction of new Petrol Filling Station comprising forecourt and canopy, 2 no. underground fuel tanks, fuel pumps, sales building, car wash, jet washes, car parking, EV charging, new access, cycle parking, car care, plant, landscaping and associated works.

The Parish Council thanks the case officer for their agreement to extend the closing date for this planning application to enable time for the Council to request, receive and scrutinise the pre-application advice dated 7th January 2020, provided to the applicants in relation to application 192637, and pending the outcome of a further FOI request relating to pre-application advice provided to the applicant specific to this current application (211819), by WBC.

Having now received some of this information, the following are the council's preliminary observations and objections

The Parish Council objects to this proposal for the construction of a Petrol Filling Station (PFS) on the basis that it is an unnecessary commercial development of a green field site that is situated within a Green Route Enhancement Area that would result in the erosion of the rural setting of the area for the following reasons:

1. Settlement Limits

By virtue of being located beyond settlement limits and failing to take into consideration the character of the countryside and landscape, the proposal would lead to an erosion and urbanisation of the countryside, failing to protect the quality of the environment. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02 and CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

2. Detrimental to the character of the area

The proposal would result in an incongruous and alien addition to the street scene and an erosion of the Borough's green infrastructure, to the detriment of the character of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP1, CP3, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, IRS2 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

In Page 3 of the pre-application advice dated 7th January 2020, WBC provided incontrovertible evidence of this, when they stated:

"There are few fuel stations in the area, however in this instance, the site is located outside settlement limits within the countryside. As such, policy CP11 of the Core Strategy is relevant to the proposal. This policy does not normally permit development outside of development limits except if it:

1) *Contributes to sustainable rural enterprises within the Borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and*

2) *It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and*

3) *It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement...*"

The exceptions listed above to CP11 are "and" exceptions, therefore ALL three must be fulfilled. In realistic terms however, despite the slight change of location the application does not overcome any of these exceptions and the application therefore remains totally contrary to CP11.

Furthermore, on page 4, the pre-application advice further states:

*"The proposal would result in the expansion of new development, into the Countryside and away from any existing buildings. Therefore, the principle of development in the countryside is generally considered unacceptable. However, the Council recognises that there is a need for such a use in the local area. **The current location however is considered inappropriate due to its siting as it is likely to draw traffic off the Arborfield Relief Road and through Arborfield Village, which is contrary to the objectives of the relief road. A location closer to or off the ARR is likely to be more acceptable.**"*

Nothing in the current proposal addresses the above issue and the new proposal still directs traffic towards Langley Common roundabout, so does not negate any of the above grounds for refusal.

3. Anti-social Behaviour

Since the opening of Observer Way, the road has been plagued with vehicles being driven at high speed and in an anti-social manner, effectively using the road as a racetrack. There have already been several Road Traffic Collisions and incidents where vehicles have either left the road having lost control or collided with street furniture situated on the central islands. To further provide a facility where groups could meet up at the commencement of Observer Way, would only encourage this anti-social behaviour, rather than deter it.

4. Local planning history

We draw your attention to:

Planning application 202303:

Site Address: Land at Baird Road, Arborfield Garrison, Arborfield

Proposal: Outline application with Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and scale reserved for the proposed erection of a two-storey building providing ten 1 - 2- & 3-bedroom apartments with consideration of means of access to be determined

As recently as 3rd December 2020, planning application 202303 was refused on the precise grounds listed as objections at point 1, above. To permit this development would be directly contrary to that decision completely undermining the very grounds that WBC correctly refused PA 202303. Permitting this

application would also set a dangerous precedent for future residential development both on Baird Road, and the area to the north of the proposal, alongside Observer Way, including Ducks Nest Farm.

The Parish Council feels this application is likely to be indicative of a greater plan that would, if permitted, lead to applications for even more residential development. This intention is apparent in, **para 6.4** of the Transport Assessment that states:

*“The Ducks Nest Roundabout has been assessed using the ARCADY computer program. Assessments have been undertaken for the AM and PM peak hours for the year 2035. **The assessments include the trips predicted to be generated by the David Wilson Homes Ducks Nest residential development.**”*

The Parish Council strongly objects to such pre-empted and engineered actions to use this application to create opportunity for future development creep that is well beyond settlement limits. Such planning strategy threatens even further the character of our countryside, and we request that WBC refuses this application to help protect the erosion and urbanisation of our countryside and protect the quality of our environment in line with the following: The National Planning Policy Framework, CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02 and CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

5. Line of sight and design of exit

As stated in the pre-application advice for the original application:

“The technical specifications of the roundabout have already been completed and the vehicular entry/exit point has a poor relationship with the intended functionality of the roundabout. It is recommended that an alternate entry/exit point be considered, which will require further consultation with Council’s Highways department”

“The roundabout design includes a dedicated foot and cycle way along its north-western side, separated from the road by a swale. The location of the vehicular entry/exit will conflict with these aspects of the scheme”

The current application still shows an access from the roundabout, despite the above requirements from WBC. Furthermore, the additional ‘exit’ point will take traffic out onto Eversley Road, which is a 40mph limit, within feet of an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing, with a poor line of sight for traffic approaching from Observer Way. A right turn would be impractical and unsafe under the circumstances (unless the speed limit were reduced to 30mph), which would therefore require all traffic to make a left turn towards Langley Common Roundabout.

