

Comments on Report of the Chief Planning Officer re 17/02594/OT – Land off Racecourse Approach

The following are our comments on the Report of the Chief Planning Officer, dated 29 August 2019, regarding planning application 17/02594/OT. The paragraph numbers used refer to the paragraph numbers in that report.

Emerging Policy – Core Strategy Selective Review (CSSR)

2.3 The report neglects to identify that because of the reduced target housing requirement identified for the period 2017 – 2033 in the CSSR, Leeds now has a housing land supply of 5.9 years. Thus there is no urgency to accept this application, as the 5 year target is being met.

Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan

2.4 The advanced Neighbourhood Plan requires new housing to be “*well-connected to the town*”. Clearly an estate located on the other side of a 6 lane motorway and whose access to facilities is judged by the Leeds Chief Planning Officer to be unsustainable fails to meet this criteria.

Principle of Development

3.5 The site in the Site Allocation Plan (HG2-226 East of Wetherby) is for a site of 1,100 houses. There is not a joint planning application for the whole site, only for a partial site. **This part site is not part of the Site Allocation Plan!** Indeed the Site Allocation Plan (CD1/1g Page 363) clearly states:

“A comprehensive design brief for the development needs to be agreed prior to the development of the site.”

The Planning Panel has twice requested a plan for the whole site: in October 2018 they “*requested to receive further information as to what is proposed for the whole of the site....*” and in March 2019: “*That determination of the application be deferred to await further information on the masterplan of the SAP site as a whole.....*”. Taylor Wimpey has failed to supply this plan and no planning application has been received from the owners of the remaining land within the allocation designated in the Site Allocation Plan.

The report implies that Taylor Wimpey is “jumping the gun” by stating that “*Whilst it would have been preferable for the outline application to include the entire allocation.....*” If the other land owners really want to build on this site they would have filed a joint application.

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3.6 The Site Allocation Plan states that “*Highway Access to Site: Access points must be created onto **York Road** and Racecourse Approach B1224....*” Taylor Wimpey has now shown a vehicular access which “***could be delivered** from York Road and along Carr Lane*” and that “***there are no reasons to doubt** that this could be delivered in the **medium to long term***”. In other words, there is no commitment to providing access onto York Road – in direct contravention of the Site Allocation Plan.

Moreover, the suggested possible exit onto York Road is next to a hump backed bridge which would make turning right onto York Road and a right turn from York road **extremely dangerous!**

Housing Mix

3.7 The report claims that the housing mix will enable the elderly to downsize because smaller houses will be built. However, it fails to recognise that the elderly downsizing want houses for which they are not dependent upon car transport and which are easily accessible to local facilities: including shop, cafes, GP surgeries, bus services to Leeds and Harrogate. Clearly, with such poor accessibility this estate totally fails to meet these requirements. No pensioner would willingly choose to relocate to this site.

Highways and Accessibility

3.8 Those of us who attended the SAP meetings will know that the Inspectors were **NOT** appreciative of and fully aware of the development’s failure to meet the Core Strategy Accessibility Standards when considering the soundness of the SAP. It became clear that the Inspector was only concerned to ensure that SAP did not breach planning laws and in particular did not use Green Belt land. She totally ignored Leeds Core Strategy, and indeed decreased the SAP time period by 5 years in contravention of the Core Strategy. “Soundness” means “Does not break planning laws” NOT “Suitable to build housing for families” – the latter is the role of the Planning Panel.

The Developer’s own Traffic Consultant’s report confirms (para 4.3.9) that during peak hours, the journey time for a car from the entrance of the estate to the bus station is 8 minutes, and thus the time for a bus, **excluding: passengers boarding and leaving, turning onto and off the estate from a busy Racecourse Approach, travelling around the estate to 2 stops and that the Racecourse Approach speed limit will fall from 60m.p.h.to 40m.p.h.**, will be 16 minutes. Despite all these extras to add, the report says that “The Hoppa bus will provide will provide shuttle services during the day at a c20 minutes frequency.....It could be operated using one suitably sized bus”. Obviously the shuttle bus will run an inadequate service during peak periods and is being provided as a fig leaf to cover the site’s lack of accessibility.

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3.9 As has already been identified above (3.6) using Carr Lane as access onto and from the busy York Road would be extremely dangerous because of the hump backed bridge over the A1(M). A ghost right turn lane has not been mentioned in the plan nor any comment as to the developer undertaking such work, although such provision is made for the three turnings off Racecourse Approach. This is a major failing which would create traffic tailbacks where drivers turning right will feel pressurised into chancing a gap in traffic coming over a blind summit on the bridge.

Also virtually on top of the junction is a bridleway crossing over York Road with only a drop kerb and tactile paving. This will undoubtedly be a well used crossing by senior school children seeking a shortcut through the underpass to get to Wetherby High School. This is an accident waiting to happen.

