

**PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 29 November 2023

Time: 6.30pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair) (Chair), Claire Parris (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Forhad Chowdhury, Nazmin Chowdhury, Chris Howells, Graham Lawrence CC, Maureen McKay, Adam Mitchell CC, Ellie Plater, Graham Snell, Carolina Veres and Conor McGrath

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.30pm
End Time: 7.55pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rob Broom and Anne Wells .

Councillor Conor McGrath substituted for Councillor Rob Broom.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 22/00781/RMM - LAND TO THE NORTH OF STEVENAGE, OFF NORTH ROAD AND WESTON ROAD, STEVENAGE

The Committee considered a report in respect of application 22/00781/RMM seeking the construction of a Country Park including access, layout and landscaping pursuant to Outline permission 17/00862/OPM. The Principal Planning Officer reminded Members that this application had been deferred from the 14th March 2023 Planning Committee.

The Principal Planning Officer advised that the site was allocated in the Local Plan through Policy HO3 which gave full provision of the site and included things such as residential units and a site for a school. A requirement of this policy was a Country Park. The Local Plan Policy NH8 which related to the provision of the North of Stevenage Country Park. In 2020 outline planning permission was approved.

The houses to the south were approved and there had been several reserved matters applications considered including Phase 1D of 115 residential units, Phase 1A-C of 243 residential units, and the infrastructure which included the drainage for the Country Park. There would be a flood attenuation basin which would be grass lined and would only fill up in occasions of flooding.

Photos of the site plan and location were presented which included the locations of the community orchard, the potential animal grazing, the toilet block and car park,

the footpaths around the site, and the grounding tower.

The Chair introduced Chris Naylor, an objector, to address the Committee.

Mr Naylor addressed the committee and stated that the Country Park would ruin the historic fields and believed that this was an urban fringe park rather than the restoration and recreation of the fields for a rural meadow. The previous application was deferred asking for deeper engagement with residents, but he believed the application had not changed to reflect any concerns. He raised concerns on the size and occupancy of the car park, such as hospital staff using it, and the cycle superhighway and suggested that there should be a better connection. He raised further concerns around the proposed mound and the number of bins within the park.

The Chair thanked Mr Naylor for his contribution to the meeting.

The Chair then introduced Jo Unsworth, the developer, to address the Committee.

Ms Unsworth advised that the proposals were supported by the Planning Officers and Stevenage Direct Services who would eventually manage the park. The aim of the Country Park was to create a landscape that Forster would've recognised in the early 20th century. For example, planting species referred to in Forster's writing, biodiverse hay meadows, and replicating original field patterns. This would increase the biodiversity by 59% through planting woodlands, hedgerows, and a community orchard. The Country Park would be free, open, and accessible to all. The plans had changed in response to feedback and included downgrading the side of the paths, redesigning the toilet block, and changing half of the carpark to an overflow agreement. The widths of paths were a key concern but was specified in a legal agreement to ensure the park could be enjoyed by all. Alternative car park locations were explored but were not viable. Accessible routes needed to be less steep and not made of gravel. She reminded Members that the works of the Country Park including landscaping and provision of facilities would cost the developers in excess of £1.8m. If this was not obtained from the developers, it would have to be funded by the Council in the future.

The Chair thanked Ms Unsworth for her contribution to the meeting.

The Principal Planning Officer provided Members with further detail on the application. There would be a 50-space car park and toilet block, a footpath network, flood attenuation basins, community orchard, wayfinding signs, seats, and cycle stands.

The most northern field would be including the regrading of additional soil. There was also a link to the NS1 development in North Herts. There would be reinforced grass across half the car park to lessen the impact as well as additional cycle parking. Field 2 would potentially be used for grazing of animals in the future. Public rights of way would be retained. The community orchard would also have access to Weston Road.

The proposed redesigned toilet block was kept as a single story with a grass seed

roof to reduce the visual impact. There would be curved edges and a space for an information panel to provide historic information of the park and any other local matters. She then presented some visuals to show the development over time.