At Langley Common Roundabout, through ‘Reading bound’ traffic would have an option to turn left and travel through the village (the whole reason for the ACRR [Observer Way] was to reduce traffic passing through the village) or circumnavigate the roundabout and return back past the Service Station to re-join Observer Way at Ducks Nest Farm roundabout. This would significantly increase the volume of traffic both through the village and on Eversley Road between Langley Common Road and Observer Way.

6. Transport Assessment

The current Transport Assessment bases all of its calculations on flawed data. It defines the spur from Ducks Nest Farm roundabout, as being an “exit only”, yet in the **Highway Capacity Conclusion** at **Para 6.4.4**, states:

*“In summary, whilst there are theoretical capacity issues with the Ducks Nest roundabout’s forecast capacity, the introduction of a proposed petrol station with an exit-only arm will have practically no effect on the overall operation of the roundabout. **The number of traffic movements potentially re-joining the roundabout are very low and would not have a material or noticeable impact.**”*

If the number of traffic movements potentially re-joining the roundabout are very low and would not have a material or noticeable impact, this would suggest that as the only egress from the PFS is onto Eversley Road, they are anticipating the through traffic NOT returning back along Eversley Road to Ducks Nest Farm roundabout, to re-join Observer Way, and the only alternative is to force the traffic through the village.

No data has been supplied regarding the impact of such traffic movements on the Village Centre.

Furthermore, no assessment has been provided for the increase in southbound traffic, leaving the PFS and wishing to travel along the A327 towards Eversley and the Arborfield Green development which would, by definition, increase the volume of traffic re-joining the roundabout.

7. Impact on community facilities

Whilst the issue of its effect on other local shops is not a planning matter, its sustainability is.

The developer has called this a petrol station with a shop, but with a shop floor area of 493 sqm and 23 no. parking spaces it’s more like a shop with a petrol station and this proposed PFS would be open 24 hours a day seven days a week.

The village is currently serviced by the village shop (Londis), which is a significant focal point at the heart of the Village Centre and has recently been expanded, and by the soon to open Co-Op which will provide a service from 0600-2300 to the community in Arborfield Garrison, and a further new store and other commercial facilities that are to be provided at the newly built Arborfield Green village centre, all of which are within close proximity to the proposed PFS.

Many of the original residents of the post war development in Arborfield still live in the village and rely on having a store that they can walk to. Both the Co-Op and Londis stores are within easy walking distance of Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Garrison and the new village centre will provide good walking access for residents of both Arborfield Garrison and Arborfield Green.

It is highly unlikely that all these stores will survive simultaneously if this application was permitted and, would therefore either result in the approval of an unsustainable business or cause the failure of existing local businesses.

If the coronavirus pandemic has taught us anything it’s that locals depend on these local shops that are within walking distance of their homes.

8. Impact on village centre

Traffic leaving the PFS would need to be deterred from travelling through the village, which was the whole reason for the relief road. The plans submitted show no mitigation factors for the potential increase of traffic through the village.

Pleasingly, there has been a marked reduction in traffic including the number of heavy lorries passing through the Village Centre since the opening of Observer Way and this proposal could seriously impact this with the increase in heavy lorries the most likely to negatively impact on the Village Centre as

unfortunately, they are the least likely to circumnavigate the Langley Common roundabout to return to use Observer Way, as this would be an increase in journey distance. A point that is totally ignored in the application.

9. Light pollution

The area in question is currently an unlit greenfield site. The increase in light pollution caused by the minimum quantity of lights required to make the site safe for use, would cause substantial and unnecessary light pollution to this area of natural undeveloped countryside.

10. Climate Emergency statement

The proposal conflicts with the declaration of climate emergency made by WBC. On the 18th July 2019, WBC declared a 'Climate Emergency', where Cllr Halsall said:

"Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) believes the world is now in a climate emergency. More concerted and urgent action is needed at local, national and international level to protect our planet for future generations.

"As such, this Council commits to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030."

The subsequent Climate Emergency Action Plan, published in January 2020, undertook to:

Increase the take up of sustainable transport modes (Spatial Strategy for the Local Plan will partly influence this) (SDG11; SDG13; SDG17)

Increase the number of electric cars in the borough (SDG7)

Improve air quality in the borough. (SDG3; SDG4; SDG5)

Whilst the proposal offers space for 2 electrical charging points, it will nonetheless encourage people to drive to the site and will perpetuate the culture of petrol and diesel car-based travel and lifestyles that is at the heart of the climate emergency policy.

The proposal is therefore contrary to SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG7, SDG13 and SDG17 of the Wokingham Borough Council Climate Emergency Action Plan.

11. Environmental impact

The area is historically prone to flooding and this is evidenced by the balance ponds installed on the opposite side of Observer Way to the proposed development, together with the deep drainage ditches all along Observer Way.

