

Re: PA 2022 / 3796 - site at 16-18 Oatlands Drive. Application to build 2 blocks comprising 33 flats following demolition of existing 2 detached houses.

To: All members of the Planning Committee

From: Sharon Finch (no. 20 Oatlands Drive) Jane Murray (no. 22) Rosemary Roach (no. 17)

The purpose of this communication is to bring to your attention certain matters relating to this planning application, of which you may not yet be aware. The document is intended firstly as information but also seeks to explain the reasons why we disagree so strongly with the Planning Officer's decision to recommend the granting of planning permission for another 33 flats in this location.

Relevant planning background:

Since 2020 the same group of developers has been seeking permission from Elmbridge Council to replace 8 detached houses (nos. 4 – 18 Oatlands Drive) with a total of 8 blocks comprising 111 flats. The adopted strategy has been to divide the total area of 1.2 hectares into 3 separate application sites and apply for permission on each site separately: 51 flats on 0.55 hectares at nos. 8-14, 27 flats on 0.3 hectares at nos. 4-6 and 33 flats on 0.35 hectares at nos. 16-18.

The site at nos. 8-14 is currently under construction (4 separate blocks comprising 51 flats) after the Planning Inspector allowed the applicant's appeal against Elmbridge's refusal of PA 2020/3223.

The site at nos. 4-6 was recommended for refusal by Elmbridge Council (PA 2022/2118). The applicant's appeal against this refusal was dismissed by the Planning Inspector on 29 September 2023

The site at nos. 16-18 is the subject of this application (2022/3796)

The 3 separate sites mentioned above share many common features. All the properties front a busy section of Oatlands Drive near the Walton Bridge junction and all have / had deep rear gardens extending to, and abutting, the Greenbelt public open space of the Engine River and Cowey Sale. All the sites are partially located in flood risk zones, all the gardens have / had extensive mature planting including many trees with TPOs, providing a highly attractive setting and exceptional habitat for wildlife.

The planning applications submitted for all 3 sites propose huge increases in their density (from 7.27 to **92.73 dph** at nos. 8-14; from 6.66 to **90.00 dph** at nos. 4-6; from 5.71 to **94.29 dph** at nos. 16-18.) Had the applicants initially submitted just one application for all 111 flats, an Environmental Impact Assessment would have been required. Proposals for all of the 8 blocks show them to be less than 22m apart, creating cramped living conditions and lack of privacy for residents. Therefore, the cumulative impact of 3 the separate applications is an important material consideration in the determination of PA 2022 / 3796.

Planning decisions to date:

Elmbridge Council's decisions on the planning applications for the sites at 8-14 and 4-6 Oatlands Drive (a total of 78 flats) were consistent, The Council refused permission on both, citing the design, scale, appearance, form, height and bulk of the proposed blocks as major reasons for refusal because such large buildings would cause harm to the character of the street-scene and the entire area.

However, the Planning Inspector who allowed the appeal at the 8-14 site disagreed with Elmbridge's view, considering the proposed design to be acceptable in the context of its surroundings. Now that the 51 flats have been constructed it seems there are few people who agree this was the right decision.

The Planning Inspector who decided the appeal at the 4-6 site dismissed it on multiple grounds, all of which are also highly relevant to the site at 16-18:

- i) the front building would be out of character with the street-scene due to its height, bulk and cramped design. The proposal would unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the street-scene and the area
- ii) the rear building would leave little space for soft landscaping and would have an urbanising impact on the adjacent parkland and treed setting
- iii) the loss of trees would further expose the 4 buildings already constructed at 8-14 and collectively the 3 buildings at the rear of the sites would be visually hard and dominant
- iv) overall, the proposal would cause significant and unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the street-scene
- v) given the intensive nature of the proposal there would be minimal space for further tree planting that would allow them to grow and mature without affecting the living conditions within the proposed apartments. This adds to concerns regarding the cramped appearance of the proposal and the harmful effect it would have on its surroundings
- vi) the proposal would fail to make adequate provision for affordable housing
- vii) the proposals would result in inappropriate development in an area at high risk of flooding. In fact, because of this, she concluded that the tilted balance would not be applicable to the proposal.
- viii) collectively the proposal and the approved development on the adjoining site (8-14) would have the potential to have a negative impact on the Biodiversity Opportunity Area due to the proximity of the rear buildings to the BOA and Engine River pond, with associated loss of sunlight, light pollution and loss of vegetation.

The Inspector concluded that the proposals contained within PA 2022/2118 conflict with all the following policies: CS1, CS3, CS14, CS15, CS17, CS19, CS21, CS26, DM1, DM2, DM5, DM6, the SPD objectives, paragraphs 119, 123, 124, 125, 130, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 166 and 174 of the Framework and paragraphs 023, 024, 027 and 028 of the PPG.

Comments:

Given the common factors relating to both the site at 4-6 and at 16-18, and in view of the comprehensive rejection by the Planning Inspector of the proposals for 4-6, together with the refusal of earlier applications by Elmbridge Council, we consider the Planning Officer's decision **(as detailed in Appendix 2 to this document) to be inconsistent and contradictory. Furthermore, we feel the arguments of the local community against this application (which have been erudite, heart-felt and objective) have been given insufficient consideration.**

The Sequential Test documentation relating to the site at 16-18 is also of great concern to us, **as explained in Appendix 1 to this document.** The test forms an important element in this planning application and we therefore kindly ask you to review our analysis of the documentation submitted by the applicant, which we find unsatisfactory.

We urge you, please, to consider all this information. and **sincerely hope your decision will be to refuse this application, to prevent further harm to the character and environment of this part of Oatlands Drive.**

Thank you for taking the time to read this communication..

12 October 2023