

Weybridge Society

your community association working for Weybridge



5th May 2024

THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE
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10 Churchfields Avenue
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Dear Sirs

APPEAL REFERENCE APP/K3605/W/24/3337473

16-18 OATLANDS DRIVE, WEYBRIDGE KT13 9JL Application 2022/3796

Development of 2 detached blocks comprising 33 flats with new vehicular access, associated parking, cycle storage, refuse storage and amenity areas with hard and soft landscaping and associated engineering and infrastructure works, following demolition of existing houses.

PREAMBLE - The Weybridge Society has charitable status and is a local community association of some 700+ members, the majority of whom live in Weybridge. The Society's focus is on maintaining and improving the environment of Weybridge.

The Society submitted its letter of objection to application 2022/3796 on 23rd February 2023.

BACKGROUND - Due to the presence of the new flatted development at 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive which is currently nearing completion, the character of the area has changed but hopefully, not irrecoverably. Both 2020/0691 and 2020/3223 (8-14 Oatlands Drive) were unfortunately granted consent on appeal by the Planning Inspector in June 2021 despite refusal by EBC's Planning Committee and 214 and 182 objections respectively from local residents.

In Weybridge Society's view, further erosion of the area's character is neither desirable nor acceptable. Local residents feared that following the Inspector's decision to allow construction of 8-14 Oatlands Drive, developers would submit further schemes for the remaining detached properties along Oatlands Drive, creating a domino effect which could potentially create a complete row of flatted developments. These new proposals show that resident's fears were not unfounded. A further proposed development at 4 – 6 Oatlands Drive, from the same developer, was dismissed on appeal. Residents are hopeful that this proposal for 16 – 18 Oatlands Drive, also by the same developer, will be dismissed thus ensuring that the varied character of dwellings in Oatlands Drive will prevail.

In our view a material question for this Inspector is "had an application for 8 – 14 and 16 – 18 Oatlands Drive been submitted as a single proposal for 84 flats, would the previous Inspector have been minded to permit such a vast development bearing in mind its impact on the character of the area?". If the answer to that question is "no", then this appeal should fail.

It is worth noting that during construction of 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive, multiple 'Variation of Condition' applications have been submitted in order to 'enhance' the application approved on appeal. This led the Senior Conservation and Design Officer to comment as follows:

"This site is a painful reminder of the problems the Council faces with repeated alterations to developments that slowly over time lessened the quality of the original permission".

Our comments below relate to the Appellant's 'Statement of Case' ("SoC") and focus primarily on the proposals' effect on the character of the area.

Referring to 8 – 14 Oatlands Drive (construction of which is substantially progressed), the Appellant states, in **2.3** of the SoC, that 8 – 14 '*must be considered part of the existing context*'.

And in

2.8 that '*The immediate context has experienced a change in character with a densification of the townscape.*

and again (with respect to 8-14 Oatlands Drive) that,

'The emerging character in this locality therefore includes newer flatted development in addition to the post-war flatted buildings referred to within the Council's Design and Character SPD'.

In reality, despite the unfortunate new development at 8–14, this part of Oatlands Drive continues to be characterised by a mix of architectural styles. Rather than continuing the concept of mixed styles, this development would (along with 8–14) result in a uniform row of three very similar large blocks. Residents are now seeking the Inspector's help to prevent the 'domino' effect occurring along Oatlands Drive where the construction of yet more unwanted high-density blocks of flats would cause further erosion of the area's character.

3.7 of the SoC says '*The development (8-14 Oatlands Drive) is currently at an advanced stage of construction and once completed will form part of the established character of the immediate area in which the current proposals at 16–18 Oatlands Drive **must** be considered.* We disagree, for reasons stated above, that the development at 8-14 Oatlands Drive **MUST** be considered as part of the established character.

With regard to the comparisons drawn with existing post-war flatted developments further up the hill (**2.13**), as is clearly shown in the photo montage, most of these are set significantly further back from Oatlands Drive than the proposal before you and most have substantial landscaped grounds to the rear.

SECTION 5 – focuses on the need for additional dwellings in Elmbridge. However, Weybridge Society continues to question why this need is used in Weybridge to approve further flatted developments. The towns of Walton & Weybridge both have a disproportionate number of flatted developments and while Weybridge Society accepts that there is a need for more dwellings, our frequently stated view is that there is a **dire shortage of small, affordable family homes with gardens**. The proposal before you will provide yet more expensive, unwanted flats but does nothing to meet the town's need.

CONCLUSION - Weybridge Society agrees with the Planning Committee's decision that:

The proposed development, by reason of its mass and scale would be out of keeping and detrimental to the character of the area when viewed from both Oatlands Drive and the Engine River in conflict with Policy DM2 of the Development Management Plan 2015 and the NPPF.

We trust that the Inspector will support the views and concerns of residents and our elected representatives and dismiss this Appeal.

Yours faithfully

Kay Williamson

Co-Chair Weybridge Society Planning Panel