

DM/23/0810 Land South of Crawley Down Road, Felbridge, RH19 2PP

Felbridge Parish Council strongly objects to this application. Whilst it is accepted that development of this site has been agreed in principle by the adoption of DPD Policy SA19 following the examination in public, Felbridge Parish Council does not believe that the development proposal as submitted meets the criteria necessary for the application to be considered viable.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

Felbridge Parish Council do not accept the latest Transport Assessment which is based upon a survey taken on 16th May 2023. This was not a neutral date as this was at the end of a series of emergency resurfacing works on Copthorne Road and the road was closed until the morning of 16th May, however the 'Road Closed Ahead' signs were left out day and night at The Dukes Head and Crawley Down thus road users were avoiding the area, particularly as there were also works on West Park Road. We believe a current traffic study is necessary to support this development. Whilst this latest study has also modelled the combined traffic impact with SA20 it has not included all the other committed (approved but not completed) dwellings in East Grinstead (west district), Crawley Down and Copthorne of which there were over 700 additional dwellings in May 2023. All these commitments are guaranteed additional traffic burdens and need to be taken into account.

Felbridge Parish Council objects to the non-transparency of the Transport/Highway assessments of this site. The latest documents have not been submitted to the Planning Portal by the applicant or their agents, instead a variety of documents have been sent direct to the Highways Authorities and as such they are only being uploaded onto the portal when the Highway Authority has already reviewed them. There are also email trails indicating the presence of safety audits, but the audits themselves are not on the portal. This restricts the time for public consultation of these documents and the ability to engage with the Highway Authorities before they have responded. Currently, (at 8th December 2023) none of the latest transport documents are on the Tandridge Planning Portal.

The proposed traffic calming on Crawley Down Road is welcomed from a highway safety perspective, but it falls short of what we believe would be necessary. The new western entrance at 123 Crawley Down Road has a reduced visibility distance to the east which would only be acceptable if the traffic was calmed to 30mph, yet the only proposed calming is at the pedestrian crossing at the eastern entrance, thus not calming the traffic to the west. We also question the use of cycle lane bypasses as we believe these are considered a hazard to cyclists. We are also concerned about pedestrian mobility around the western entrance; one of the most popular bus routes through Felbridge is the 400 route as this offers an express service to Crawley, Gatwick and East Surrey Hospital but this only has stops on the A264/Copthorne Road. Thus residents living in the larger part of the development in the western parcel are not being offered a crossing to be able to get to their nearest 400 route bus stop at the north end of Rowplatt Lane. The transport assessment suggests that their preferred crossing point would be much further east at McIver Close.

We are also concerned that the traffic calming plan has many features marked 'potential', it is not acceptable for an application to be approved with a planning condition referencing a highways improvement plan that does not actually state what will definitely be provided.

The inspector's amendment to Policy SA19 requires that the traffic impact from this site is mitigated 'by maximising sustainable transport enhancements; where additional impacts remain, highway mitigation measures will be considered'. This requires the Sustainable Transport Plan to have been completed and the mitigation delivered calculated such that the necessary highway mitigation measures can be quantified. The current proposal is based upon completing the Sustainable Transport Plan prior to first occupation, how can the necessary highway mitigation methods be understood if that Plan is not published prior to planning Approval? We also note that the report on 'A22 and A264 Corridor Feasibility Study' presented to the TDC Planning Policy Committee on 16 November 2023 specifically states that (para 14);

“Prior to the conclusion of this work, any planning applications in and around the corridor will need to demonstrate they can mitigate their own transport impacts”

Thus this site must mitigate its transport impacts and not rely upon the corridor project whose timelines extend beyond occupation of this site, there is still the potential that the Corridor feasibility study will not be able to identify a deliverable solution to the Star junction. West Sussex Highways response to the DPD consultation was ‘*The DPD should acknowledge the possibility that improvements may not be deliverable at the Felbridge junction.*’ So even the Highway Authority is questioning the viability of delivering the junction improvements. Thus S106 funding is not necessarily going to be able to mitigate the traffic generated as the development of sites SA19 and SA20 could proceed, whilst Sussex and Surrey Highways may decide in the future that no viable scheme exists to really mitigate the already severe road network. This would lead to even more development burdening an already severe road network.

We also continue to have concerns about the regular flooding of Gullege Track, this is the only green transport route out of the site towards East Grinstead. The frequent flooding significantly reduces its viability to deliver modal shift away from vehicular transport. Residents are not going to choose to walk or cycle using that route if they do not know whether it will be safe to return along it.

