

Pirton Parish Council

Parish Clerk:

Dr Janine Budd

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Ben Glover,
Planning Officer,
NHDC,
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City

Dear Mr Glover,

Re: 25/02064/OP Land Adjacent To 10, Hambridge Way, Pirton, Hertfordshire,

Thank you for consulting the Pirton Parish Council (PPC) on the application for Outline Planning Permission for up to 50 dwellings on this site.

We would like to thank Blakeney Homes for engaging with us prior to the submission of this application.

We OBJECT to this application.

The site is to the rear of the Cotman End development, also constructed by Blakeney Homes, of 10 houses. The development proposed is adjacent to the Pirton Recreation Ground. The proposal envisages access via Walnut Tree Road and the existing road infrastructure for the 10 housing units mentioned above. That existing road infrastructure is directly adjacent to the vehicular access to the Recreation Ground. A public footpath (Footpath 005) runs through the existing development and exits onto the Recreation Ground.

We would have the following comments:

1) The proposed site is outside the village development boundary and not within any of the exceptions provided in the Local Plan and is, as a result, contrary to Local Plan Policy SP2 and CGB1 as well as our Pirton Neighbourhood Plan under PNP 1.1.

Under PNP 1.2. the limit proposed for new developments in Pirton is 30 houses, which this proposal far exceeds. It is to be noted that (other than Comice Meadows, which gained approval prior to the PNP coming into effect) no development has exceeded this figure of 30 houses.

2) We have significant concerns regarding the proposed access from Walnut Tree Road through the existing development.

Visitor Parking Spaces:

At the moment, it appears that access will be achieved by extending through the two visitor car parking spaces to form a new road to the proposed 50 houses. This will seriously compromise the parking situation in the original development. When granting planning permission for 8 houses, NHDC planning officers accepted 5 visitor car parking spaces. Arguably, it should have been 6 spaces (based on the standard of 0.75 visitor car parking spaces per house). When the development was amended to 10 housing units, we believe that this should have increased further to either 7 or 8 spaces, but it remained at 5 visitor spaces. To remove 2 spaces (which are regularly used) would leave 3 remaining, which is wholly inadequate for 10 houses and runs contrary to the original planning permission.

The problem has been compounded by NHDC granting, in one instance, the conversion of a garage in Cotman End to living accommodation. Part of the rationale was that there were 5 visitor parking spaces. Having set this precedent, it is entirely possible that the existing development could, in future, lose further spaces in this manner leading to increased kerbside parking which would cause problems for larger vehicles.

This will exacerbate the problem for vans /refuse vehicles, which may have to reverse out of the original development. The original design (which was granted permission) showed the visitor parking area (which will be lost because of the new road) was also to serve as a reversing area for large vehicles. It will now be more difficult for such vehicles to reverse safely. We raised this with Blakeney Homes who agreed to replacement visitor spaces. However, we seriously doubt that any visitor spaces could be added to the existing development at this juncture. Having looked more closely at the plans, we believe that, were the spaces to be added to the proposed development, they would inevitably be a significant distance away from those that they replaced. If so, we do not think this would be adequate or a valid replacement. However, if Blakeney Homes can demonstrate otherwise then this would resolve the issue and we look forward to their clarification of where the replacement spaces will be located.

Adequacy of the Existing Road:

The new development proposes to use the existing road serving the original development and the original exit. This road appears from the plans to be only 4.8 metres wide generally (5 metres at the exit onto Walnut Tree Road), which NHDC deemed sufficient for 10 houses. However, it is arguably not sufficient for an additional 50 houses and less than the width specified for the proposed new estate. It is not clear whether the soft verge and planting that is adjacent to the current visitor car parking spaces will be removed as a result of the proposed new road. However, it is clear that the planting to the rear will.

What is very worrying is that Footpath 005 will be diverted across the new access road in a "pinch point" which is only 3.7. metres wide. With the wide and tall boundary hedgerow with the Recreation Ground, visibility may be restricted. In addition, we believe that the new road will have to curve slightly. We urge that NHDC planners visit the site to see the conditions first hand as we consider it hazardous. To be blunt, we are not convinced that a 5-metre road and pavements could be accommodated.

In addition, the substantial planting to the rear of the visitor car parking spaces (put in by Blakeney Homes as part of the landscaping) will be removed, which will affect the current residents and the adjoining Recreation Ground. Whilst the narrow width at this point may slow traffic, it will do so by making it difficult for wider vehicles to pass at the same time, which may cause queues, particularly at peak times.

Measures should also be taken to ensure that vehicles do not have access at this point to or from the Recreation Ground, as this would be extremely hazardous. We should make clear also that it is essential that any crossing should not be located such that it requires users to be exposed to traffic into the Recreation Ground. The interface between the Recreation Ground and boundary treatments (e.g. fencing/planting are not specified). This could affect the amenity of the Recreation Ground. Again, we would ask for an on-site meeting (which we would support) to discuss all these issues.