She highlighted the late representation that had been sent to Members. One was from an additional consultation with Herts Sports and Disability Foundation as well as a further consultation with Chesfield Park over concerns of trespassing. Officers advised a condition would be imposed requesting further detail on boundary measures around that area to prevent possible access.

Further to the March Committee where Members voted to defer the application, the reasons and concerns addressed were set out in the report and included:

- An updated baseline assessment for biodiversity net gain on the site had been submitted. The reassessment net gain was approximately 60%.
- Further consultation was aimed at groups in the area that may have use of the Country Park and hadn't had earlier opportunities for consultation. The groups that responded were engaged and provided informative responses of areas that were beneficial or could be approved.
- Engagement with local schools was being explored to gain involvement with information posters around the site marking the sites historical and heritage connections.
- The additional soil deposited in the northern field did not create a mound. There would be a regrading of the existing contours and would continue the slope. From evidence in terms of the impact on the carbon footprint to take soil offsite, the impact carried significant weight compared to the visual aspect.
- The Local Highways Authority stood by their previous comments on the scheme including the use of Weston Road as a quiet connection route through to Great Ashby for cyclists. Alternative options that were presented providing an access further south were not acceptable.
- There was full consideration of the comments provided by users in regard to the width of the footpaths such as cycling, running and disability groups, while also considering the requirements from the Local Highway Authority and the Councils Parks Maintenance team. Options to narrow the pathways were considered and addressed in the reports, however the provision of a fully accessible park outweighed the lower impact on the heritage assets.
- In response to concerns from a neighbouring resident, the footpath to the rear of Rooks Nest House had been moved further into the park and additional landscaping had been proposed along the boundary to reduce the impact.
- Justification of the car park size had been given in terms of the size of other car parks within the area, not just Stevenage. A comparison had been made with Great Ashby park which had issues with the limited size of the car park.

The Principal Planning Officer advised that alternative options for elements of the proposals had been proposed from third parties in consultation. Firstly, a cycling connection across the site to meet aims to promote cycling within the development with connections to existing neighbouring developments and the proposed NH1 site

in North Herts. The connections needed to be made at several intersections on the Western side of the Park to ensure they met the aims and objectives. In Officers and the Highways Authority's opinion, a simplistic East to West line would not be sufficient in its own right.

An alternative car park had also been proposed by Rectory Lane, however, the area of land was in close proximity to listed buildings as well as a designated green link and wildlife site and these impacts had not been assessed. Additionally, there was no clear route into the park and there had been no assessment on the safety of a road junction into Rectory Lane. Furthermore, the land was not owned by the developers.

A few Members asked questions in relation to the access to the proposed toilet block. In response, the Principal Planning Officer advised that it wouldn't have 24-hour access and would operate down to dusk times. There was a storage area in the toilet block for maintenance and there would be regular checks along with the maintenance of the park. The disabled toilet space was raised in report and there was a provision to impose a condition to seek an additional layout if what was proposed wasn't sufficient. There were two unisex toilets and a disabled toilet.

Some Members asked questions around the access and management of the car park, including whether there would be a barrier. The Principal Planning Officer advised that the car park was barriered and there was a condition imposed to seek further details of what the barrier would be and where it would be located. In terms of car park use, the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the car park was not physically adjacent to residential streets so by design they hoped it would limit the amount of people using it to the car park and not the surrounding streets. The Country Park intended to service Stevenage however it wouldn't exclude people outside of Stevenage. It was a relatively small car park for the size of the park.

A Member asked a question in relation to the park maintenance. The Principal Planning Officer advised that the drainage management was done through the management company of the developer who would have access over Council land as and when was needed.

A Member asked whether the car park was near the Weston Park Cemetery. It was advised that the Country Park car park was completely separate.

A Member asked how many EV charging points were in the car park. The Principal Planning Officer advised that there was a requirement in the transport supplementary planning document (SPD) for at least a 20% active provision. The details of what type of charging points was controlled through a condition but would have to meet the level stated in the SPD.