Moreover again this paragraph identifies by the use of phrases such as “*would be expected to complete*”, “*third party land*” and “*when the south west part of the allocation comes forward*” that this is pie in the sky and will never be provided. The developer should withdraw the application and re-apply when he can “*provide a route through the third party land in the south west of the allocation*” and the safety aspects of such access have been fully evaluated.

Again this inability to provide a firm commitment to meeting the requirements of the Site Allocation Plan emphasises the lack of a comprehensive design for the allocated site.

3.10 The report states that “*Highways have requested that these future access requirements including bus link be reflected on a further revised Masterplan and Parameter Plan in advance of a planning decision*”. Has this been provided? If so, why is it not available for public scrutiny? If not, why is this application being brought forward now when key components of accessibility have not been provided?

3.11 See previous comments on accessibility under 3.8. The site clearly does not meet Leeds accessibility standards.

3.12 Failure to meet most of the accessibility standards should be a barrier to this development. Why does Leeds City Council have standards if they ignore them?

3.13 As previously pointed out (3.8 above) the bus cannot possibly meet the 20 minute frequency in peak times. Moreover, the Planning Panel members themselves have pointed out the failure of Hoppa Bus solutions in reducing car travel in other developments.

3.16 The traffic impact on the York Road/North Street/Deighton Road/York Place junction has been ignored. The developer’s own traffic consultant’s report identifies this as a potential

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bottleneck BEFORE including the extra traffic resulting from the more recently approved housing on Spofforth Hill and Sandbeck Way. There are no mitigation measures included in the S106 Agreement. Panel members have seen for themselves the problems at this junction during their site visit and that was not during a peak period.

The quoted “additional information prior to the Panel meeting on 28th March” is **NOT** in the public domain!

Climate Change, Health and Well-Being, Sustainability

Taylor Wimpey says that they will meet current housing standards. They would on any site in Leeds. They are not replacing old poorly insulated houses with new. They are building additional houses. They do not address the key issue that because of this site’s lack of accessibility, this will be an estate that increases car usage in Leeds. At previous Panel meetings, Councillors have recognised this fact. 24% of UK domestic greenhouse gas emissions came from transport, so this site will inevitably increase Leeds’ carbon emissions. **Do Councillors recognised the Climate Change Emergency or are the Council’s words mere platitudes?**

Education

- 3.25 The report states that “CIL payments ...would also be directed towards the construction of the school.” This school will only be constructed because of this estate being built. Surely **ALL** construction costs should be the subject of an S106 contribution.
- 3.27 The plan is that this school will only open, and then only for reception, after the 400th house is occupied. There is insufficient capacity for Primary School children in Wetherby because of the high level of housing development occurring in the town. The suggested alternatives of St James and Deighton Gates are both beyond the accessibility standards and will result in additional car journeys to take children to school. Moreover there are no S106 payments to cover the costs of extending these schools to meet the demands placed upon them by the Racecourse Approach development.

Economic Benefits

There will be no long term economic benefits for Wetherby. Indeed, this development will be detrimental to the town. Already tourists complain there is insufficient long term parking, which will be made worse by the additional traffic from this development. Shoppers into the town will be deterred and may prefer to shop in Harrogate, where parking is easier. Wetherby will no longer be the market town pearl in Leeds’ crown, but instead a commuter sprawl.

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Working to ensure that the physical character of Wetherby and District is protected and developed for the benefit of the community of both current and future generations.

3.32 Indeed, this development is the exact opposite to NPPF paragraph 8; the land is **NOT** “*in the right place*” **NOR** “*at the right time to support growth, innovation and productivity*”. It definitely does not “*co-ordinate the provision of infrastructure*” in that it will lead to major traffic jams in Wetherby and more people spending more time travelling to their places of work.

Public Consultation

3.33 Yes, the developers did consult the public and Wetherby Town Council, but not Better Wetherby. They also ignored all the comments and suggestions put forward except to accept that the doctors’ surgeries were further away than the accessibility standards require. The only result of the consultations was to increase the number of objections.

Further Representations

3.37 The report fails to answer or address the representation of Better Wetherby which was submitted on 5th August regarding the validity of the Developer’s traffic consultant’s report and identifying particular traffic problems at York Road/North Street/Deighton Road/York Place junction, at North Street/St James Street junction and at York Road/Audby Lane/Hallfield Lane junction.

Conclusion

We believe that the application from Taylor Wimpey to build 800 houses off Racecourse Approach is an ill conceived plan. It breaks many of the principles set out in the Leeds Core Strategy and does not meet the requirements set out in the Leeds Site Allocation Plan.

We recommend that Leeds Planning Panel reject this application.