Felbridge Parish Council fully supports the East Grinstead Town Council amendment to the East Grinstead Neighbourhood plan that requires Mid Sussex District Council to issue a Grampian precedent condition for SA19 & 20. Should any future planning consent be granted for either or both of these allocated sites, then Mid Sussex District Council guarantee that Section 106/278 legal agreements will be executed prior to consent. This includes an upgrading of the A22/A264 ‘Star’ road junction to provide full mitigation for the existing over capacity of this junction; mitigation to negate the increased capacity caused by the proposed extra 750 dwellings; plus the additional accommodation for 150+ residents of the Retirement Community on the SA20 site. The relocation of Imberhorne Lower School from Windmill Lane in East Grinstead to the site, along with the addition of a two form entry primary school will also increase vehicle movements for the site. This work is to be completed prior to the first housing occupations of either site mentioned above.

DESIGN

We find a number of failings in relation to compliance with the MSDC Design Guide regarding the following principles.

Principle DG9 (Page 51): Reduce Reliance on the Private Car: There is an inadequate bus service in Felbridge with few services at evenings and weekends. There is a lack of local facilities, for example no doctor or dentist; supermarket; leisure centre; restaurants; rail service or safe footpath option. The village is served by one single intake primary school that is already oversubscribed before all the 121 dwellings already approved on MSDC land off or near Crawley Down Road have been constructed or occupied. There is reference in the application to a safe cycle route using the Gullege Bridleway and Worth Way to reach East Grinstead. However, the bridleway surface is unsuitable for cycles (or wheelchairs/pushchairs), it regularly floods and the Worth Way has no lighting.

Principle DG11 (Page 52): Respond to the Existing Townscape. “New development should generally reflect the scale of adjacent areas and the settlement context within which it is located to deliver a coherent and consistent urban fabric”.

Felbridge Parish Council strongly object to the Planning Statement

4.2 The proposed development seeks to deliver a sympathetic extension to Felbridge.

This proposal does not provide a sympathetic extension to Felbridge. As the housing density of the west parcel at 40dph is in stark contrast to the existing density immediately north of the site which is 16dph. It is also greater than the 30dph of the eastern parcel despite being nearer the development edge and the rural edge. This does not conform to the MSDC design guide principles DG11, DG16 & DG34.

This principle requires this site to have a comparable density and style of housing to the neighbouring areas whereas this application is for a considerably higher density with properties that are totally different in scale or design. The proposed western parcel comprises 2-storey, 2.5-storey and 3-storey dwellings, the abutting dwellings in Felbridge on the north boundary of the site are a mixture of single storey and 2-storey houses with nearly one third being single storey and therefore the solely 2-storey and higher development immediately south of them is inappropriate. We are also concerned about the visual impact as there is very little drop in height between the existing single storey dwellings on Crawley Down Road and the site of the proposed 3-storey dwellings, thus there are likely to be visible above the existing street scene.

Principle DG16 (Page 63): Create a Positive Development Edge. “Development should nevertheless be sensitively designed so that it avoids imposing upon the rural edge and existing roads that are characterised by their hedgerows and tree belt. This may require additional boundary planting. At the rural edge lower density development will also normally be necessary.”

This requirement has not been met in the site plan as presented which has a higher density at the rural edge, than the surrounding area.

Principle DG34 (Page 87): Managing Increased Density in Urban Extensions. “A range of densities, building types and forms will normally be required with higher density development in the more accessible locations and lower density development in the peripheral areas.” This proposal has its highest density in the parcel furthest from the urban centre of East Grinstead and on the periphery of the built up area boundary bounding onto the rural area beyond.

SUSTAINABILITY

No update has been provided to the Sustainability Statement (March 2023), thus our comments on this matter are still relevant; the Sustainability Statement gives little comfort or commitment on any methods that will be included onsite. Given the potential phasing out of gas boilers in new homes, there needs to be an alternative heating approach proposed for these dwellings. An air source heat pump solution (or other sustainable energy solution) for all properties would be preferable and is becoming common on other housing schemes of a similar size. There is no mention of commitment to photo-voltaic or solar hot water and this should be clarified. Given the rural nature of the site, consideration should be given to sustainable green features including green screens and rainwater gardens.

Play Area

Felbridge Parish Council suggests a different consideration for teenagers and urges the developer and the Council to look at initiatives such as Make Space for Girls especially given the proximity to Imberhorne School.

Affordable Homes: It is noted that the application shows 30% of dwellings would be affordable homes. However, in the consultation feedback for the pre-application, East Grinstead Town Council suggested that the percentage of affordable homes delivered on greenfield sites in Mid Sussex should be 40%.

