

Chelford Parish Council Submission

Planning Application 20/4976M Holly Tree House

Background

The location of this site is not within the boundaries of Chelford Parish, but is situated in the Parish of Ollerton with Marthall. This is not the first time the applicant has produced proposals to develop Green Belt land close to Chelford. Previously, in a leaflet issued by the applicant (June 2017), he proposed building a considerable number of houses in order to, quote, 'regenerate what has become a geriatric, grey community' and to 're-balance' the population in Chelford. The applicant also raised serious questions about Chelford as a sustainable location stating that, 'we have no services'. It is ironic therefore, that in this current planning application there appears to have been a major volte-face in the applicant's thinking and motives.

Comments

Chelford Parish Council strongly objects to the proposals in this application. The material considerations are not deemed sufficient to outweigh the harm that this development will create. The proposals do not adhere to the policies and sustainable development principles of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and national policy.

1. Green Belt

The NPPF (paras. 143-146) demands that there should be "exceptional circumstances" to develop Green Belt land and states that inappropriate development is harmful to the Green Belt. Plans to develop Green Belt land should therefore only be approved in "very special circumstances".

Where exceptions may be acceptable, NPPF makes it abundantly clear that any extension or alteration of a building should not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building; the replacement of a building, should be in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces; any building should not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

The site proposed, lies in the Green Belt and given its scale and purpose, it fails to meet the requirements of national policy and CELPS policy (PG3). Even the applicant agrees that it is an inappropriate development in the Green Belt, quote:

'We recognise and accept that the proposal is outside of a defined settlement, involves inappropriate development in the Green Belt and may result in some spatial harm to the concept of openness' Para 3.66 Planning Statement

The arguments put forward to justify that these proposals as an exceptional case, are weak and entirely unconvincing. The proposition that it qualifies on the grounds of outdoor recreation is fanciful thinking. To refer to the site as 'brownfield' is also stretching the case to a highly questionable level.

The level of development is considerable and replacement buildings will far exceed the existing building footprint. These proposals do absolutely nothing to create and reinforce local distinctiveness and neither do they enhance the landscape character of the area. This development will have a negative impact on openness and visual amenity and will bring unacceptable urbanisation to the area. It is a clear overdevelopment by reason of its scale and mass, within a low density area and it will have a detrimental impact on the appearance and character of the area.

2. Accessibility

Given the concerns we have about the transport and highways assessments carried out by the applicant, Chelford Parish Council, joined with Snelson, Over Peover and Ollerton with Marthall Parish Councils, to engage the services of an independent traffic consultant. The key findings of his report, which can be found as a separate submission on behalf of the four Parish Councils, are:

- The development is located in a remote location and will be car dependent.
- The applicant has not demonstrated that safe access can be achieved for all modes of travel.
- The anticipated trip attraction rates do not reflect the remoteness of the site and are likely to underestimate the number of vehicles attracted to the local highway network and this would appear to be accepted by the applicant because the site is proposing to provide car parking in excess of the maximum standards required by CEC
- The transport statement fails to fully consider the impact of the site attracted traffic on the local highway network and in particular the safety of the narrow section of Pepper Street adjacent to Holly Cottage where forward visibility is restricted.
- It is considered that the mitigation measures proposed would be unlikely to alter the car dominance of the development in this remote location

This is an inaccessible location for the type of development proposed. We do not agree that the existing provision of public transport is sufficient to sustain this location. Bus services are relatively infrequent (every two hours, 5 a day) and are timed to be of little use to employees and residents. Placing bus stops near to the site will not somehow increase the level of services, nor will it necessarily encourage use of buses. We note that there is to be single private electric bus for use by residents, but this will be totally inadequate to meet the needs of all residents. There are no specific plans to encourage use of cycles. The applicant has not demonstrated that safe access can be achieved by all modes of travel. The provision of e-vehicles is also wholly inadequate and the proposed size of the resident population far exceeds the capacity to use such vehicles.

Consequently, there will be considerable movement of cars to reach the kind of services needed by site residents and clearly the applicant has made this assumption judging by the 165 parking spaces allocated in the plans. However, this appears to conflict with the assumption that this development will allow residents to live on the site without a car. We note the reference to taxis and ambulances accessing the facility and given the supposed number of employees on the site, traffic movements will not be just those of site residents. Pepper Street is not suited to carry regular traffic from this development given various points which only allow single line traffic and which present visual challenges for traffic.

Whilst we note the proposals for a footpath. However no consideration has been given to the fact that this footpath will lead site residents to a busy crossroads with the A537 and Pepper Street. Access to a footway into Chelford is on the northern side of the A537 and this will mean site residents will have to cross a busy junction. The traffic consultant has advised that this footway is of limited width for much of its length and in places the footway width from Pepper Street into Chelford is around 1m which would not allow pedestrians to pass side by side without walking into the road. Not only is this not considered to be an attractive proposition to encourage walking as a mode of travel along the A537, there are no proposals to protect the safety of pedestrians crossing the junction. This junction is also located close to where the speed limit changes from 50mph to 30mph and is notorious for speeding traffic on entering the lower speed zone.

