



Reference Planning application 21/01630/OUT, Appeal

Elmsbrook Community Organisation (ECO) does not directly oppose the planned development adjacent to the Elmsbrook Exemplar site, however we very much oppose the development in its current proposed/designed form, as was presented to the Cherwell District Planning Committee in January and March 2023, and will soon be heard at Appeal by Public Inquiry.

We hope that the Inquiry will result in a dismissal of the case, but with recommendations such that changes can be made to critical access, eco aspects of home design, affordable housing and other provision requirements, and the applicant/appellant can resubmit an amended version as soon as possible.

We fully support the NW Bicester Ecotown: we love living here, and we love the way that the community is growing: that it is a safe place to raise children, that so many eco ventures are taking place, that you can walk around and everyone says hello to everyone else: it truly is a 'beacon' for so many aspects of how environmentally conscious and community-centric housing developments should be done! However, it is paramount that no development application is allowed to break so many of the Ecotown requirements and policies, so as to "ruin" what has been started here – as opposed to growing and strengthening it.

We have written letters of Objection, as a required Consultee, since the first validated document set was released on the Cherwell Planning Portal website. We have had concerns throughout over certain elements of the proposals including access, density, movement of traffic, suitable sustainable travel provision, visitor parking, bus provision, eco-home build standards, impacts on local landmarks (St. Lawrence's Church and Home Farm), impacts on cyclists and pedestrians, and drainage.

Members of ECO took part in a video call, early in 2021, where a team from the applicant/appellant presented their initial plans for the Western and Eastern Parcels – and while we stated a few initial concerns, for example regarding the impact on the Church, we were initially extremely impressed by the presentation, the people involved, and their stated intention to work with us, to ensure that they deliver a development which would work in harmony with Elmsbrook. We looked forward to learning more, and further engagement.

Sadly, that was the last engagement we had from anyone involved with the proposed development. When we read the initial set of planning documentation, we were disappointed to discover that many issues not mentioned at the presentation were suddenly obvious from the documents, especially regarding the sheer number of homes they were trying to fit in and the many serious traffic impact implications.

We have never received any communications regarding our comments and points in objections, nor to our emails. Nothing appears to have changed since the initial submitted plans: none of the issues have actually been rectified – just more documents submitted defending the initial version.

We fully supported members of the Elmsbrook Traffic/Parking Group and Bicester BUG who spoke at the 9 March Committee meeting. ECO had already been considering submitting to be a Rule 6 party for the Appeal – so when it became clear that several local parties wanted to do the same due to Objections across a wide range of issues (i.e. not just traffic), we were glad to join forces and be a part of it.

Several of the ECO committee members have been part of the 20+ member committee for NW Bicester Alliance (NWBA), and been involved in both the writing and proofreading of our Statement of Case, and numerous Common Ground and Evidence documents – including myself, as Chair. We have also read the independent evidence re traffic issues, for which we have been co-ordinating ‘crowdfunding’ of this, among a large number of residents.

We fully endorse the NWBA’s participation at the Inquiry. We hope/pray that the case will be dismissed: without meeting all of the requirements of the Ecotown Masterplan, designed to ensure its safe and sustainable development as per the ‘One Planet’ principles, we will no longer be able to call it an Ecotown, and the likelihood of the UK meeting our binding Net Zero 2050 targets would almost certainly be reduced to zero if the building industry cannot act fully towards it, now.

Signed:

CVaughan

Christie Vaughan (Chair)