Another Member asked what the mound in the 1A field was. The Principal Planning Officer advised that the amount of soil was lesser around the outside and was greater in the middle, however it followed the contours of the land. There was a suggestion of a condition to impose a management plan of the soil to ensure it was acceptable for a meadow to be planted on it.

A Member asked how wide the public consultation was. The Principal Planning Officer advised that the application itself went through several rounds of public consultation. The amended plan went to third parties specifically written into the application as well as site notices being put up. The level of consultation through the statutory process was significant and other third parties were consulted. From the deferral they looked at other groups that hadn't been part of the initial consultations.

Another Member asked what the timeline for the delivery of the Country Park was. The Principal Planning Officer advised that the following Item was related to the variations of the Section 106 (S106) timings due to the delay in agreeing the proposal to the Country Park. The Country Park was proposed to come forward in two phases, the northern area in a second phase due to the grounding work. The developers were bound by the S106 timings to provide the Country Park and transferring it to the Council. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) added that there were trigger dates linked to stages of the residential developments.

A Member asked whether the outcome of the speed limit consultation of Western Way had been publicised. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised SBC were not party to the outcome as it was an HCC consultation.

Some Members asked questions in relation to the grounding tower. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that electricity providers had their own default powers to put the grounding tower where it was the most suitable for them. The Principal Planning Officer added that the UK Power Network had their own permitted development rights to carry out certain works without needed to come through planning. They looked at where the placement was best, and the current pylon was within the Country Park.

A few Members asked questions in relation to the number of bins within the park. The Principal Planning Officer advised that they were guided through the Parks and Amenities team on how other parks within Stevenage worked and the level that was acceptable for them. There was a possibility for a reduction if Members were minded.

A Member asked a question in relation to the access to footpaths and whether the works would impact these. The Principal Planning Officer advised that they were designated public rights of way. If there were closures needed, they would have to be accepted by the County Council Public Rights of Way team and suitable diversions would have to be in place. They were working with the developers to ensure the footpaths that were open were being looked after.

Another Member asked for the justification for the fencing that had been put up. The Principal Planning Officer advised that there was fencing in the area of the western side. There were permissions to deal with works to do with the drainage and so it would be an active site. The area for the toilet block was also an active part of the site as they were carrying out infrastructure works. Wherever there were active works they were being fenced off.

A Member queried what would happen if they refused. The Assistant Director

(Planning & Regulatory) advised that the Committee would have to explain in planning terms why they were rejecting it. There was a requirement for the Country Park and the transfer would still take place, but the Council would not have the funds to provide the Country Park that had been requested.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the application 22/00781/RMM be **GRANTED** reserved matters planning permission, subject to the conditions and reasons set out in the report, with the inclusion of additional conditions to re-assess the street furniture proposed in the Country Park and boundary treatments on all boundaries with Chesfield Park to the north-east of the site, and with the Assistant Director (Planning & Regulation) being delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning & Development Committee, to amend or add to the suggested draft conditions prior to the decision notice being issued.

Conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3100-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CPOS-DR-L-3102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-3108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CPOS-DR-L-4052-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4053-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-4054-A-C03; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5101-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5102-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5103-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5104-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CPOS-DR-L-5105-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5106-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5107-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-5108-A-C04; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7420-A-C01; BM1-NPA-CP-OS-DR-L-7421-A-C01; M1-NPA-CP-OS-RP-Y-4600-A-C01; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7400-A-C04; BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7407-A-C01; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4000-R08; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4001-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4002-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4003-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4004-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4005-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4006-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4007-R06; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4008-R07; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4012-R06; BM1-OC-RMAXX-DR-C-4013-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4014-R05; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4015-R03; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4016-R04; BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4017-R02; BM1-OCRMA-XX-DR-C-4018-R03; BM1-OC-V1-ZZ-DR-C-0042-P08; P1708.TB.01_B;
2. Notwithstanding the details as set out in the approved plans, prior to installation of any street furniture within the Country Park details of their design and materials shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The street furniture to be included are covers, benches, bins, picnic benches, wayfinding markers, information posts, signage, and bollards. In addition, details of lifesaving equipment to be positioned near the retention basins / within the Country Park shall also be provided for the local planning authority's written approval. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details within each respective phase of delivery of the Country Park, including the provision of lifesaving equipment, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
3. Prior to commencement of any works relating to landscaping within the Country Park, a landscape planting timeframe document shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. This document shall detail the sequence of planting for each phase and/or field area of the Country Park as identified on

