

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.

21/01123/F

Steeple Aston Parish Council held a virtual meeting on May 10th 2021 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 subsequent Parish Council meeting on May 17th decided to **OBJECT** to this application for the following reasons:

1. Intensification of use

We believe that the proposals will introduce large numbers of office-based and other staff to the site. The typical average occupancy for business parks is around 11 sq.m. per person (based on rates published by industry bodies). The proposed lettable floor area is 2,215 sq.m., so that if fully let the new development could give employment to up to 201 people. The current buildings have never been suitable for such numbers, and therefore the development proposals can be regarded as an intensification of the use of the site.

We consider therefore that the requirements of CDC Local Plan policy “SLE1: Employment Development” should apply to this application. The criteria for new rural employment sites in this policy include the following:

Relevant 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>“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 non-designated buildings or features of local importance).”</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.
<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>	Despite claims to the contrary, employees and users of the proposed business units will undoubtedly increase the use of travel by private car. Current demand for local business premises is already met by Lakeside Business Park adjacent to the site.
<i>Policy SLE1 also states:</i>	The applicants have not demonstrated any need for an intensification of employment on this rural site. There might be benefits in this

“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.”

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.

A major strategic employment site is however being developed currently at Heyford Park, only a few miles from the application site, with full support from CDC Local Plan Policy Villages 5. CDC Local Plan policy also supports employment development at nearby Bicester, in preference to rural locations.

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 an independent 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. Pedestrian Safety and 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.

There is no pavement between the application site and the School, so that parents with children (and all other pedestrians) are forced to walk on the highway in this narrow lane. Parked vehicles of parents dropping off and collecting children from School exacerbate this situation by forcing pedestrians into the centre of Fir Lane. Any increase in the level of traffic moving past the school gates as a result of this application will undoubtedly worsen an already unsafe situation.

Many children cross Fir Lane opposite the School gates, getting to and from the well-used playground and recreation field opposite the school. Unfortunately, OCC withdrew support for a

person to assist children crossing some years ago. The safeguarding of children remains a serious concern to the school and the local community.

3. Parking provision

The applicants now intend to provide a total of 79 parking spaces, using OCC criteria for the floor space proposed. However, the introduction of Class E – for which 22 of the units are intended – broadens usage of the site very considerably to include types of use for which the OCC criteria were not intended. Instead, we consider that until the criteria are revised to take account of Class E, it should be assumed, as stated in 1. above, that if fully let the new development might employ up to 201 people. According to the Travel Plan, 81% of employees will initially drive to work each day – requiring 163 parking spaces. The parking provision proposed is therefore clearly inadequate for the potential number of drivers and additional visitors to the site.

Parking at the front of the site, as now 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 79 spaces, it is inevitable that parking will overspill on to Fir Lane either side of the business park, possibly as far as the School, 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. Photos are attached to this submission to illustrate existing problems.

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, especially when visitors, deliveries and suppliers, and maintenance vehicles are taken into account. These additional vehicle movements along Fir Lane, past the Primary School and through the Steeple Aston Conservation Area, have been completely overlooked in the Travel Plan.

The increased levels of pollution generated by these vehicles are 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. 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.

The Parish Council has concluded that there is no suitable access for construction vehicles to reach the application site. Photos are attached to this submission to illustrate this.

6. Need for an extended footpath to the 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. There is no provision for such a footpath in the application, and as a result it should be refused.

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.

7. Loss of greenfield land

The applicants have drawn their development site boundary to include a large area of land behind the proposed development. This is undeveloped green field land with a number of mature trees, which we believe to have been part of a formal avenue of trees planted after WW1. As far as we can tell, this land is not required as part of the development, and should be excluded from the site for which approval is sought. Not to do so risks loss of an important green field site that separates Hatch End from the Lakeside Business Park, and if consented as part of the Class E site may give the applicants certainty that they can extend the current development proposal in due course. No such encouragement should be given. The parish council therefore requests refusal of the application on the grounds of the loss of undeveloped greenfield land, contrary to Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies.

8. 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.” (bold text - 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 has an unacceptable impact on local roads, and fails to facilitate safe 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, May 2021

APPENDIX:

PHOTOS ILLUSTRATING EXISTING TRAFFIC CONGESTION, PARKING ISSUES AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY CONCERNS.

See separate document