

Further to our previous objection letter submitted on 24 February 2023 we now wish to add the following comments and observations concerning PA 2022 / 3796.

Since February the severe impact of the buildings currently under construction at 8-14 Oatlands Drive has become more evident, warranting these further comments.

With this submission, we ask Elmbridge Council, when considering PA 2022/3796 for the site at nos. 16-18, to look very closely indeed at the bigger picture of the developers' ambition to destroy this part of Oatlands Drive. It is no exaggeration to state that this ambition now poses an existential threat to the remaining detached houses in the neighbourhood. We would like to reiterate the following points in particular:

The developers have used obfuscatory tactics from the outset in their dealings with Elmbridge's planning department and local residents. It is now abundantly clear that their plan was always to redevelop all 8 detached properties (from no. 4 to no. 18) into 8 blocks totalling 111 flats. Knowing that one planning application to build 8 huge blocks on a relatively small site area would almost certainly have been refused permission, they decided to split the area into 3 sections, with a plan to gain planning permission for each in turn.

The 2 blocks comprising 33 flats at nos.16 – 18 would be even bigger than those currently under construction at 8 – 14. The drawings show that they would be higher, wider and bulkier, with no design features to mitigate their overbearing mass. All this is clear from the proposed street scene drawings. There is no possibility whatsoever that they would complement the prevailing character of the area. The buildings now constructed at 8 – 14 are already overpowering on the street scene and larger buildings on either side of that site would utterly and irredeemably change the prevailing character of the road.

The front building breaches the clearly defined building line along that side of Oatlands Drive. The huge front block would be just under 11 metres from the front boundary, whereas the adjacent houses (i.e. nos. 18 and 20) are set back more than 14 metres. The front block would therefore project 3 metres beyond the building line of the neighbouring property at no. 20. Would other property owners along that row of houses be permitted to build in their front gardens, in breach of the building line? The answer would undoubtedly be "No" so this principle should apply to PA 2022 / 3796. If the proposed buildings need to breach the building line by 3 metres, they are too large for the site.

The loss of large areas of natural habitat in the deep gardens of nos. 16 and 18 (for example, the removal of 2 mature 20+ metre-long mixed-species hedgerows that provide shelter and nesting sites for countless birds and other wildlife) have, we believe, been severely understated in all the supporting documentation, with the impact on the biodiversity of the sites underestimated. The "biodiversity metric" submitted by the developers which concludes that replacing 2 houses with 33 flats would result in a biodiversity net gain of 5.64% is, quite frankly, risible. Whatever methodology has been used to reach that figure,

the reality of the result is utterly ludicrous and should be seen as such. For proof of this, one needs only to take a walk along the public footpath behind those glorious gardens.

The Planning Inspector's conclusions concerning the limited visual impact of the rear blocks at the 8 – 14 site can now be seen as erroneous. These 2 blocks dominate the view from Walton Bridge on the approach to the traffic lights – where once you could see only trees and a leafy landscape your eye is now immediately drawn to these very large buildings. They have already changed the aspect of Elmbridge as seen from the Spelthorne side of the river and the prospect of this being repeated on the two adjacent sites is appalling, bearing in mind also that the proposed buildings at the 16 - 18 site (and also the 4 – 6 site) are even bigger than those at 8 – 14.

Furthermore, the Planning Inspector's assurances that the rear buildings at 8 – 14 would be “set back far enough from the Engine River to allow for a landscaped buffer of retained trees and supplementary planting to enhance the appearance of the development” can now be seen as false. The reality is that the rear blocks are built almost to the edge of the pond, with a minimal strip of land between the rear walls and the stagnant water – a far cry from the marketing information showing a beautifully manicured, striped lawn area. These oppressive buildings have created a severely negative impact on a lovely area of natural woodland and watercourses and to permit any further destruction of this landscape should be considered utter folly.

The deep, mature gardens to these properties on the northern side of Oatlands Drive should be considered one of Elmbridge's immensely valuable, and irreplaceable, environmental assets. They provide sanctuary for numerous species of flora and fauna, form a major part of the green “buffer zone” between Spelthorne and Elmbridge and are in themselves a visual delight. Surely they deserve protection from opportunistic and insensitive development? Because once they are gone, they and their history are gone forever.

Once again, we urge Elmbridge Council to refuse planning permission for application number 2022 / 3796.

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