

HATCH END OLD POULTRY FARM, MIDDLE ASTON ROAD, MIDDLE ASTON: DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS. ERECTION OF REPLACEMENT BUSINESS UNITS, ANCILLARY HUB AND ASSOCIATED EXTERNAL WORKS.

20/01127/F

Steeple Aston Parish Council held a virtual meeting on June 15th 2020 at which this application was discussed at length. The meeting was attended by a large number of members of the public who all spoke against the application. The Parish Council wishes to **OBJECT** to this application for the following reasons:

1. Economic factors

We have been unable to establish from the applicants what types of business are likely to wish to locate here. However, we believe that the proposals will introduce large numbers of office-based staff to the site (B1 use class). This belief is supported by the design of the units with mezzanines and an absence of suitable external doors for transfer of goods. The typical average occupancy for B1 business parks is around 11 sq.m. per person (based on rates published by industry bodies). The proposed lettable floor area is 3,198 sq.m., so that if fully let the new development could give employment to 266 people. The buildings currently on site give employment to about 15 people, although there were nearer 50 some years back. The lettable floor area is proposed to increase from the existing 2,297 sq.m. – an increase of 39%. By any of these measures, the proposals involve **intensification** of the existing use. We consider therefore that the requirements of CDC Local Plan policy SLE1: Employment Development for “new” employment development should apply to this application. The criteria for new rural employment sites include the following:

Selected SLE1 criteria	Steeple Aston PC comment
<i>“Sufficient justification is provided to demonstrate why the development should be located in the rural area on a non-allocated site.”</i>	No justification has been given to support intensification of the existing use.
<i>“They will be small scale unless it can be demonstrated that there will be no significant adverse impacts on the character of a village or surrounding environment.”</i>	The scale of the buildings proposed is significantly greater than the existing development, in height, massing and visual impact.
<i>“The proposal and any associated employment activities can be carried out without undue detriment to residential amenity, the highway network, village character and its setting, the appearance and character of the landscape and the environment generally including on any designated buildings or features (or on any</i>	The intensification of employment on the site, and its consequent effect on the numbers of vehicles using Fir Lane and the surrounding rural highway network, will be seriously detrimental to amenity, setting, character and public safety.

<p><i>non-designated buildings or features of local importance)."</i></p>	
<p><i>"The proposal will not give rise to excessive or inappropriate traffic and will wherever possible contribute to the general aim of reducing the need to travel by private car. There are no suitable available plots or premises within existing nearby employment sites in the rural areas."</i></p>	<p>Despite claims to the contrary, employees and users of the proposed business units will undoubtedly <u>increase</u> the use of travel by private car. Current demand for local business premises is already met by Lakeside Business Park adjacent to the site, which still has further capacity.</p>
<p><i>Policy SLE1 also states:</i></p> <p><i>"With the potential for increased travel by private car by workers and other environmental impacts, justification for employment development on new sites in the rural areas will need to be provided. This should include an applicant demonstrating a need for and benefits of employment in the particular location proposed and explaining why the proposed development should not be located at the towns, close to the proposed labour supply."</i></p>	<p>The applicants have not demonstrated any need for an intensification of employment on this rural site. There might be benefits in this location if significant numbers of people employed could walk or cycle to work instead of using private cars, but no evidence of need or demand by local residents has been provided.</p> <p>A major strategic employment site is however being developed currently at Heyford Park, approximately one mile from the application site, with full support from CDC Local Plan Policy Villages 5. CDC Local Plan policy also supports employment development at Bicester, only three miles away, in preference to rural locations.</p>

CDC Local Plan paragraph B.36 states:

"Employment growth in the rural areas will be limited and will involve:

- farm diversification schemes
- small scale, appropriate employment sites
- sustainable growth in tourism including recreation-based tourism
- improvement of existing employment sites and reuse of existing buildings and brownfield sites (reflecting their historic or cultural significance where appropriate)
- support for working from home.

Steeple Aston Parish Council submits that the application does not conform to the above policy statement, and that a viability assessment of the need and demand for intensification of employment at this site should be required to be submitted before the application is further considered.

2. Parking provision

The site currently has 50 parking spaces for the 5 businesses it used to accommodate. The proposal for 29 businesses is a six-fold increase, and it might be reasonable to assume therefore that parking would need to be increased six-fold as a result. Another way of estimating the actual parking need is to use floor space. According to published industry standards the typical average occupancy for B1 business parks is around 11 sq.m. per person. Excluding the proposed hub building, the proposed lettable floor area is 2,924 sq.m., so that if fully let the new development might employ 266 people. It is reasonable to assume that about 200 of these people would drive to and from work each day.

The applicants propose a total of 97 parking spaces, which is clearly inadequate for the proposed development. Parking at the front of the site, as proposed, will be most inappropriate for the rural location, and for the stated aim of an agricultural appearance to the development. It will instead have an urbanising effect, which should not be permitted. If permitted with 97 spaces, it is inevitable that parking will overspill on to Fir Lane either side of the business park, possibly as far as the junction with North Side/ Paines Hill in Steeple Aston, where existing parking problems and consequent disruption would become unbearable for many residents and others. The character of the Conservation Area in this location would also be seriously compromised.