The traffic assessment submitted by the applicant is weak. Trip rate data is based on 2015 data which is outdated and the locations of most of the sites chosen for comparison bear little resemblance to the location of the proposed site. They are therefore poor comparators. No timings are specified for the traffic survey so it is unclear if these relate to peak periods of traffic movement.

3. Infrastructure and Sustainability

The applicant has previously described Chelford as having an infrastructure not fit for purpose, with no services. (leaflet issued to residents). Although little has changed to the infrastructure since he put forward previous development ideas, it would now seem, rather surprisingly, that it can support a development of this size. This site is relatively isolated and is not in a sustainable and accessible location. The site is not within a settlement and is located far from the kind of services required to sustain the proposed population.

We note that the applicant refers to the site as within 'walkable range' to all Chelford's 'amenities and facilities', but this is a gross exaggeration of the kind of infrastructure available for the size of population proposed. In fact some of the facilities listed do not actually exist e.g. cricket club and the Post Office is only a temporary arrangement. The applicant also mentions the proximity of Chelford Surgery, yet fails to explain that the doctors and staff have no appetite for this development. The Surgery is already under considerable pressure from significant housing developments in Chelford (almost 40% increase in housing) and surrounding areas and the specific nature of this development will place an unacceptable burden on the Surgery staff and facilities. This application makes no attempt to assess the impact of the development on local health services and has taken no account of the views of medical staff.

Whilst the applicant claims that no other sites are suitable, it is a remarkable coincidence that the only suitable site happens to be in a location which houses the applicant's former home and which he has been unable to sell for some considerable time. This leads us to question the justification and evidence that this site will fulfil a local need and we wonder at the applicant's philanthropic motivation to provide this facility. Certainly, strategic planning estimates for the demand of this type of care in Chelford, suggest that the claims made by the applicant are grossly exaggerated. In the Cheshire East Draft Housing Strategy 2020-24, it is estimated that Chelford will have a net need for 17 people by 2030.

4. Bio Diversity

The site and adjacent areas contain considerable bio diversity including important wildlife. Whilst some mitigation is proposed, this along with the site development, it is argued, will lead to an increase net biodiversity. However, the applicant fails to produce clear evidence with appropriate measures, to support this claim. We believe that this development will cause considerable disturbance to wildlife on and next to the site, some of which is of nature conservation value. The site is also adjacent to Stocking Wood which is a designated wildlife site (WLS). A European Protected Species has been recorded on the site and we are not convinced that this application has given full weight to the requirements of Habitat Regulations. We remain concerned also that the impact of noise and light from the development has not been fully evaluated.

5. Utilities

We note that UU has advised that the existing distribution network is insufficient to support this development and Chelford has recently experienced water supply issues with low pressure. The existing soil structure will not provide adequate drainage and the drainage structure will be subject to overload, a point confirmed in the Flood Risk Assessment Strategy document. There is surface water and groundwater flood risk on the proposed site. It is a concern that surface water will drain into Stockin Wood, an area already subject to flooding, which will also have a negative impact on biodiversity. The assessments presented in this application fail to consider the broader consequences and impact of this development on utilities in the local area.

6. Chelford Neighbourhood Plan

The proposals conflict with a number of policy statements in the Chelford Neighbourhood Plan. These include housing mix, housing development and scale, replacement dwellings, Green Belt, biodiversity and landscape character. In particular, para. 4.3.18 in the Plan, makes the clear point

that the provision of specialist housing for the elderly will be dependent on the local infrastructure in terms of the viability and sustainability of this type of accommodation. It also states that based on current and the likely future assessment of the local infrastructure, the viability of such provision is doubtful given the need to ensure that this type of accommodation is close to appropriate services and facilities.

7. Community

Although not a material planning consideration, we must challenge the conclusions drawn from the various attempts by the applicant to engage with the community (document J10). The analysis of feedback, which claims a 'very good level of support for the scheme', is completely erroneous and misleading. From the evidence presented by the applicant, we can find no justification for claiming that these proposals have good support from local residents.

Conclusion

It is clear that this site is within the Green Belt land where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. A very strong case for very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. Based on the information provided, the level of development proposed is significant, it cannot be classed as exceptional and there are no very special circumstances. It is inappropriate in the proposed isolated location and this outweighs any other material considerations. The proposals fail to comply with local and national policies. We do not accept that the various justifications offered, carry anywhere near sufficient weight to consider these plans as acceptable. Therefore this application should be rejected.