It should be noted that the vehicular access to the Recreation Ground is directly adjacent to the current exit from the original development. Whilst this was accepted last time, the fact is that the situation has changed. Firstly, there will be a huge increase in traffic using the exit. Secondly, the new pavilion is being built and will be completed by year end 2025 and will increase usage at the Recreation Ground. It is designed not only as a sports facility but also for events that it could not previously host. Thirdly, there are other developments proposed in the village (including one for 130 homes) and this could lead to queues on Walnut Tree Road and potential conflicts with the Recreation Ground Access as well as the new development. Having additional access to the Recreation Ground through the new Cotman End road would improve this position, were it possible with a different layout.

Footpath 005:

Footpath 005 leads from Walnut Tree Road to the Recreation Ground. During the planning process for the original development, Blakeney attempted to change the course of Footpath 005 but withdrew the application. Nevertheless, the footpath was blocked and an alternative route built without planning permission. HCC were informed and eventually agreed the route of Footpath 005 had been blocked and ordered its reopening. At that stage, the alternate route was also blocked, although it is not known by whom. The footpath is of great importance as it is the only public pedestrian access to the Recreation Ground. The PPC has an access road, but

this is used, in practice, for vehicular traffic. It has no pavements and is 10 foot wide and unsuitable for mixed pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

The application states that the footpath will not be diverted, which we believe is incorrect. The current footpath runs from its exit from the existing development diagonally to the other side of the boundary hedge on the Recreation Ground. It does not turn 90 degrees from the exit as proposed. We believe that Blakeney Homes should provide larger scale plans of this area to demonstrate what is proposed. We stress again that we have serious safety concerns with the proposed crossing of the road due to its narrow width and visibility restrictions. Herts County Council should be contacted to confirm the situation and the procedure to be followed. To consider the granting of planning permission before this is done would seem premature and inadvisable. As stated in Part 4, Chapter 5 of the HCC Highways Place and Movement Planning Design Guide:

"Part 3 highlights that the granting of planning permission does not entitle scheme promoters to obstruct, divert or extinguish a PRow. Separate procedures must be successfully completed before this can be confirmed, under either Section 247 / 257 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA 90) or Section 118 / 119 of the Highways Act 1980"

In view of the previous blocking of Footpath 005 and the lack of, for example, dropped kerbs when crossing the estate road of the existing development as well as the unauthorised alternative footpath that was constructed, we believe that our concerns are legitimate in this context. We are not convinced that the proposals deliver a safe method of entry for walkers and users of the Recreation Ground as required by PNP 11. HCC needs to be consulted at the earliest opportunity.

3) We are concerned that the density of the development is stated as 16.3. units per hectare. This is a transitional area for the village and this, as stated in the PNP and Character Assessment is normally 11.9. units per hectare. In view of this and PNP 1.2. (mentioned above), we believe that this development should not exceed 30 houses. Many of our concerns stated in this response flow from the fact that 50 houses are simply too many, affecting green spaces, layout and design.

4) We discussed the height of the proposed buildings with Blakeney Homes and that a few buildings were mentioned as being 2.5. storeys high. We were told that such buildings would not necessarily be higher than any two storey buildings. The Character Assessment states that, with two exceptions, there are no buildings of more than two storeys and almost all buildings are under 9 metres. This led to and influenced many of the provisions of PNP 2 (Design and Character). We would therefore ask that no buildings should exceed 9 metres in height as a maximum and such a provision to be included were permission to be granted.

5) The application states that the development and the village will have access to green spaces (.99 hectares). In practice, this is diminished by the substantive attenuation feature shown on the plans. It contains no playground facilities. Mention is made of playground facilities at Comice Meadows, but these are private facilities accessed by private roads and are not publicly available. The nearest public facilities are at the Recreation Ground and would probably have to be accessed via Footpath 005 (see previous comments).

As for the village, as the proposed development is a private one with unadopted roads, then the developer would have to grant access via some method. Again, were there fewer houses, more extensive green space would be available and better facilities could be added. In terms of access to the countryside, we should point out the location is surrounded by hedgerows, acknowledged by the applicants as possibly falling under the definition of "Important Hedgerows" as defined by the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. The importance of the preservation of hedgerows/trees/wildlife is set out on PNP 4/5 and some of the boundary hedgerows are deemed by the Ecological Report as being Habitats of Principal Importance. There is a lack of clarity as to ownership of the hedgerows and whether third party approvals are required for accessing the countryside. Access from/to the site will depend on these factors. Further clarification is needed.

