

UPDATE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

ITEM NO. 18

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 5th September 2018

App No.: 180855 ADJ (South Oxfordshire District Council ref P18/S1522/O)

Address: Land adjacent to Highdown Avenue, Emmer Green, Reading RG4 8QS

Proposal: Outline application to establish the principle for use of the site for Class C3 Residential occupation; means of access from Highdown Hill and density of Class C3 residential to be determined under this application.

RECOMMENDATION

Points E & F amended to read (additions in **bold**):

- e) It is not considered that the quantum of development proposed on this sloping site would retain the local landscape character **and would have a harmful** impact on biodiversity within and surrounding the site and is unacceptable on this basis. The proposal would therefore be contrary to NPPF Para 170 **and 174**.
- f) The proposal would have a significant impact on the surrounding infrastructure in Reading Borough including highways, open space/leisure facilities (encompassing the use of Emmer Green Recreation Ground and Bugs Bottom), **biodiversity within the Local Wildlife Site at Hemdean Bottom**, air quality and the provision of affordable housing. No clear plan or mechanism to secure appropriate mitigation to these impacts has been secured without which the scheme is considered unsustainable and contrary to para of the National Planning Policy Framework Para 54.

Additional Consultation Responses:

RBC Ecology Consultant:

The application site hosts a badger sett, has the potential to host reptiles and dormouse (the ecology report recommends further surveys to confirm if these are present), may be used by commuting and foraging bats, and contains the “priority habitat” (as per the NPPF) lowland calcareous grassland, all of which will be adversely affected if the application goes ahead. It is also likely that the proposals will result in an increase in recreational use of the adjacent Local Wildlife Site, Hemdean Bottom (within Reading Borough, and owned and managed by RBC), and no mitigation appears to be proposed.

Species In relation to protected species, Paragraph 99 of the government Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within The Planning System (this document has not been revoked by the National Planning Policy Framework) states that:

“It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted..”

In this case, since 1) the presence or otherwise of protected species (reptiles and dormouse) has not been established, and 2) the extent that protected species (badgers and bats) may be affected by the proposed development has not been established, the application would not be in accordance with the above planning policy.

Habitats The SODC Ecology advisor has visited the site and confirms that the ecological value of the site had been underestimated by the applicant's ecologist and it contains the priority habitat (as defined in the NPPF) lowland calcareous grassland which is protected by virtue of paragraph 174 of the NPPF.

Local Wildlife Sites The proposals may result in an increase in recreational use of Hemdean Bottom and no mitigation appears to be proposed. Hemdean Bottom is a Local Wildlife Site, owned and managed by RBC. If the proposals were to have an adverse effect on it (e.g. as a result of an increase in recreational use), they would be contrary to RBC policy CS36.

Appraisal

The objections of Reading Borough Council have been updated to incorporate the above comments.

Case Officer: Susanna Bedford