

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF FOWLMERE PARISH COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE

which was held on-line via zoom

on **TUESDAY 23rd March 2021 at 7:30pm**

PRESENT: Cllr P Burge (Chairman), Cllr D Roberts, Cllr L Wragg, Cllr C Howe, Cllr R Lennon, Cllr J Hobro, Cllr S Mulholland and Cllr P Collinson

IN ATTENDANCE Ms K Byrne (Clerk), Ms Kate Wood (Welding Alloys agent) and 4 members of the public including Mr D Brock

Before the meeting began Cllr Burge advised the attendees that the Zoom session was going to be recorded but would not be widely distributed. There were no objections.

1. Apologies for Absence

There were apologies for absence from Cllr M Vinton (who was unable to join via Zoom).

2. Declarations of interest (*if any*)

Cllr Roberts declared that if an application is placed before South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) she will approach any new information afresh. Also, because Cllr Roberts is a District Cllr at SCDC, the same applies and she will look at any application, which goes to SCDC, afresh.

3. Minutes from Previous Meeting 23rd February 2021 – Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed to be a true record, and were signed by Cllr Burge; he will deliver the signed copy to the Clerk. There were no matters arising.

As members of the public were present, Cllr Burge explained the structure of the meeting: for each application Cllr Burge will give a brief introduction and overview of the plans, then invite the applicant/agent to speak (if present) and allow councillors to ask them any questions, followed by representations from members of the public, moving to deliberations between members of the committee, and then consideration of how to respond as a PC. Speakers will have a maximum of 5 minutes.

4. 21/00298/FUL – Green Fox Farm, Fowlmere Rd, Melbourn

Farmland diversification, ecological enhancements and erection of 1 no. residential dwelling with an associated change of use in land from agricultural to residential

[The screen was shared on Zoom to show the relevant documents for this and the following item.]

Cllr Burge summarised the application. The site is outside Fowlmere parish, and within the parish of Melbourn, which is adjacent to Fowlmere. The application is made under section 79e of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy H/15 of the Local Plan 'Countryside Dwelling of Exceptional Quality'.

Cllr Burge asked if any applicants or members of the public wanted to speak, none did.

During discussions, councillors raised concerns about the proposed development being in an unspoilt area of countryside, being outside defined village envelopes and not complying with the above policies, the effects of the building on the adjacent site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and the SSSI Impact Risk Zone, the risk of contamination on the nearby water courses especially the sensitive chalk streams, and the impact on the access road (Mill Road/Fowlmere Road). Some councillors saw some merit in the number of trees, vegetation and biodiversity that are proposed to be included in the application, also in the letter of support from RSPB.

Cllr Roberts proposed that Fowlmere PC recommends refusal because the application does not comply with the policies (for development in open countryside), the proposed building is too large and very dominant, and because the site is extremely close to important and sensitive chalk streams and the SSSI. 4 councillors voted for recommending refusal, 3 voted for recommending a neutral stance, 1 abstained. Therefore, by a majority vote, Fowlmere Parish Council recommended refusal. If officers are minded to approve the application then Fowlmere PC would request that the application be sent to SCDC Planning Committee, and there should be a site visit. Also, because the access road (Mill Road/Fowlmere Road) is in a poor state of repair and may degenerate significantly during development, its condition should be monitored, and if it deteriorates further the applicant should be asked to contribute towards repairs and resurfacing.

The PC agreed that Cllr Burge and the Clerk would prepare a summation of the points raised and submit it to Greater Cambridge Shared Planning on behalf of the PC.

5. 21/00542/OUT – Welding Alloys, The Way, Fowlmere

Outline planning for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of 45 dwellings and office building, with some matters reserved except for access

Cllr Burge summarised the application. It is an outline application, so not all details need to be presented at this stage, reserved matters can be submitted at a later date. 45 dwellings and a small office building are proposed. Cllr Burge invited the agent Ms Wood to speak.

Ms Wood said that this was a very similar application to that which was refused in 2016 (due to the level of affordable housing). Since then the SCDC Local plan has been published, and the NPPF has been updated and now includes a Vacant Building Credit which encourages the redevelopment of brownfield land by offsetting the floor space lost by demolishing vacant buildings against the floor space of affordable housing. Ms Wood said that this calculation meant there is no requirement for affordable housing but they are proposing 2 affordable units. Ms Wood said that the relevant policy is E/14 (which relates to Loss of Employment Land to Non Employment Uses).

