



Planning Services
Leeds City Council
9th floor, Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
Leeds
LS2 8BB

Date

Dear Sirs,

Planning Application 17/02594/OT - Land Off Racecourse Approach Wetherby LS22,

We wish to lodge an objection to the application to build 800 houses on the land off Racecourse Approach on a number of planning grounds.

The application is to build houses upon land designated as “Rural Land”. The planning rules applicable to “Rural Land” are Policy SP2 from the Leeds Unitary Development Plan Review (2006). SP2 states that **“Countryside is protected for its own sake, as a recreational resource, as a setting for a diversified and prosperous rural economy, and as the location of valued landscapes, wildlife and natural features.”** Further guidance in National Guidelines PPG7 Paragraph 3.20 states that **“The pattern of new development should be determined through the development plan process, and should be well-related in scale and location to existing development. Expansion of villages and towns should avoid creating ribbon development or a fragmented pattern of development.”** These rules make clear that Rural Land is protected and that fragmented development on it should be avoided.

The proposed site is clearly “fragmented” in that it is physically disconnected from Wetherby by a motorway, the A1(M), and this severance issue cannot be resolved (as stated in Leeds own site assessment). The presence of a motorway is a severe and physical barrier to connectivity of services, facilities and employment opportunities and sustainable modes of travel meaning that residents in the proposed allocation will be less likely to walk into Wetherby. The motorway, together with the various local side roads, are also a significant visual barrier which separates the proposed allocation from Wetherby.

It should be importantly noted that a very similar site was considered in the Leeds SHLAA (reference 3136), and rejected. This would have been located slightly further south and again on the eastern side of the A1(M). A statement in the reason for rejection was **“Development of the site would be unrelated to the existing settlement and represents a significant incursion into open countryside extending to the south-east of Wetherby. Presently the A1(M) forms a strong defensible boundary between the urban area and the countryside. The site would be isolated from the main urban area of Wetherby with very limited**

access across the A1(M), which creates a significant access boundary to the existing settlement”.

How can the proposed Racecourse Approach site, very slightly further north, still to the east of the A1(M), be viewed as any more sustainable? This site is also very close to the already very busy J46 of the Motorway. This includes access to one of the busiest Service Areas on the network and experiences peak-time queuing onto the carriageway. Any direct conflict, between vehicle and pedestrian access at this point without significant separation would be extremely hazardous, especially in poor conditions.

The proposed allocation is likely to form a separate community rather than an integral part of the existing settlement. The middle of the site is also located within Flood Zones 2 and 3 as Sandbeck runs through the site.

The above is confirmed by the Leeds Council Highways team (detailed within the Outer North East Housing Site Assessment) where they state that **‘the site fails all the accessibility criteria’** and that the **‘severance issues to Wetherby cannot be resolved’**.

An assessment of the overall site was included within the Sustainability Appraisal Report (May 2017). The assessment noted that the site has only **one positive benefit** associated with the construction of new housing, with **4 significant negative impacts**:

- Development on greenfield land,
- Flood risk,
- Impact on landscape
- Energy/resources.

A **further 6 negative effects** were also identified in relation to:

- Health;
- Culture and leisure;
- Social inclusion and community participation;
- Greenhouse gas emission;
- The needs of the local community not being met locally;
- Pollution.

It is telling that the majority of these negative effects are related to the site not having access to services or amenities and also the resultant reliance on the car to access these requirements (greenhouse gas and pollution).

Virtually all the employment opportunities are in Harrogate, Leeds and York. It is naïve to believe that a proposed local “hopper bus” service, will encourage persons wishing to travel to these destinations, to use public transport, (changing in Wetherby) instead of the private car.

In addition the development (and its proposed sister development of a further 300 houses for which no planning application has yet been made), will increase the size of Wetherby by 20% and lead to major problems within the town of Wetherby itself. These include significantly increased traffic, pollution and safety risks within the town and particularly at the junctions of

- York Road with North Street,
- North Street with St James Street,
- Hallfield Lane with York Road
- A168 with the Walton Road. This junction already suffers from significant congestion due to being poorly squeezed in to a very limited dimensions, providing insufficient manoeuvring space for the regular use by large vehicles.

There is also increased risk to children around St James School from traffic hazards and pollution caused by increased “stop – start” traffic along Hallfield Lane which is already frequently blocked with parked cars and cars of parents fetching their children. The pressure on GP’s surgeries, already heavy, will increase further, yet there are no plans for a new surgery on site.

Finally, it is acknowledged by Leeds City Council that Wetherby and the surrounding area has relatively poor public transport links and lacks a major transport hub for rail. The scale of the Racecourse Approach development is also clearly incompatible with the existing size and historic character of Wetherby. Moreover, the site was not even considered the most sustainable or justified option when originally assessed by the Council against other reasonable alternatives within the Outer North East HMCA.

We therefore strongly urge that this Planning Application be rejected.

Yours faithfully,

Chris McIntosh
Hon. Secretary
Better Wetherby