The installation of 2 no. 75,000 litre underground fuel tanks in an area with a relatively high-water table creates a realistic risk of contamination of the ground water in the event of a leak.

Furthermore, the long-term environmental impact of turning a green-field site into a contaminated brown-field site, creating the availability of the land for future residential development would be in breach of development guidelines and amount to planning creep.

12. Noise pollution

The provision of a Car Wash and Jet Washes will create an undoubted increase in irritable noise. Statistically, this might not be significantly louder than the current background noise, but the pitch and tone are different to passing traffic and will be considerably more noticeable and stressful for the local residents, particularly those facing or backing onto Baird Road.

This matter was considered significant enough in the previous application for the planning officers to observe that:

“Ducks Nest Farm and Rickman Close are sufficiently close to be affected by light spill and noise from the forecourt and car wash/plant. The Environmental Health Officer has indicated that they have concerns regarding this and therefore measures to prevent harm should be outlined in any full application submitted.”

Whilst the location may have been moved from Langley Common Roundabout, the current proposed location is equally as close to the residential properties on, or backing onto, Baird Road and No's 1-7 Arbery Way, as it was to Rickman Close, and the above concerns therefore remain valid. No measures to prevent harm, or to address this issue, appear to have been outlined in this current application.

Delivery lorries will also provide an increase in noise pollution, especially if deliveries are outside of normal daytime hours.

The most significant issue of noise pollution, however, will be caused by the increase in traffic movements, which is not adequately addressed in the Noise Assessment, and the high likelihood of the use of the PFS as a rendezvous location for drivers who already meet up at various locations around the area, in order to drive in an anti-social manner. Its close proximity to Observer Way makes it an ideal location for a meeting point, especially as there will be refreshments readily available at the site.

The resultant anti-social behaviour, likely to be caused by vehicles exiting the location and speeding along Observer Way, would have a significant impact on the otherwise quiet and rural location.

13. Over provision

The plan relies on sufficient turnover to make the site profitable. As detailed at 7 above the current and planned volume of residential occupancy in the locality is sufficiently covered by the combination of the Londis (Eversley Road) and the soon to open Co-Op (Bramshill Close) and the already approved new centre at Arborfield Green. With the current and planned residential levels this will either result in the business being unsustainable or cause significant impact on the other local businesses and, make the provision of a new store at the village centre less appealing. This would result in job losses locally (evidencing objection 7. above).

The only other way that the business could be sustainable, would be if it relied on foot traffic from an additional residential development to the north (mentioned in the Transport Assessment as the “David Wilson Homes Development”). Currently there is no residential development in that location and the council would strongly object to any proposal for residential development in the area to the north of the site, as it would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02 and CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (see objection 1. above).

Additionally, any development on which this application would rely for its sustainability, would result in an incongruous and alien addition to the street scene and an erosion of the Borough's green infrastructure, to the detriment of the character of the area and would therefore be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, CP1, CP3, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, CC01, CC02, CC03 and

TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, IRS2 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (see objection 2. above).

14. Pre-application, Pre-determination and Apparent Bias

Lastly, there is the issue of pre-application advice, pre-determination and apparent bias.

It is apparent throughout this application, by viewing all of the supporting documentation, that this application relies on the David Wilson Homes Ducks Nest Farm Development being granted planning permission and, cherry picks parts of the pre planning advice Frazier Retail Ltd. Received from WBC.

The approval of this application and the provision of a large shop with PFS at this location, would alleviate many of the grounds for objection to a future application for a residential development within Ducks Nest Farm, relating to the provision of amenities and the breach of the 'settlement gap' that is a factor that we feel, persuaded WBC to summarise in their letter, that "The principle of the proposal is acceptable" despite there being plenty of reason to the contrary.

We understand that subsequent to the pre-planning application referred to above, a further pre-application was submitted by Frazier Retail Ltd. However, any reference or response to this is not included in the supporting documentation and we therefore await sight of this document, reserving the right to make any further specific comments related to it.

Given all of the above we feel it would be inappropriate to use this application to facilitate or rely on a future yet to be applied for development or, any out-of-date pre-application response. As a result, we remain confident that this application will be judged solely on its own merit, as should any future application for residential development at that site, unless the applications are jointly submitted in support of each other.

In its current form the Parish Council feels this application is divisive and if approved would demonstrate a case for both 'pre-determination' and 'apparent bias'.

15. Summary

In summary, the council would draw the attention of the planning officers to their own summary, provided at page 10 of their pre-application advice for 192637, where they stated:

"In summary, the proposal is likely to be considered unacceptable in principle in this location. And further details are needed to properly assess the potential impacts on the character of the area. Further details are required regarding trees and landscapes, heritage impacts, neighbouring amenity, highways, ecology and drainage. The scheme is considered to conflict with national and local policy and therefore is not acceptable in its present form."

Although the current application does move the location slightly, the vast majority of the grounds for refusing application 192637 remain within this current application. Arborfield and Newland Parish Council therefore remain opposed to the construction of a PFS and Store and ask that WBC refuse permission for this application.

Arborfield & Newland Parish Council
2nd August 2021