The application seriously underestimates the number of parking spaces required.

3. Construction period

The proposed routing of construction vehicles through Steeple Aston will cause significant disruption to the residents of the 80 dwellings which front South Side, Paines Hill and Fir Lane. Vibration will affect large numbers of these old dwellings, many of which have shallow or no foundations. Residents' parking on these narrow streets already makes for difficulties with through traffic, and tight bends are already problematical for larger vehicles. A year or more of construction traffic on top of all this will cause serious stress in the village.

The alternative of routing through Middle Aston is considered to be equally unacceptable, especially as the only viable route is designated as unsuitable for HGVs.

There is no suitable access for construction vehicles to reach the application site.

4. Travel plan and vehicle movements

The applicants have submitted a Travel Plan which suggests that significant numbers of employees will walk, cycle, or use buses or trains to get to and from work at Hatch End. These are not credible proposals in view of the following:

- No evidence is provided that there is significant need or demand from local residents to work in businesses located here. On the contrary, the great majority of staff and visitors will travel from local towns, or from further away.
- Public transport stops are a good distance from Hatch End, are infrequent or badly-timed, and will be unattractive in inclement weather when the convenient alternative is to drive.

The result is that an unacceptable volume of traffic will be generated by the development. It is reasonable to assume (based on the parking projections covered in 2. above) that **150 additional cars each day** will be arriving at and leaving the business park. This excludes visitors, deliveries and suppliers, and maintenance vehicles. The additional vehicle movements along Fir Lane, past the Primary School and through the Steeple Aston Conservation Area, have been seriously understated by the applicants. The increased levels of pollution generated by these vehicles is also unacceptable to the Parish Council and to the School, in view of well-documented effects of pollution on schoolchildren (and adults).

The application will cause a detrimental impact from increased traffic on the residents of Steeple Aston and on the character and amenities of the village and its Conservation Area. As a result it fails to satisfy policy PC1 of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan and CDC Local Plan policies ESD13 and ESD15.

5. Dr Radcliffe's School

The application fails to take note of the proximity of Dr Radcliffe's Primary School to the site. The school has over 200 children on roll, coming from a wide catchment area. The large number of parents dropping-off and collecting young children already causes a major parking problem locally, and significant congestion of the narrow lanes nearby. Pedestrian safety is already an issue, and there have been numerous near-misses of children walking in or crossing Fir Lane. OCC withdrew support for a person to assist children crossing some years ago, and this remains a serious concern to the school and the local community. There is also a very well-used playground and a recreation field opposite the school.

The increased level of traffic moving past the school gates as a result of this application will undoubtedly worsen an already worrying situation. **A full Road Safety Audit should be carried out by independent consultants and presented to the Parish Council before any further consideration of the application.**

6. Need for footpath from existing to site

An existing footpath along Fir Lane connects the school to the rest of the village. From the school to the application site, however, all pedestrians have to walk in the road. If users of the proposed development are to be encouraged to walk (as they are in the applicants' Travel Plan) it is essential that the footpath be extended for the full distance to the site. The applicants have also told the Parish Council that it is their aim to make a staff canteen in the hub building on site available for community use as a café. A safe route from the village for residents would be a basic necessity if this idea were to be implemented. **An extended footpath must be a S.106 requirement of any approval.**

7. Design, height and massing of new buildings and impact on local character, conservation area, etc.

The proposed new buildings are significantly taller than the existing single-storey sheds that they replace. Their form, materials and massing are all inappropriate for a rural site and do not even satisfy the applicants' own criteria of creating an agricultural appearance. This is a business park that will look like many other business parks. It is of inappropriate appearance for its rural location, and endangers the importance of the continuing visual separation of the two villages of Middle and Steeple Aston because of its urbanising effect.

As the application is adjacent to a conservation area, the applicants are also required by policy PD4 of the MCNP to submit a full Heritage Impact Assessment which takes proper account of the local Character Assessments included within the MCNP, and of the Conservation Area Appraisal for Steeple Aston. The application should not be decided until this detailed Assessment has been received.

Because of its detrimental impact, the application does not satisfy the requirements of CDC Local Plan policies ESD13 and ESD15 or of policies PD4, PD5 and PC1 of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan.

8. Failure to consult school and residential neighbours

The Parish Council is very disappointed that Cherwell District Council failed to consult Dr Radcliffe's Primary School or other residents of Fir Lane about the application. An email from the case officer to the parish clerk admits that no site notice had been placed at the site by 20th May 2020, such that very few local people knew about the application.

9. National Planning Policy Framework

NPPF para. 84 specifically applies to applications of this type and location:

*“Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. **In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport).** The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.”* (our emphasis).

It is clear to Steeple Aston Parish Council that this application is exactly what the NPPF guidance seeks to avoid – a development that is not sensitive to its surroundings, has an unacceptable impact on local roads, and fails to facilitate access on foot.

AS A RESULT OF ALL THE ABOVE, STEEPLE ASTON PARISH COUNCIL URGES CHERWELL DISTRICT COUNCIL TO REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THIS APPLICATION.

Steeple Aston Parish Council
June 2020