



23rd February 2023

Head of Planning Services
Elmbridge Borough Council
Civic Centre, High Street,
Esher, Surrey KT10 9SD

10 Churchfields Avenue
Weybridge
Surrey
KT13 9YA

Attn. Clare Adamson

Planning Application 2022/3796 16 – 18 Oatlands Drive, Weybridge, KT13 9JL

OBJECTION

I am writing on behalf of the Weybridge Society to object to the above application on the following grounds:

- 1. INTRODUCTION** This application, from a developer whose aim seems to be the destruction of this area's character, is seeking consent to demolish a further two properties along Oatlands Drive and replace them with two blocks comprising 33 apartments. The scheme is similar in style to that proposed for 4 – 6 Oatlands Drive (2022/2118) and the development currently under construction at nos 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive (2020/0691 & 2022/3223) which were refused consent by Elmbridge but allowed by the Planning Inspector. If permitted these further applications would result in an alarming **111 apartments replacing just 8 detached homes**, each of which made a significant contribution to the unique character of this section of Oatlands Drive. The applicant has clearly judged that had all three applications been submitted as a single application, a Planning Inspector may have been less supportive in the event of an appeal.
- 2. OUT OF CHARACTER** The detached properties on both sides of Oatlands Drive, particularly the two substantial Victorian Listed villas on the south side, give the area its sense of character and openness. Unfortunately, this unique character has been diminished due to the replacement dwellings currently under construction. To mitigate this loss and to prevent a contiguous line of unimaginatively designed blocks of apartments dominating Oatlands Drive, it is vital that the remaining properties (4-6 & 16-18) on either side of the current development remain.
- 3. UNACCEPTABLE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DESIGN** The proposal is for a 3/4-storey block of modern style apartments fronting Oatlands Drive with a further 3/4 storey block to the rear. The 'Existing and Proposed' streetscene illustrations submitted with the application clearly demonstrate the unacceptable impact these apartment blocks will have on the surrounding area. The present rhythm of the streetscene, with a pleasing mix of detached dwellings, will be irrecoverably changed by the introduction of potentially four unimaginatively designed blocks fronting Oatlands Drive. If permitted, these apartment blocks would be an over dominant feature which would totally destroy the character of this section of Oatlands Drive. The aerial photographs included in the Design & Access Statement confirm the present greenness and openness of this neighbourhood, all of which would be significantly impacted by these dense developments, contrary to Policy DM2.
- 4. CAR OWNERSHIP & INADEQUATE PARKING PROVISION** Just 32 car parking space are to be provided for the 33 apartments with no additional spaces for visitors. This is woefully inadequate given that car ownership is higher than average in Elmbridge and far short of **Elmbridge's guidelines which would**

require 59 spaces. It is highly probable that residents will own at least one car and probably more. This will result in some residents and all visitors needing to park off site to the detriment of local residents who live in the nearby leafy streets, contrary to Policy DM7.

5. **HOUSING NEED** Weybridge Society accepts that while this proposal would go some way to meet the need for 1, 2 and 3 bedroom properties, it introduces even more apartments in an area where there is already an abundant supply. Evidence for this can be found by researching any property website and also by speaking to local estate agents who confirm that there is already an **'ample supply of apartments to meet present and anticipated demand'**. Apart from the developer's 51 apartment scheme at 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive, currently being marketed as 'Riverside Gardens', there are some 375 apartments for sale at Walton Court and several new apartment developments currently being marketed in Weybridge including Bridge House (28 apartments) and Henbury House, Springfield Lane (20 apartments), both in the town centre, as well as others currently under construction in and around Queens Road. In addition to these, particularly in the Brooklands area of Weybridge, there are a significant number of schemes which have 'permitted development' consent to convert offices into apartments, some of which have now been re-submitted as ambitious high-rise apartment schemes in place of the existing offices. Several of these applications are currently being considered by Elmbridge's planning officers.

