

Planning Applications 2021/1089 & 1090

We are utterly dismayed by the prospect of losing an important and treasured area of countryside that sits right on our doorstep. Up until now it has made our part of Gawber a very pleasant place to live in. Having examined the content of the 2 planning applications has only served to increase our apprehension. Our immediate concern at this stage is that from examining the applications and the vast amount of accompanying documentation, it has become clear that the proposed development entails much more than the 1700 or so houses and 43ha of employment that Local Plan Policy MU1 provides for. While that is bad enough in its own right, from delving into the application documents it is apparent that the development will have another major component, namely a massive programme of earthworks extending across the whole of the area in order to create 'development platforms'. This work will involve extensive cut and fill operations, together with moving material from one part of the land to another. Although it must have been known about at the time, the extent and nature of the earthworks was not made apparent when the consultation exercises in connection with the Barnsley Local Plan and the Masterplan Framework were carried out. Indeed, those Council Members who endorsed both, despite the considerable body of opposition to them, may well not have been made aware of just what the proposal was going to entail on the ground. The Planning Statement extols the virtues of the additional housing and employment opportunities and the new link road, and even attempts to place a value on this. However, it is silent insofar as the negative aspects of the development, the loss of countryside and the manner in which this will be carried out are concerned. The earthworks will have a major and devastating impact in their own right. But what is even worse is that their deleterious effect will be exacerbated by the astonishing time span for the works indicated – 8 years or thereabouts! And it gets worse. In tandem with the earthworks, the wholesale removal of trees and hedges from the land is intended, as well as the large scale destruction of wildlife habitats on the site. If all this isn't bad enough, access to the public footpaths that run across the land is going to be denied for an unreasonably long length of time. We and many others who live on the fringes of the land are going to be subject to a programme of scorched earth. Instead of looking onto fields and greenery, we will be confronted by a moonscape, likely to last for a good number of years. All this will have a serious and highly detrimental effect on the quality of life that we and everyone else who lives on the fringes of the land ought reasonably able to enjoy.

In opting for a mass programme of mayhem and destruction across the whole of the site, the developers appear to have paid scant regard to the living conditions of people such as ourselves who live next to it. The nature of the work appears to have been contrived solely to suit the convenience of the developers, seemingly insensitive and oblivious to the continued well-being of local residents who are going to have to endure the effects of the works first hand over a very long period. Not only is this evident from the scale and nature of the physical works proposed, but also in the unreasonably early starts to work that are envisaged. For an activity involving heavy plant and machinery which will inevitably cause a huge amount of disturbance, starts as early as 07.00 hrs cannot be permitted. There should be no work on the site before at least 08.00 hrs at any time – if any planning permission is granted, a condition to this effect should be imposed.

The insensitivity referred to is readily apparent at a local level, namely the field between Farmhouse Lane and Gawber School, bounded by Wharfedale Road to the east and Colster Close to the north. The concerns set out below apply to the part of the site we are most familiar with, but it seems likely that the matters set out below will be relevant to other parts of the land too.

Firstly, the Site Wide Cut/Fill Analysis (Drawing No: 4848-JPG-XX-00-DR-C1208-S4-P07), indicates that virtually all the field is going to be subject to certain degrees of cut and fill. The reason for this is not readily apparent as, apart from in the field's north-west corner, the slopes across it are very gentle, to the extent that, for the most part, it is unlikely that the existing topography would seriously impede development as envisaged in the Masterplan. Given that a good deal of the field is flanked by housing, the propensity for disturbance to residents is likely to outweigh any benefits accruing from carrying out the earthworks indicated here.

Secondly, of the 9 hedges on the site on the land identified as being 'species rich', in the Ecology Chapter of the Environmental Statement, H3 follows the line of a ditch in the northern part of the field, and H4a runs along its south-western edge. However, although the Local Plan policy for site MU1 indicates that the development will be expected to "*Retain, buffer and manage the species-rich hedgerows and boundary features...*" this is not reflected in the applicant's plans for the site as a whole. Instead reliance is placed upon some fairly limited 'translocation', the chance of success of which must be questionable.

