

WEEDON PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK TO THE COUNCIL MRS BARBARA MITCHELL

Mick Denman, Planning Officer
AVDC Development Control
The Gateway
Gatehouse Road
Aylesbury
Bucks HP19 8FF

25.10.2012

Dear Mr Denman

Parish Council Comments on Planning Application

**12/00739/AOP Land north of Weedon Hill Major Development
Site for B1 employment development, residential development of up to 120 units and Park and Ride facility**

As previously advised, Weedon Parish Council resolved to OPPOSE this application at its meeting on Saturday 13th October 2012. Objection was urged by the 32 members of the public who came to our drop-in session to view the plans and documentation, and 7 people who attended the council meeting itself and voted unanimously in favour of a motion for the Parish Council to oppose the application.

Before proceeding to our detailed comments, we wish to register our disappointment at the breakdown of the consultation timetable with parishes on this application. While you have extended response deadlines, this hardly compensates for the lost period over the summer when this application could have received much greater publicity and been addressed more effectively by parish councils and the wider public.

Consultation timetable errors leading to late public comments

As you are aware, AVDC's planning consultation process in respect of the application with relevant parish councils was not been carried out according to the prescribed timetables. The site is located partly in the parish of Buckingham Park, and mainly in Weedon. The closely neighbouring parish of Watermead also has an interest.

NONE of the parish councils received notification or copies of plans and documentation when the application was registered and validated with AVDC in May 2012. The first occasion Weedon Parish Council heard about the plans was when we received notification on 18th September of an amendment, upon which we were asked to comment. When we immediately asked Buckingham Park and Watermead whether they had received the original notification and plans, we were told that they had not.

Without the normal notification and documents, Weedon Parish Council was unaware that the plans had indeed been submitted, and had therefore been unable to arrange for a public viewing of the detailed application, as is our normal procedure before responding to AVDC's request for comments. No-one should therefore be surprised, given this lack of information, that there had been very few public objections registered to the plans up until 5th October, which was the date on which Weedon PC hand-delivered introductory leaflets to the village, advertising our 13th October meeting.

Buckingham Park and Watermead PCs have also now arranged local meetings to determine their responses and inform their constituents.

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Reasons for objection

1. Unnecessary and intrusive development into open countryside

- 1.1 The proposal is an unnecessary and intrusive development into open countryside beyond the established limit of built development.
- 1.2 The site is not identified by the current Aylesbury Vale Local Plan for development, apart from a relatively small area currently designated as a park-and-ride facility as part of the Weedon Hill MDA (now Buckingham Park). Therefore the proposals conflict with policy RA14.
- 1.3 Weedon Hill MDA originally gained outline planning permission for 850 homes. As the detailed reserved matters have been realised, the number of homes on the MDA has increased to over 1,000. Building yet another 120 homes, plus an additional similar area of employment units, effectively extending the size of the MDA significantly, is excessive.
- 1.4 Since AVDC is in the process of preparing a new Development Plan, approval of this planning application would be premature. Development on this site is in our view very unlikely to be provided for in the new plan, and would therefore be in direct conflict with its provisions, providing additional housing and employment which would be excess to AVDC's requirements over the longer term.

2. Employment units

- 2.1 The employment units are proposed to be of B1 use, with approximately 50% designated B1a offices. National planning policy guidance advises that B1 office uses should be focused on town centres. As residents of Aylesbury Vale, we strongly support revitalising the centre of Aylesbury and do not accept the applicant's argument that provision of offices in this out-of-town location would benefit the town centre.
- 2.2 Industrial units, too, should be located in appropriate areas with the best possible road and rail links, preferably in already designated employment parks.
- 2.3 From the visual evidence of estate agents' boards and empty units all over the town and in both new and older commercial/industrial areas, there is significant excess capacity of commercial space in Greater Aylesbury. As Berryfields and other permitted developments come to completion, this capacity will only increase. What is the point of building yet more employment units to stand empty? Or is this proposal just a ploy to gain outline planning permission for commercial uses and then apply to change to housing?

We doubt that in the current market conditions, the employment land development would actually be delivered.