MORE APARTMENTS ARE NEITHER WANTED NOR NEEDED

While the target market for these developments in Oatlands Drive are families, given the choice, most families prefer to live in a house with a garden. No amount of balcony or shared amenity space compensates for the lack of a garden once children come into the equation. Even in Weybridge there are a limited number of houses available with prices similar to the apartments currently being marketed at 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive (Riverside Gardens) where **two-bedroom apartments are priced at £675,000.**

SMALL FAMILY HOMES WITH GARDENS ARE NEEDED The evidence is clear. While there is an oversupply of apartments, there is a dire shortage of small family homes that families can afford to buy. Developers of course favour blocks of apartments – there is far more profit. But sites such as these could and should be considered for small scale housing. There are already a disproportionate number of apartment developments in Walton and Weybridge compared with other areas of the borough. Our residents are witnessing a scale of densification which is not only impacting the character of our towns but is also placing additional burdens on infrastructure, including healthcare and schooling and adding to traffic congestion.

6. **LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** It seems incredible that although deemed financially viable for the developer, this development along with the neighbouring developments, is not deemed sufficiently viable to include provision for affordable dwellings. We trust that the Council's financial experts will examine the developer's evidence in this regard.
7. **IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURING PROPERTY** The property at no. 20 Oatlands Drive is currently bordered by a single neighbour's garden. This proposal seeks to replace the neighbouring dwelling and substantial garden with two large blocks of apartments served by a long access road sited immediately alongside the house and garden of 20 Oatlands Drive. This proposed access road leads to the parking areas at the centre of the development providing the sole vehicle access for all 33 apartments. This will have a severely detrimental impact on the peace and tranquillity of the garden amenity currently enjoyed by the residents at 20 Oatlands Drive. The associated noise and disturbance will be a grossly unfair intrusion and contrary to policies DM2& DM7. Could it be that the developer is hoping to buy no 20 as well, and so on and so on?
8. **ELMBRIDGE & GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGIES NOT MET** These proposals go against many of the guidelines applied to new development by Elmbridge particularly in terms of density, architectural design, enhancing the character of the area, affordable housing provision and quality of residential environment for future occupants. They are also at odds with the government's latest thoughts as expressed in December 2022 by Michael Gove who stated *'If we are to deliver the new homes this country needs, new development must have the support of local communities. That requires people to know it will be beautiful,*

accompanied by the right infrastructure, approved democratically, that it will enhance the environment and create proper neighbourhoods'. This scheme, along with that under construction at 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive, does not have the support of the community; is not beautiful; will certainly not enhance the environment and it is unlikely to create a proper neighbourhood. Our members and many other residents in both Walton and Weybridge are frustrated that planning decisions permitting more and more flatted developments continue to blight both our towns when what is required are affordable 2/3 bedroom homes with gardens.

9 TRAFFIC CONCERNS The site is situated near to a very busy and complicated road junction feeding a major Thames crossing. Twice a day at peak times, traffic builds up at this junction and often extends back to Oatlands Chase and frequently as far as Oatlands village. This further proposal, with an access road serving the occupants of 33 apartments, will only exacerbate the current situation. Permission for any further developments on this section of Oatlands Drive should be withheld until the current development at 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive is fully occupied and the impact on traffic congestion understood.

10 CONCLUSION This proposal represents yet more overdevelopment of this section of Oatlands Drive. If permitted, it would have a significantly adverse impact on the character of the area. It will add to the already over supply of apartments and does nothing to satisfy the dire need for small, affordable homes **WITH GARDENS** – the choice of most families.

Weybridge Society trusts that the Planning Committee will take note of the views expressed above and those expressed by many other in their letters of objection and refuse permission for this proposal in order to prevent the 'domino affect' causing the wholesale destruction of the character of this section of Oatlands Drive.

Yours faithfully

Kay Williamson - Co-Chair Weybridge Society Planning Panel