

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE

held on 7 November 2023

Present:

Cllr L Morales (Chairman)
Cllr T Aziz (Vice-Chair)

Cllr G Cosnahan	Cllr C Martin
Cllr S Dorsett	Cllr S Mukherjee
Cllr S Greentree	Cllr S Oades
Cllr D Jordan	Cllr T Spenser

Also Present: Councillors A Javaid, I Johnson, L Lyons and E Nicholson.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor G Cosnahan declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 6b. 2023/0505 Woking Community Hospital, Woking – arising from the Councillors' spouse being a Senior Manager and Nurse for the Inpatients Department of St Peters Hospital. As this role was within the same NHS trust, but not the same hospital, as the application site, the Councillor did not have a disclosable pecuniary interest. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 September 2023 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

5. PLANNING AND ENFORCEMENT APPEALS

The Committee received a report on the planning appeals lodged and the appeal decisions.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

6. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Committee determined the following applications subject to the conditions, informatives, reasons for refusal or authorisation of enforcement action which appear in the published report to the Committee or as detailed in these minutes.

6a. 2023/0645 3-12 High Street, Woking

[NOTE 1: The Planning Officer advised the Committee that a written update had been circulated earlier in the day which updated representations received, Section 106 Legal agreement requirements and some of the proposed planning conditions.]

[NOTE 2: That there were no registered public speakers for this item.]

The Committee considered an application for the partial demolition of 3-5 High Street, demolition and reinstatement of facade of 6-7 High Street, demolition of 8-12 High Street and redevelopment of the site to create a shared living building (sui generis use) which ranges in height from two and three storeys (plus basement), to eight and nine storeys (plus basement), to fourteen to seventeen storeys (plus basement), including commercial floorspace [Use Class E], plant, refuse, bicycle store and associated highway works, including alterations to rear service access (Environmental Statement submitted).

Councillor A Javaid, Ward Councillor, spoke in support of the application and thought that to approve it would be in the best interests of Woking. The application promised to deliver a scheme that had exceptional architecture and harmonised with the town. The design and planning of the potential 'The Lighthouse' space had ensured that it aligned with the requirements of the Charity. The applicant was also actively collaborating with The Lighthouse to find alternative premises during the development phase. Councillor A Javaid went on to say that she thought this was an innovative living development which gave flexibility to single households and would allow young people to live in the town centre. Councillor A Javaid supported the application and thought that the Borough should be prioritising applications such as this.

Following a question, the Planning Officer confirmed that the average size of the units was 18sq.m. and the accessible units were between 27-32 sq.m. These were not intended to be self-contained dwellings.

Following a question about the height of the building on a fairly narrow street, the Planning Officer confirmed that the applicant had tested the height of the building on the surrounding area with verified views and that there was differences in the height at different points due to the stepped nature of the building. The Planning Officer confirmed that they were satisfied that the level of harm to the conservation area was at the lower end of less than substantial. Some Members commented that this building would actually create a more natural town scape in regard to the height of surrounding buildings.

The Chairman commented that there was twenty seven proposed accessible rooms, yet only three disabled parking spaces. It was also questioned whether accessible rooms would ever be rented to a tenant that was not disabled. The Planning Officer commented that this would depend entirely on the demand for the accessible rooms from disabled tenants. From a follow up question, the Planning Officer confirmed that they would expect 10% of the 'affordable' room provision to be accessible, meaning that of the 33 no. affordable units, 3 no. units should be the larger, accessible units.

The Committee were pleased that the application would offer 10% affordable home provision.

Some concerns had been raised around cycle storage from Active Travel England and the applicant had responded to these concerns. Since then, the Planning Officer had not received any further comments from Active Travel England. The assessment for cycle parking was as per the report, but a suggested amended condition 11 had been included in the written update. The Committee were supportive of the amended condition 11 as detailed on the written update.