Drawing number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DRL-3100-A C04 hereby approved. The works shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

4. Prior to the construction of the LEAP (local equipped area of play) or any imaginative play areas, details of all play equipment (including imaginative play), fencing and surfacing materials to be used within the LEAP along with a detailed maintenance strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The LEAP shall be constructed in accordance with the approved materials prior to first use of any given phase of the Country Park hereby permitted unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
5. Prior to the commencement of any works, details of any temporary boundary treatment needed to prevent unauthorised vehicular access (including off road motor-vehicles) to access any respective phase of the Country Park whilst under construction shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The temporary boundary treatment shall be installed in accordance with the approved details of works of any given phase of construction for the Country Park and shall remain in place until relevant permanent measures have been installed prior to first use of any given phase of the Country Park.
6. Prior to the commencement of any phase of the Country Park, details of measures to prevent off-road vehicles (other than those authorised for construction and maintenance purposes) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The preventative shall be installed and put in place prior to the first use of each phase of the Country Park unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
7. Prior to the construction of the car park hereby permitted, details of the access deterrents for the car park, including any bollards, access gates and height restriction barriers shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
8. Prior to the commencement of the Country Park hereby permitted, measures to avoid antisocial behaviour and nuisance for neighbouring properties which back onto the Country Park, such as the use of defensive planting, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
9. Prior to commencement of any works relating to the provision of drainage features hereby approved, a Drainage Timeframe Strategy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Strategy will identify the works to be carried out, their sequence of construction and an indication of timeframes for each stage. The works shall thereafter be constructed in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
10. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the soft and hard landscaping details submitted, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
11. All planting, seeding and turfing comprised in the approved landscaping details as agreed under condition 5 of this approval within each respective Phase of the delivery of the Country Park shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding seasons following the first occupation of the development hereby permitted or, the

completion of the approved development whichever is the sooner within each respective Phase of the delivery of the Country Park.

12. All hard surfacing comprised in the approved landscaping details as specified in condition 7 of this approval shall be carried out prior to first use of the each phase of delivery of the Country Park hereby permitted or, the completion of each phase of delivery of the Country Park, whichever is the sooner.
13. Any trees or plants comprised within the scheme of landscaping, which within a period of five years from the completion of each phase of delivery of the Country Park die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
14. No tree shown on the approved landscaping scheme, shall be cut down, uprooted or destroyed, nor shall any retained tree be topped or lopped within five years of the completion of development without the written approval of the Local Planning Authority.
15. Before any development commences, (including any site clearance or demolition works, (but excluding work on the site access(es)) trees on the site shall be protected in accordance with Drawing number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-7404-A-C01 Tree Protection Enclosure Plan as hereby approved. Such protection may be inspected by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the work and these measures shall be maintained until the conclusion of all site and building operations within each respect phase of delivery of the Country Park.
16. No development above slab level of the toilet block hereby permitted shall be carried out until details/samples of the materials to be used in the construction of the toilet block (including the grass sedum roof and how this roof is to be maintained) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The development shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved details/samples.
17. Prior to first use of the proposed car park, details of the height restriction barrier to be sited at the start of the entrance road into the Country Park red line shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The barrier shall be installed in accordance with the details approved prior to first use of the car park unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
18. The proposed earthwork remodelling proposed to the northern field of the Country Park shall not exceed in size, scale, form or area those measurements identified on Drawing number BM1-OC-RMA-XX-DR-C-4016-R04 Earthworks Assessment.
19. All areas of hedges, scrub or similar vegetation where birds may nest which are to be removed as part of the development within each phase(s), are to be cleared outside the birdnesting season (March - August inclusive) or if clearance during the bird-nesting season cannot reasonably be avoided, a suitably qualified ecologist will check the areas to be removed immediately prior to clearance and advise whether nesting birds are present. If active nests are recorded, no vegetation clearance or other works that may disturb active nests shall proceed until all young have fledged the nest.
20. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the Landscape and Management Plan dated 05/08/2022 by Nicholas Pearson

