



The Bearsted & Thurnham Society

The Residents Association for the Civil Parishes of Bearsted and Thurnham



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Richard Timms
Principal Planning Officer
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
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6th February 2020

Dear Mr Timms,

Land to the west of Church Road, Otham.

Maidstone Borough Council saw fit to include this 16 hectare site for up to 440 houses in the Local Plan, which was adopted in October 2017.

It is located to the west of Church Road on farmland running between the Grade I listed St Nicholas church and the Grade II listed Church House to the north and the Grade II listed Rectory some 300 metres to the south.

Three applications have been submitted for this site:

1. 19/501029/ENVSCR

Maidstone Borough Council confirmed to the applicant that:

Therefore this Screening Opinion is hereby adopted that an Environmental Impact Assessment IS NOT REQUIRED for the proposed development.

In view of this there was no requirement to submit the proposal to the Secretary of State.

2. 19/501600/OUT

This outline planning application for "Up to 440 residential dwellings" has received numerous objections, notably four from KCC Highways.

The application has appeared on the agenda for three meetings of the Planning Committee;

a. **24th October 2019**, where it was resolved:

That consideration of this application be deferred for further discussions to:

- *Seek to remove the proposed car park for the Church from the scheme;*
- *Seek to (a) amend the Parameter Plan to provide a greater amount of wooded open space at the southern end of the site to protect the Ancient Woodland and create a sustainable open space and (b) to amend conditions 4 and 7 to require woodland planting to restore and protect the Ancient Woodland and enhance the landscaping around the Church;*

- *Seek to resolve the outstanding issues relating to improvements to the Willington Street/Deringwood Drive junction;*
 - *Give further consideration to the impact of the development on the Spot Lane junction and possible mitigation;*
 - *Investigate the potential widening of Church Road to the south of the site where this would not involve the loss of Ancient Woodland;*
 - *Seek to optimise the amount of renewable energy generated on site (to avoid use of fossil fuel heating); and*
 - *Seek further clarification of the surface water drainage scheme and how it can be satisfactorily accommodated within the development layout.*
- b. **5th December 2019** when the Development Manager said that he had nothing further to report in respect of the application at present.
- c. **19th December 2019** when the Principal Planning Officer said that the applicant was working on the reasons for deferral and it was hoped to report the application back to the Committee in the New Year.

3. 19/506182/FULL

The application for full planning permission for 421 dwellings was submitted by DHA on behalf of Bellway Homes on 9th December 2019 and the application was validated on 13th January 2020.

It is unclear why the applicant has seen fit to submit a full planning application before the previous outline application had been determined by Maidstone Borough Council.

Although located in the parish of Otham and abutting Downswood a planning approval would result in further severe traffic issues for the residents of Bearsted and Thurnham and the Society objects on the following highways and heritage grounds:

- The proposal involves the construction of 421 homes on the field next to St Nicholas church Otham with the only vehicle access onto Church Road. The developer claims that “only 70%” of generated traffic will carry on into Downswood, leaving the estate via Deringwood Drive either onto Willington Street, or into Spot Lane.
- Proposed traffic signals at the junction of Deringwood Drive and Willington Street have been constantly rejected by KCC on traffic safety grounds in view of the steep downhill approaches. Stopping more traffic at the signals will only increase pollution, particularly as more heavy good vehicles start to climb on the Willington Street having been stationary at all times of day.
- At peak times, traffic on Spot Lane is already congested, far in excess of conditions when traffic calming measures were installed to dissuade through traffic in the mid 1990s.
- The alternative route, south towards Sutton Road via Church Road and Gore Court Road is a narrow country lane that is already struggling with the volume of traffic generated by new development along Sutton Road – and building is in progress that will double the number of new homes there. It is unlikely that much of the traffic generated by the proposed development will go this way unless absolutely necessary.
- The developer demonstrates that Willington Street, without the traffic arising from the proposed houses will be grossly over-congested. It is plainly absurd to suggest that yet more traffic can be accommodated without the implementation of significant measures to accommodate some of that “background” traffic elsewhere.
- With no amenities on site, the developer is counting on the new residents taking up non-existent spare capacity in local schools, doctors and dentists. Many of the facilities quoted in the application documents are pure fantasy – they either closed years ago or their significance is grossly exaggerated. With no realistic “local”

alternatives it is likely that the traffic generated will far exceed the developer's predictions. Overall, it is apparent that the volume of traffic trying to pass through Downswood and into Bearsted will be unsustainable.

- The development includes three-storey blocks of apartments topped by “decorative” cupolas, totally out of character with any nearby accommodation.
- The application documents include many examples of “street scenes”. Curiously there are no attempts to show the visual impact of the housing development on the church or the existing houses in Downswood and Chapman Avenue.
- The church, which has been surrounded by fields for centuries, is threatened by being overshadowed by buildings. If it remains structurally intact after piling and other construction activities, and it is accessible during those activities, the current practice of parking along Church Road will be impossible. This is acknowledged by the developer and demonstrated in the proposals to provide a parking places along the road within the development. They are too far from the church to be of use to anyone with mobility issues – nearly 300m from the church using existing means of access. In any event they are likely to be taken up by residents and their visitors who discover the inadequacies of parking spaces allocated to their properties. As a Grade 1 listed building, the church should be afforded the highest levels of protection, both as a structure and to ensure its continuing viability.

A separate and more detailed report focussing on heritage and archaeological issues will be submitted as a separate document.

For all the reasons given above we request that the applications are rejected.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Vanhecke
Chairman