Following a question about the communal amenity space, the Planning Officer explained that co-living was not directly addressed in the Council's planning policy, or SPD, at the moment, so specific ratios of living space against co-living units was not specified. It is residential and the principle of use was considered acceptable. This would be one of the first co-living developments in the Borough. There was some concern from the Committee regarding this point and they raised questions about what would happen with the development if the co-living 'experiment' did not work. It was noted this was not a planning issue and the building was not Council owned so it had no relevance to the decision. Beverley Kuchar, Interim Strategic Director – Place, commented that co-living was not a new concept and that there were many products like this in London. This was seen as an increasingly important part of accommodation provision, particularly when it was close to public transport provision. This was new to Woking and was becoming increasingly popular.

Some Members commented that they could see the positives in the application and that the site was one that had been identified for redevelopment, and therefore needed to be regenerated. They were pleased at how the heritage of the site had been protected in the design of the application. Some Councillors commented that they were slightly conflicted on some elements, but nothing that the application could be refused on.

The Committee were pleased with the written update provided on condition 11, regarding cycle provision. There was concern that there was no provision for car parking, as although there was an expectation residents would not be driving due to the proximity of the site to the train station, there would still be a large number of car owners.

Some Councillors thought that the provision of amenities in the application was unacceptable and had worked out that the kitchen facilities provided one cooking station per sixteen residents. Some members of the Committee thought that as there were no specific policies on co-living, this application had tried to avoid current policy, and was not sure it was value for money for potential residents. Further comments were made regarding the actual benefit this would serve to young people as it was thought the proposed rent was still too expensive and it was suggested it was a glorified HMO (house of multiple occupation).

In accordance with Standing Order 22.2, the Chairman deemed that a division should be taken on the recommendation. The votes for and against approval of the application were recorded as follows.

In favour: Cllrs T Aziz, G Cosnahan, S Dorsett, S Greentree, C Martin and S Mukherjee.

TOTAL: 6

Against: Cllrs D Jordan, S Oades and T Spenser.

TOTAL: 3

Present but not voting: Cllr L Morales (Chairman)

TOTAL: 1

The application was therefore approved.

RESOLVED That planning permission be GRANTED subject to:

- i) The prior completion of a Section 106 Legal Agreement to secure the requirements as set out at the conclusion of the report (and amended by way of written update);
- ii) Completion of an Appropriate Assessment, supported by Natural England; and
- iii) Planning conditions set out at the end of the report (and amended by way of written update).

The Planning Committee also authorised the Development Manager (or their authorised deputies) to take all necessary action(s) in connection with points 1-3 above.

6b. 2023/0505 Woking Community Hospital

[NOTE: In accordance with the procedure for public speaking at Planning Committee, Mrs Helen Archer attended the meeting and spoke in objection to the application and Mr Jack Wagstaff spoke in support.]

The Committee considered an application for an extension to Woking Community Hospital to create a new diagnostic centre and associated alterations to car park (amended plans).

Councillor L Lyons, Ward Councillor, spoke on the application and explained that himself, Councillor I Johnson and Councillor E Nicholson had referred it to the Committee for consideration. The Councillors had been contacted by residents about the loss of privacy the removal of the trees would create and Councillor L Lyons thought it important that deliberation on the item took place in public. He commented that most residents were supportive of the hospital expanding and enhancing the services offered, however the loss of trees on the western boundary was the contentious point; these trees formed a natural barrier between the hospital site and the flats at St Andrews Gate. Councillor L Lyons thought that if this point could be addressed then the residents would be broadly happy with the application.

Some Members of the Committee queried whether the proximity of Heathside Crescent car park meant that this hospital car park expansion was unnecessary. The Planning Officer advised that the application must be considered in the form as put forward.

The applicant had suggested that they would be happy to submit a full planting plan before the start of the development. The Committee thought this was a good idea and asked that an additional condition be added regarding landscaping details on south west boundary, which was to be submitted before the development commenced.

