

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Monday 16 December 2024

Present:-

Councillor Paul Knott (Chair)
Councillors Patrick, Asvachin, Atkinson, Banyard, Bennett, Hughes, Jobson, Ketchin, Mitchell, M and Pole

Also Present

Strategic Director for Place, Planning Solicitor, Principal Project Manager (Development) (MD), Principal Project Manager, City Development (CC) and Democratic Services Officer (PMD)

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2024 were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made by Members.

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PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 24/0531/RES - LAND AT REDHILLS, EXWICK LANE, EXETER

The Principal Project Manager – Development Management presented the reserved matters application (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale) pursuant to outline planning permission 20/1380/OUT for residential development of 80 homes and associated infrastructure).

Members received a presentation which included:-

- site location plan;
- aerial view;
- proposed site plan;
- character areas (1 to 3);
- drainage layout (west and east);
- visuals for Lichfield Road and St Peters Mount (existing, year 1 and year 15);
- key matters; and
- officer recommendation.

The Principal Project Manager – Development Management responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- having a tree management in place was part of the conditions and any breaches were expected to be reported by members of the public;
- the type of trees to be planted had already been agreed and the trees would be as mature as possible;
- the trees would be planted immediately after the buildings have been built;
- the marketing aspect of the properties in the development fell outside the remit of Planning;

- no conversation had taken place about viability and it could only be assumed that the developers would deliver the scheme as submitted;
- no application for phased building had been submitted;
- the computer-generated landscapes shown in the presentation had been done by a certified photomontage expert;
- the semi-mature trees would be planted immediately after the building had been completed;
- the playing areas would cover a range of ages. The exact details of the playing areas were not yet known but were required;
- South West Water had accepted the split-sewage plan (whereas they normally would not accept combined pipes unless there were no issues);
- while the affordable housing element of the scheme appeared to be clustered, it was in fact normal for such projects to have up to ten affordable dwellings together; and
- the flats in the development would have access to a communal garden.

Speaking under Standing Order 44, Councillor Bialyk congratulated the planning team for their mitigation efforts and made reference to:-

- the decision of the Inspectorate;
- his wish that the Chair of the Planning Committee be consulted on any changes;
- the drainage on Exwick Lane;
- the need for the hedges to be maintained;
- the hedgerow near Barley Villas;
- the importance of the site to both the city and the countryside; and
- the need to bear in mind flooding risks as much as possible.

Mr Chris Marsh, speaking in favour of the application, stressed how the developers had worked closely with Exeter City Council; he made particular reference to:-

- the three character areas;
- how the scheme would promote connectivity;
- the ecological enhancement;
- the significant planting of trees;
- how the initial visual impact would be reduced steadily from day one;
- the material benefits;
- the energy rating; and
- the developers' intention to deliver the project as submitted.

Mr Marsh responded to Members' questions as follows:-

- the quota of 35% affordable housing had been agreed at the outline stage;
- maintenance of the trees would be transferred to a management company and undertaken in accordance with the landscape management plan;
- the planting strategy offered details about the exact nature and species of the quickly maturing trees which would be planted;
- the application was supported by an ecological scheme, which took into account e.g. bats in drainage areas;
- the developers would not be involved in the marketing of the individual properties; and
- any shortcomings regarding Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) requirements would have been raised by ECC planning officers.

During debate, Members expressed the following views:-

- the contribution towards Cemetery Park was the one positive outcome of the proposal; and

- while most Members did not want this proposal in the first place, they found themselves having to work together towards an acceptable scheme, and this application was the best that could be expected in the circumstances.

The recommendation was for approval subject to the conditions as set out in the report.

The Chair moved and Councillor Mitchell seconded the recommendation, which was voted upon and CARRIED.

RESOLVED that planning permission for Reserved Matters (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale) pursuant to outline planning permission 20/1380/OUT for residential development of 80 homes and associated infrastructure be approved subject to the conditions set out in the report.

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PLANNING APPLICATION NO. 24/1195/VOC - LAND NORTH EAST OF 371 TOPSHAM ROAD, ACCESS TO WEST OF ENGLAND SCHOOL, EXETER

The Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects) presented the application for Development comprising change of use to golf driving range including construction of an 8 bay and 2 bay facility incorporating equipment store and car park (Variation of condition 2 of 21/1676/FUL to change the surface material of the car park from grasscrete or similar to recycled plastic cell gravel).

Members received a presentation which included:-

- site location plan;
- aerial view;
- Riverside & Ludwell Valley Parks Masterplan 2016-2026;
- existing gate/location of access;
- existing access road looking south;
- view of site from existing access looking east;
- approved site layout;
- proposed change and suggested colour;
- approved planting plan;
- views towards site from Ludwell Valley Park; and
- officer recommendation.

The Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects) responded to questions from Members as follows:-

- the applicant felt that grasscrete was not ideal in terms of possible run-off and heating up the soil;
- there would be worms in the soil under the gravel;
- the remit of the Committee with regard to the present application was to consider visual harm and sustainability of drainage;
- no ecology report was required for this application;
- the Committee could only assess what the developer wanted to build;
- there was previous experience of the proposed material at the golf driving range; and
- if the present application was refused, the applicant would have to revert to the original application “or similar”.