In addition to the species rich hedgerows, the Ecology Chapter notes that hedge H2, on the northern boundary of the field and the grounds of Gawber School, together with H4 on the northern side of Farmhouse Lane and H4a, are 'important' under the 'Wildlife and Landscape' and Archaeology and History assessment criteria. Regretfully, though, little weight appears to have been given to this by the developers. The application documents indicate that these hedges will all go, along with the species rich hedgerows.

We seriously question whether the removal of all these locally important landscape features really is necessary. Hedge H3 could be retained as a feature – it is hard to imagine that a competent designer could not find a way of doing this as part of the detailed housing layout for this part of the site. The other 'important' hedges are boundary features on the outer edge of the field – there seems to be no good reason why they could not be retained. On the 'Masterplan' layout most of H4 is on the outer edge of an area of open space – surely it would make sense to retain it. Likewise, hedge 4a, which marks the edge of one of the proposed housing areas, flanks a significant area of planting indicated on the Landscape Masterplan – why not retain it then? It could be saved if a more sensitive approach towards the carrying out of the earthworks on this part of the site was adopted.

Thirdly, the Landscape Framework Plan shows a 'biodiversity/wildlife corridor' running on the northern edge of the field as far east as the rear of properties in Wharfedale Road. Inexplicably, this feature is not shown on the Landscape Masterplan – only a narrow area of planting is shown at the rear of Nos 9-13 Colster Close. The wildlife corridors should be retained; indeed it ought to be extended to include the readily discernible uncultivated margin that runs alongside the rear boundaries of the properties on the west side of Wharfedale Road as far as Farmhouse Lane.

Fourthly, despite the detailed assessment of the trees on the site, it is intended that nearly all will go regardless of their quality. This is another instance of the

insensitive approach envisaged by the developers – it cannot be right. In this respect we draw particular attention to Group G13 in the north-east corner of the field near the junction of Colster Close and Wharfedale Road. The Arboricultural Report describes G13 as *“a semi-mature mixed species plantation in the corner of an arable field that similarly provides screening to existing residents”*. The *“useful”* screening function of the trees in G13 is also highlighted in the Table at Appendix A.

Several of the trees in G13 were planted by the developer of the properties in Wharfedale Road and the eastern end of Colster Close in accordance with a landscaping scheme approved in association with the housing development. Indeed, the trees stand on a parcel of land which we believe is still owned by the then developer. Not only do the trees provide screening as indicated, but they also form a very pleasant amenity feature which enhances the setting of the adjoining properties.

According to section 3.2 Landscape Design Statement on the proposed ‘edges’ including what is termed the ‘Pogmoor Edge’ *“Planting and trees should be used where appropriate, creating a soft buffer between proposed and existing”*. This is all well and good, but why destroy the existing trees in G13 in order to carry out fresh planting which inevitably will take several years to establish – it makes no sense whatsoever. The solution is simple – retain G13! Not only would this save the trees, but as this part of the site is known to be inhabited by hedgehogs, it would help reduce the wholesale destruction of habitat as is proposed.

Reducing the level of the land by 2m alongside the edge as envisaged would help reduce the impact of the new buildings to some extent, albeit limited, but the main problem is twofold. Firstly, the maximum dwelling heights indicated, up to 13.5m, are too high – this is half as much or so higher than the neighbouring 2 storey houses and well over twice as high as the bungalows. The maximum height of any houses should not be allowed to exceed that of the existing ones on the adjoining land. And, as many of the neighbouring properties here are bungalows, the relationship between the existing and proposed housing should be reflected in the design and disposition of the new housing in order to ensure that the effect of the development on the neighbours is neither oppressive nor overbearing.

Conclusion

The proposed earthworks and the consequences of carrying them out are wholly lacking in sensitivity to the nature of the area and those who live alongside it. The scorched earth approach may suit the developers by presenting them with a blank canvas, but taking a bludgeon to the existing landscape and eradicating it hardly sits comfortably with the stated aim of creating a landscape led development.

If this most unwelcome development is to proceed, a much more sympathetic approach is called for, one which pays far more respect to the qualities of the existing landscape and strives to incorporate them into the scheme instead of regarding them as impediments. As it stands, the proposals are completely unacceptable. Unless the applicant can come with a more sensitive scheme which properly respects the living conditions of local residents and the key features of the local landscape, the applications should be **REFUSED**.