RESOLVED

That planning permission be GRANTED subject to an additional condition be added regarding landscaping details on south west boundary.

6c. TPO/0013/2023 Land rear of 1 Nethercote Avenue

The Committee considered a recommendation that a Tree Preservation Order be confirmed following the receipt of one letter of objection to the making of the Order. The Tree Preservation Order protects two Oak trees on land to the rear of 1 Nethercote Avenue, Woking, Surrey, GU21 3JZ.

RESOLVED

That Tree Preservation Order Ref. TPO/0013/2023 be confirmed without modification.

7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Borough Council's arrangements for public participation at meetings of the Planning Committee had been reviewed with the purpose of allowing supporters and objectors equal opportunity to speak at the Committee meetings. The existing arrangements required 10 letters of objection before public speaking on an application was allowed. Under the proposals, this would change to a minimum of five representations, regardless of whether they supported or objected to an application.

The proposed amendments had been considered by the Corporate Governance Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and were before the Planning Committee to consider the proposed changes.

The Chairman flagged up an error in the text of the report, and asked that the word 'supporter' be added consistently throughout. The Chairman noted this was missing from point 4.4 and 4.5, and asked Officers to thoroughly check the remainder of the document.

Following a suggestion by the Chairman to remove point 4.12, which stated the right to speak would only be exercised at the first meeting, it was agreed that point 4.13 would actually cover any need for public speaking to be allowed a second time on an application. The Committee agreed that very few applications came back in their original form and point 4.13 would allow public speaking for a second time if it was necessary.

The Committee asked that the wording in the Constitution make it clear that an objector or supporter could only speak if it was contrary to the Planning Officers recommendation. Under point 1.2 it was suggested it be re-worded to read "The number of objectors or supporters required, in contrary to the Officers recommendation, before a planning application qualifies for public speaking at the Planning Committee is five (5)."

It was clarified that details regarding the receipt of petitions had not been deleted, but had been expanded under point 2.41.

Councillor L Lyons, Planning Portfolio Holder, commented that the Planning Committee needed to be more accessible and commended all the work that had been done to update the Public Speaking at Planning Committee section of the Constitution. He cautioned making any changes that would see an increase in applications coming to the Committee for determination. There would be huge staffing changes at Woking Borough Council, and

a lowering of service would need to be accepted. Councillor L Lyons also cautioned against a policy that allowed a member of the public to speak in support of an application, in addition to the applicant.

The Chairman commented that her understanding was that if the text 'contrary to the Officers recommendation' was added, this would mean that a supporter or the applicant could speak, not both. The current policy meant that public speaking was not allowed from the applicant/supporter if there was no one registered in objection, the new proposal would solve this. Thomas James, Development Manager, suggested that to address Councillor L Lyons concerns, he could change the wording in point 3.9 to state "Only one representor of the objectors or supporters/applicant would be allowed to make an oral presentation". Mr James said that this would make it clear only one person could speak and he would also check whether there was reference elsewhere in the section where this would need to be added.

Following a question from the Committee, it was confirmed that if approved by Council in November, the changes would come into effect shortly afterwards.

RECOMMEND TO THE STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE for recommendation there on to Council That

- (i) the amended Public Participation at Planning Committee section of the Constitution (Appendix 2 to the report) be adopted, subject to the following changes;
 - a) Any reference to 'objector' must be consistent with also reference to 'supporter' in the Public Speaking at Planning Committee section of the Constitution;
 - b) Point 1.2 be re-worded to read "The number of objectors or supporters required, *in contrary to the Officers recommendation*, before a planning application qualifies for public speaking at the Planning Committee is five (5)."
 - c) Amend point 3.9 and any other reference to read "Only one representor of the objectors or supporters/*applicant* will be allowed to make an oral representation."
- (ii) authority already delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution, including amendments to references within the document and section numbering, be noted; and
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 9.30 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