Speaking under Standing Order 44, Councillor Wardle made the following points:-

- he had been strongly opposed to the original application;
- several objectors had wanted to attend the present meeting but were unable to do so;

- the location was an oasis of calm;
- the proposal was a small change which had a cumulative effect;
- residents did not agree that vehicles driving on gravel was acceptable; and
- no reason had been given for this application being made.

In responses to questions from Members, Councillor Wood made the following further comments:-

- it was essential to establish how green the new material was; and
- residents had now accepted grasscrete.

Speaking in favour of the application, Mr Peter Lacey made the following comments:-

- changes in the weather had forced the club to review its options;
- also, changes in the weather had resulted in rain-sodden grass surfaces, where previously the grass was playable all year round;
- the National Trust had distanced themselves from a product similar to grasscrete;
- the proposed changes were compatible with the landscape;
- the noise arising from cars driving on the gravel had been overstated;
- a 15-metre wide tree belt adjacent to the Tollards Road boundary would provide visual and sound screening; and
- cars approaching the site would do so at low speed.

Mr Lacey responded to Members' questions as follows:-

- the gravel itself was made of stone and would be resting on recycled plastic cells;
- the gravel would be locally sourced (near Plympton);
- the plastic cells had been heavily advertised as being made of recycled plastic;
- the biggest problem with grasscrete was the weather (i.e. 25ml of rain became 50ml in impact);
- the club's groundsman did not believe the option of combining plastic cells and grass was viable as the grass would only come to the top of the plastic;
- a significant land drainage scheme was in place;
- the new proposal was also more compliant in terms of wheelchair access;
- grasscrete had to be bedded on gravel and its formation included burnt off plastic;
- the applicant had received no evidence as to whether the plastic in the proposal would break down into microplastics;
- the applicant based their faith on the National Trust using the gravel and plastic cells in their car parks;
- a total of 13,000 vehicles had used the site last year, averaging between 7 and 8 in every single hour;
- the drainage would be the same for both systems;
- it was not possible to answer with real confidence how gravel could be prevented from travelling;
- while gravel was cheaper, this was not the motivation for the new proposal;
- the area size concerned was 45m x 16.5m;
- the applicant would not be amenable to having other plants or herbs in the grasscrete.

During debate, Members expressed the following views:-

- residents' concerns needed to be considered;
- the link with the National Trust was tenuous;

- the public speaker had not sufficiently demonstrated why the club should get rid of the grasscrete;
- the original application mentioned “grasscrete or similar” and it appeared that the applicant had not considered alternative surfaces;
- gravel spillage was a risk as it could not be contained;
- vehicles turning on the gravel would cause increased noise levels;
- alternative surfaces such as GrassPave had not been considered;
- disability needed to be taken into account; and
- gravel was not accessible for wheelchair users.

The Assistant Service Lead – Development Management (Major Projects) clarified that, if the golf club wanted to submit a proposal involving plastic cells and grass, this would fall under “or similar” in the original application, and no new application would be needed.

The Chair made the following comments:-

- the embedded carbon of the concrete was a concern;
- it should be noted that the plastic in the new proposal was recycled;
- although gravel was slightly proud, there was not much risk of spillage; and
- he expressed a preference for the new proposal.

The recommendation was for approval subject to the conditions as set out in the update sheet.

The Chair moved and Councillor Mitchell seconded the recommendation, which was voted upon and DEFEATED.

The Strategic Director for Place advised Members that they would now have to explicitly formulate reasons for refusal. He offered to word a note on technical issues and clarified that the reasons could include unacceptable appearance and adverse noise impact. He also suggested that Members could vote on the reasons for refusal only and delegate the exact wording in the notice of refusal to Planning Officers.

A Member remarked that the reason for refusal in terms of the distinctiveness of Ludwell Valley Park was essentially within the officer report.

It was proposed by Councillor Hughes and seconded by Councillor Jobson that:-

1. the application be refused on grounds that-
 - i. the impact of the change on the character and local distinctiveness of Ludwell Valley Park is a negative one;
 - ii. the impact of the noise is unacceptable to the surrounding neighbours who have already expressed concerns; and
 - iii. there isn't enough information given about the sustainable construction of the new proposal;
2. that the exact wording of the decision based on these reasons be delegated to Planning Officers.

On a vote, the recommendations were CARRIED.

RESOLVED that planning permission for Development comprising change of use to golf driving range including construction of an 8 bay and 2 bay facility incorporating equipment store and car park (Variation of condition 2 of 21/1676/FUL to change the surface material of the car park from grasscrete or similar to recycled plastic cell gravel) be refused for the reasons listed during the meeting.

LIST OF DECISIONS MADE AND WITHDRAWN APPLICATIONS

A Member asked if there had been an upturn in planning applications. The Strategic Director for Place replied that there had been a downturn in applications in Exeter, especially major projects.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

APPEALS REPORT

A Member expressed satisfaction that the appeal for application no. 23/0652/FUL (70 Pennsylvania Road) had been dismissed and stressed the importance of community balance.

The report of the Strategic Director for Place was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.32 pm and closed at 7.56 pm)

Chair