3. Transport

- 3.1 As ever with developments which propose to extend the urban spread of Aylesbury, in the absence of an up-to-date higher-capacity ring road/bypass system, the transport issue is a key one.
- 3.2 As users of the A413 Buckingham Road at peak periods, Weedon residents are only too aware that three of the four junctions they have to negotiate on their way to and from work appear already over-capacity – the A413/Watermead traffic lights, the A413/Oliffe Way roundabout, and, most importantly, the Horse and Jockey traffic lights. We are not convinced that the mitigation measures proposed by the applicant would be sufficient, particularly at the Horse and Jockey lights.

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We have specific concerns that no mitigation measures have been proposed for southbound traffic in the AM peak period, probably because of the bridge issue outlined in 3.4 below. More traffic in the AM peak will simply lead to unacceptable delays and increased use of the "rat run" round Buckingham Park and Watermead.

- 3.3 The baseline data in the Transport document, which was used for modelling future vehicle flows, appears to have been based on just one day (29th March) which may well have fallen into the Easter holiday of non-state schools. This would hardly represent a "typical" day, as the morning and evening peak traffic is significantly less in school holidays than term time.
- 3.4 The A413 transport corridor on the Aylesbury approach has a major problem which has been the subject of heated debate when previous planning applications have been put forward and has always seemed insurmountable without huge investment which no-one is prepared to make. The problem is the limited width of the road bridge over the River Thames, which has only one lane in each direction, and acts as a funnel for traffic – a significant cause of tailbacks.

Unless this bottleneck is widened, there will always be a problem with A413 traffic, and any additional housing or commercial development on the northern edge of Aylesbury which would increase traffic on this route is bound to exacerbate the situation. Further development should therefore be strongly resisted.

4. Park-and-ride

- 4.1 Building housing and employment units on the currently designated park-and-ride site necessitates finding a new site for the park-and-ride. The proposed new park-and-ride site is totally unsuitable, for the following reasons.
- 4.2 The land to the east of the A413 between the buildings of Watermead and the hill at (old) Weedon Hill is substantially in the flood plain of the River Thames. The proposed new replacement park-and-ride has therefore been positioned just outside that floodplain on rising land close to Weedon Hill House.
- 4.3 The network of old-established fields and hedgerows rolling down to the River Thames on the eastern side of the A413 forms a pleasing rural landscape. The field within which the park-and-ride site is proposed shows clear evidence of historic ridge-and-furrow.
- Building an oblong of tarmacked car-park in the middle of this tranquil landscape would be a travesty, bringing to mind the words of the Joni Mitchell song: "They pave paradise – and put up a parking lot!"
- 4.4 The new P/R would harm the amenity of the neighbouring residents of (old) Weedon Hill as the whole development would look intrusive and out-of-place in the landscape. Simply planting perimeter hedging (which has a very urban appearance) would not mitigate the harm.
- 4.5 The currently designated park-and-ride site has excellent access from all directions, this access being taken directly off the western link road roundabout. Everyone can get in and out of it easily. In contrast, the new park-and ride (P/R) presents huge access difficulties.

Left-in left-out works well for vehicles going into the P/R along the A413 from the north; and is of course fine for those which are exiting wanting to continue southwards. It is potentially just about satisfactory

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for vehicles exiting the P/R which want to go north on the A413, as presumably they would turn left, southwards down the A413, then do a U-turn using the western link roundabout.

But how do vehicles coming from the south, travelling northwards from Aylesbury on the A413 (including those who are coming along the western link road and then joining the A413 at the roundabout) turn in to the P/R? They are not allowed to turn right into the P/R. There is nowhere for these vehicles to do a U-turn on the busy, fast A413 – unless it is envisaged that they use the Weedon Hill access track – which would be an appalling suggestion!

4.6 There is a potentially very serious highways issue with high speed traffic coming over the Weedon Hill Farm brow meeting buses either turning right into the P/R (crossing the on-coming traffic) or slow vehicles exiting the site. The current speed limit on the A413 up to the western link roundabout is 60mph and vehicles, particularly motorbikes at weekends, fully exploit that limit.

Therefore, from a safety perspective, the P/R would be much better sited as per the existing permission directly off the roundabout.

For all the above reasons, Weedon Parish Council urges AVDC to refuse permission for this development.

Yours sincerely

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cc Cllr Ashley Bond

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