Associates, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

21. Prior to first use of or transfer of the Country Park (in its respective phases) to Stevenage Borough Council, whichever is the sooner, all pedestrian and cycle routes within each respective phase shall be constructed and made ready for use, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
22. Prior to first use of each respective phase of the Country Park, all identified ecological improvement works and/or features that do not expressly form part of the landscaping works shall be provided in accordance with the details of the Design and Access Statement and Drawing Number BM1-NPA-V1-OS-DR-L-3100-A C04 hereby approved, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
23. Prior to first use of each respective phase of the Country Park the identified and approved cycle parking in the form of Sheffield stands, shall be made available and ready for use within its respective phase of the Country Park. The cycle parking shall thereafter be retained for its intended and specific use.
24. No demolition, construction or maintenance activities audible at the boundary and no deliveries of construction and demolition materials shall be undertaken outside the hours 07:30 hours to 18:00 hours Mondays to Fridays, 08:00 hours to 13.00 hours on Saturdays and shall not operate on a Sunday or Bank Holiday, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.
25. Prior to relevant works in phase 2A of the Country Park, details of any external lighting to be installed on the toilet block building hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved external lighting shall be provided before phase 2 of the Country Park is made available for use by the public.

3

23/00529/S106 - LAND TO THE NORTH OF STEVENAGE, OFF NORTH ROAD AND WESTON ROAD, STEVENAGE

The Committee considered a report in respect of application 23/00529/S106 seeking the modification of Schedule 2 Clause 2.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7, Schedule 3 Clause 3.2, Schedule 5 Part 1 Clause 1.2, 1.5 and 2.1.1 and Schedule 7 Clause 2.1 and 2.4 to Section 106 Agreement (dated 01.09.2022) approved. under planning permission reference number 17/00862/OPM.

The Principal Planning Officer advised that there were clauses within the Section 106 (S106) agreement that stated developers had to meet certain deadlines and requirements. It was unrealistic for developers to meet the targets previously set due to the delays in applications. There was a prior to commencement delay due to the Country Park application being deferred earlier in the year. The application proposed to increase and move the date triggers to take into account the delays going through the planning process.

Some Members raised concerns on the movement of the trigger dates. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the new trigger dates aimed to follow the same ratio of timings as if it hadn't been pushed back. For example one had been pushed back by 6 months as the Country Park application was delayed by

8 months. Many still had end dates and others were based on residential development.

Jo Unsworth also added that there was a limit on the number of dwellings that could be built. There were also long stop dates within the S106 agreements and dates when both phases of the Country Park and the school land had to be transferred to SBC.

Another Member asked whether the housing market impacted the demand. The Planning Manager for Bellway advised that work had commenced on the residential phases and there was no intention from Bellway to stop the sales so there would be no impact on their behalf.

A Member asked when the commencement date was. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the commencement date was when the developers started work on the residential site. There was a guaranteed date when SBC received the Country Park and school site. There was currently a lot of archaeological work happening on the site.

The Principal Planning Officer advised that several reserved matters had been approved and the developers were at liberty to start building. There was a lot of infrastructure underway and some of the site was still an active archaeological site. The report enabled works to carry on without the Country Park, which they could not start, but would have deadlines.

Another Member asked what would happen if the recommendation was turned down. The Assistant Director (Planning & Regulatory) advised that the reasoning for the amendments were to enable the Country Park to come in its own time but would guarantee a transfer.

It was **RESOLVED**: That the application 23/00529/S106 be **GRANTED** a variation to the S106 Planning Obligation as set out in the table in the report and subject to final drafting and to delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Planning and Regulation in conjunction with the Council's appointed Solicitor to agree the precise wording of the variation to the agreement.

4 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

5 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

CHAIR