Cllr Roberts asked about the timing of this application (Ms Wood said Welding Alloys are moving and the application meets present policies), and the number of affordable houses (Ms Wood said the Vacant Building Credit meant the requirement was zero but it is appropriate to provide 2 units). Cllr Roberts also said Fowlmere is a Group Village and therefore the maximum number of houses in a development is 8 to 15 dwellings (Ms Wood argued that Policy S/10 applies only within the village envelope, and this is outside the envelope and on a brownfield site, therefore Policy E/14 applies).

Cllr Collinson asked about the high density of the housing (Ms Wood said the density is 25 dwellings/hectare, Local Plan policy is 30/hectare, she offered to make a calculation for similar developments in Fowlmere), limited access and increased traffic (Ms Woods said the access is a bell mouth entrance which is wide for an unlimited numbers of lorries, and the anticipated traffic levels would be better than at present), positioning/lack of public open space (Ms Wood said the public open space is located near the stream where the highest risk of flooding is, and that adequate open space has been provided).

Cllr Burge invited members of the public to speak. Mr Brock said he and his wife live nearby, they are not opposed to some development on the site. He disagreed with Ms Wood that the site is not in the village, it is and therefore the maximum number of dwellings should be 8 to 15 dwellings; he disagreed that the traffic generation would be an improvement on the current situation, as there is very little traffic at present; although the layout is illustrative at this stage and not fixed, the properties as currently laid out do not provide sufficient outdoor space and shows no creativity in design. He urged the PC to recommend refusal.

Cllr Mulholland said that there is an argument for some development in the village, but this may not be the correct site. Regarding Policy E/14 and the applicant's claim that there is no market demand, the office space has been marketed for a year (as required) but 2020 has not been a typical year with the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore the argument that this has been achieved is morally debateable. Also, the village may be reluctant to get rid of a potential employment site especially at this time of (probable) economic recovery. It would be better to wait another 12-18 months.

Cllr Burge disagreed that the 3 criteria of Policy E/14 have been met: the condition that the overall benefit to the community outweighs any adverse effect on employment opportunities is not met (there are very few employment sites within the village); there is no evidence that the existing use is generating environmental problems; so the argument hinges on market demand as an employment site, the office premises has been marketed since January 2020 but it has not been a typical year for business development (due to Covid).

Cllr Wragg said that any housing development needs to be integrated into the rest of the village; also he reiterated that the village would not want to lose employment land and become a dormitory village.

Cllr Burge said there were other concerns including: an increased risk of flooding downstream as reported by Anglian Water; the layout shows the green space is not located centrally in the residential area, which is a defining characteristic of Fowlmere, and the location of some of the parking bays is quite distant from the properties which would make it difficult in the future to allow for charging of electric vehicles; the planning statement makes reference to a Contamination Assessment and a Ground Investigation Report neither of which were published on the planning website at the time of the meeting, this is concerning as the site had previously handled hazardous materials, therefore these documents should be available and be considered in the review; there has not been any pre-application consultation with the public, and a 5 minute statement in a Parish Council Planning Committee meeting is no substitute for this.

Cllr Roberts proposed that Fowlmere PC recommends refusal on the grounds that the application is premature, it conflicts with established planning policies, it will increase the risk of flooding, it would be an overdevelopment of the site, there is a lack of affordable housing, and it would result in the loss of an employment site; Cllr Lennon seconded, all concurred. If planning officers are minded to disagree and recommend approval, Fowlmere PC requests that the application should be sent for consideration by the SCDC Planning Committee.

The PC agreed that Cllr Burge and the Clerk would prepare a summation of the points raised and submit it to Greater Cambridge Shared Planning on behalf of the PC.

6. 21/00542/OUT – Welding Alloys, The Way, Fowlmere

Financial contributions to infrastructure – ideas for village projects

Cllr Burge said that should the Welding Alloys development go ahead there is an opportunity for the village to put forward some suggestions for projects in a number of categories: sport space, children play space, allotments and community orchard, indoor meeting space, and green infrastructure. Cllr Burge wished to make councillors and members of the public aware of this and suggested that the PC discuss any ideas in the next PC meeting on 20 April; all concurred.

ACTION – Clerk to put Financial contributions to infrastructure on the agenda for the April PC meeting

The meeting closed at 21.32.