6) Biodiversity. Of importance is the situation with biodiversity, which shows a net loss of 19.32% rather than a net gain of 10%. The offsetting of this elsewhere would not conform to

PNP 4/5. As stated above, the hedgerows are important to wildlife. We have concerns generally but are particularly sensitive to the wide and tall hedgerow that forms the boundary with the Recreation Ground which we fear may be substantially reduced to facilitate access roads.

We support and repeat the submissions by "Wild about Pirton" and thank them for their involvement. The enhancements suggested by Landscape Strategy and Tree Survey and Ecology Reports should be adopted as planning conditions.

7) Noise. The applicant has stressed its commitment to any new residents for noise abatement by various construction methods. However, it remains the case that there will be increased noise to the existing development and to the Recreation Ground from the access road. It should be noted that the new Pavilion is much closer to the exiting access road than the previous building. This is particularly a problem where the boundary hedgerow ends. We do not know what abatement measures are proposed and what boundary treatments will be. We fear that there will be a conflict between visibility/safety and noise abatement where the proposed footpath crossing is envisaged.

8) Archaeology. We note the report by Mr Gill Burleigh of the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society. From this we understand that no mention is made of the "hollow way" that runs across the western boundary of the site. We believe this to be an important feature which should be considered by Cotswold Archaeology and addressed in their Report before any permission is granted. This could have been avoided if we had been consulted in accordance with PNP 8.

9) Flooding. We discussed this with Blakeney Homes in relation to overflow from the site. Overflow will apparently drain from the attenuation pond into a ditch adjacent to the site, which is not under their control. It occurs to us that a lack of capacity or of maintenance of the ditch could cause flooding and we would like this possibility to be addressed and investigated by Blakeney Homes. Please see this in conjunction with the Anglian Water objection.

The earlier development of 10 houses at Cotman End has, we believe, contributed to flooding and subsequent damage to Walnut Tree Road because of rainwater discharge into the ditch alongside the road. No provision has been made for the required maintenance to this ditch to accommodate the additional (and pre-existing) water flow resulting in blockages and overflow. We are concerned that this proposed development would result in similar issues.

10) Water. We note the response from Affinity Water and ask that their recommendations be included as a condition. Unfortunately, the response (just received) from Anglian Water is concerning. As is clear from their previous comments on the recent Gladman application, there is a serious problem with surface water and the foul water system coping with additional housing in Pirton. So much so that Anglian Water has been carrying out a programme of works in the village so as to alleviate current problems. We endorse their objection and urge NHDC to address this as part of the application.

11) Sustainable Travel. We do not accept that car use will be restricted and the development is, therefore, contrary to NPPF Para 110. We do not believe that cycling or walking to Hitchin or elsewhere is viable or practical as a travel option. That leaves only travel by bus. These services are regarded as inadequate and not used by the vast majority of residents. It would require a far more frequent and extensive service as well as more bus stops to persuade residents to switch from car journeys. We note that some s106 monies could be used to improve this situation, but there would have to be convincing proposals to overcome the reluctance of residents to commit to this service and lessen dependence on car journeys. This particular development is on the very outskirts of the village. The nearest bus stop would be the Fox Public House and we doubt that residents of the new development would be prepared to walk that distance even if services were dramatically improved.

12) We note the proposals to install pavements on part of Hambridge Way. We object to this and do not see the necessity. Many areas of the village e.g. nearby Royal Oak Lane have (unfortunately) no pavements and far more traffic. Hambridge Way conversely has far less traffic as it serves only limited housing that has vehicular access to it. Currently, it is regularly used by car users who wish to park near the village centre. It is not uncommon to see 5 or 6 cars parked there, spread over both sides.

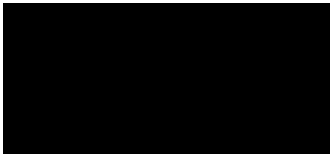
Pavements will reduce the width of Hambridge Way. If parking continues there (as it inevitably will) then the width will be reduced further and this would be counter-productive, as cars may be then parked on the pavements (as is done elsewhere in the village). The idea seems ill-conceived, particularly as it has been stated that Hambridge Way is to be used as access for emergency vehicles which could be impeded as a result.

13) We should also add as a separate point that Hambridge Way becomes quite narrow as it approaches the proposed entrance for emergency vehicles. We cannot comment further as we do not know the width of the likely emergency vehicles. However, we raise it because it looks very tight, and we feel that it may be a problem.

14) We are submitting these comments as a consultee and not as the owner of the Recreation Ground. We reserve all rights in that capacity including, but not limited to, the location of our boundaries at the Recreation Ground.

The Pirton Sports and Social Club, as operators of the pavilion and Recreation Ground on behalf of PPC, have also advised us of their concerns with this planning application and would encourage the applicant to seek to address these.

Yours sincerely,



Jill Rogers
Chairman, Pirton Parish Council