

To Members of Northern Area Planning Committee

Dear Councillors

I am writing with reference to planning application 11/02729/OUTN, agenda item 7 for your meeting of 8th March.

The officer's recommendation is for permission for this application. In recommending permission he is ignoring detailed and unanimous opposition from local residents. I would urge you to ignore the officer's recommendation and reject this application.

I will not repeat all the arguments already submitted which are well detailed in the officer's report, nor will I add additional photographic or other evidence as I am sure the planning department will do this on the day of the meeting. I will however ask you to consider whether, given the comments made by opponents the officer's decision can be justified.

Opponents of this application have raised a number of issues and reasons for rejecting this application. You will see that in the report there is not one comment in favour of the application. Objections range from individual letters to petitions raised by local residents and parents/users of the children's centre. You should also be aware that at two public meetings on consecutive Saturdays last month residents were unanimously opposed to the proposals.

The site has lain empty, unused and unmaintained for nearly four years. During this time trees have been allowed to overgrow damaging fences and the adjacent footpath, fences have fallen or been torn down and the area has become a dumping ground and eye sore. Everyone wants something done with the site but the county council has failed to maintain the site and to come up with a realistic plan for its future use. They have shown all the worst characteristics of an absentee landlord and developer and have now submitted a poorly presented and unacceptable proposal for development.

Objections include matters relating to overlooking, noise, overdevelopment and loss of open space. All of these are important but far more important is the ill-researched and dangerous proposal to allow access to the site along the existing service road serving the children's centre and education centre. Access for fifty houses will be through the old school gates.

When I and other residents checked the applicant's submissions it quickly became obvious that little thought had been given to the details of the plan. Existing houses were missing from plans, roads misnamed and incorrect footpaths and obsolete bus stops were all included. In addition it quickly became obvious that habitat studies, noise studies and traffic surveys were all too old to be regarded as accurate.

What is particularly worrying is the lack of attention paid to the possible effects of fifty or more cars entering and leaving the development through the existing school site. The applicant tries to add these on to the surveys on the traffic from East Anton and claims non-existent traffic lights will control flows. All of his arguments concentrate on the effect of traffic on the Smannell Road/Newbury Road junction.

Nowhere does he explain how the traffic from this development will get into Smannell Road in the first place. What will happen is that this traffic will back up into the development and/or road safety will be diminished.

Any of you who have knowledge of traffic and parking problems at schools will know what sort of congestion occurs there. This is true equally of the Children's Centre and yet no consideration is given to this in the officer's report or the applicant's submission. The site entrance (the school gates) is inadequate for access to so many houses. Visibility on exit is poor and will be further diminished by parking and cars entering the site and the nearby dropping off point and parking space. It is obvious to all who know the site that access for so many houses through this gate is unworkable and dangerous. This is why everyone, residents, parents, and staff are all opposed to the application.

I am disappointed to see that TVBC officers are arguing that because the county council has given itself permission to allow access to the school (which it had already) they should now allow access to fifty houses behind the school. This does not follow. They had opportunity to come up with a more realistic access plan and to seek contributions for highway improvements in Smannell Road. Instead they have opted for a pedestrian crossing on Newbury Road which will not address the problems of access to the site. The argument that there is a desire for such a crossing is flawed and not substantiated by local residents or governors of Knights Enham School.

While there are reasons to put a crossing on Newbury Road it will not encourage residents to use the "local centre" in Atholl Court. The local centres for Roman Way are the shop and surgery in Cricketers Way and the shops to the south of Enham Arch. No-one is going to walk to King Arthurs Way to catch a bus which stops a Cricketers Way and Swallowfields. If a light controlled crossing is to be installed it should be on Smannell Road to allow traffic the opportunity to enter and leave the new development. This however would not solve the problem of the additional traffic passing between the two school buildings.

The inherent problem with this application is that it proposes unacceptable traffic between two frequently used school buildings. This can be mitigated by fewer houses, an alternative use, or an alternative access. Given the highways and education departments new found enthusiasm for pedestrian crossings on Newbury Road there is no reason why a suitable access could not be built off Newbury Road. There is a precedent here with access granted to flats on Newbury Road south of Enham Arch.

These alternatives, fewer houses, other uses, or a different access, are not part of the application but should be considered. Until they are, I urge you to reject this application and ask the applicants to go away and come back with a more realistic plan for this site.

I have applied to address your meeting on Thursday and look forward to speaking, and answering questions, on these points at the meeting.

Yours sincerely

Len Gates