

Shenington with Alkerton Parish Council Response – Planning Proposal 22/00489/F

Shenington with Alkerton Parish Council, in light of strong opposition within the parish and in consideration of the significant weaknesses within the planning application itself, recommend that the Planning Committee comprehensively rejects the proposal to build 49 houses on the outskirts of the village.

The parishioners in attendance at the Parish Council meeting of 16th March 2022 indicated unanimous opposition to this proposal and therefore the Parish Council is agreed that this plan should be opposed.

The Parish Council wishes to make it clear that a representative should be allowed to present these views and any other subsequent opinions to the Planning Committee meeting.

General

The applicants sought and received a Professional Assessment by Case Officer report which, at its conclusion, indicated that there would be a number of submission requirements several of which seem to be missing.

We would also note that the quality of documents is poor in many places, including duplications, simple errors and omissions, giving an impression that the applicant wishes to submerge the Committee and other interested parties with the volume of documents provided. The fact that the applicant seems to have not taken great care with the preparation of this crucially important suite of documents gives rise to the thought that the applicant may not take particular care in other important areas.

A review of the developer's website would indicate that they have little or no experience of building within a similar environment and therefore it can be supposed that they have little idea of the impact of their construction on a historic village set in the Cotswolds. Some of the houses, and there have been quite a number of infills and conversions, that have been developed in the village over the last few decades have lacked a sympathy with the village environment and the proposed plans indicate that the developer has no better sense of what is appropriate.

Given the priority of and importance attached to Environment, Social and Governance goals ("ESG") it seems surprising that this proposal has even made it to this stage, the developers clearly have not picked up the signals of the public mood. Furthermore, on the basis that the proposals for this site have been repeatedly rejected, the current proposal seems ever more surprising and unwarranted.

Highways

A report, "Roads and traffic in Shenington and Alkerton", produced by the Shenington with Alkerton Parish Council, dated December 2015, and sent to Oxfordshire County Council highways department, provides much relevant information explaining why housing development in Shenington cannot be justified. **There has been no change in the conditions of the highways** since then and there have been Road Traffic Incidents since then, including one RTA, in the recent past, which involved a woman being cut from her vehicle on the road between the villages.

The main road through the village, and in addition Rattlecombe Road, is hazardous for walkers, both visitors and village pedestrians, cyclists and local horse riders because of its layout and high volumes and excessive speed of traffic at certain times. More traffic associated with more houses will have a negative impact of the local community life. There is no room to add pavements to the lanes in the village.

- The main road access into Shenington is from the A422 which is about 2km to the east along an unclassified road which passes through the village of Alkerton before it reaches Shenington. The road is narrow, winding, without a footway and with minimal lighting, there being no less than 100 m between street lights.
- The 2015 report identified four hazard points on the main road through Shenington characterized by poor visibility for both walkers and drivers approaching in opposite directions. There are additionally two particularly sharp and blind bends in Alkerton.
- The main-road carriageway widths were measured at five points in Shenington and all were less than 4.9m. There are points where the width is as low as 4.2m. The DfT Traffic Signs Manual says: "2.2.6. On rural roads below 5.5 m in width Drivers might also expect a road marked with a centre line to be wide enough for opposing lanes of traffic to pass. In these circumstances the centre line should be omitted ...". Thus, the main road in Shenington is insufficiently wide for two vehicles always to be able to pass irrespective of whether there are pedestrians walking on the road.
- The D'Arcy Dalton Way and the McMillan Way long-distance footpaths use the main road through Shenington.

Separately, the proposed egress from the development onto Rattlecombe Road is hazardous, with limited visibility and the lack of pedestrian facilities referred to above. The width of the road does not allow for two vehicles to pass easily and safely past the proposed junction and the ground surrounding it does not seem to allow for good sight lines for traffic exiting it. Furthermore there is no possibility of adding pavements to enhance pedestrian safety. These limitations will be particularly evident during construction. The highways in the village are completely unsuited to a high volume of heavy construction traffic.

The Professional Assessment of the [Planning] Case Officer, in the Planning and Affordable Housing Statement, made a number of observations as to requirements which do not appear to have been met, such as:

- demonstration of suitable visibility in line with the Manual for Streets requirements;
- vehicle turns in and out of the site without overrunning the centre of the road;
- the requirement for visitor parking;
- the "connecting footway [on Stocking Lane] to provide a safe route to the primary school"; and
- consultation with Oxfordshire County Council prior to application.

On the highways and traffic points alone, this application should fail.

Foul and Surface Water Drainage and Water Supplies

The pre-application feedback from Cherwell District Council in response to 21/02693/PREAPP, at Appendix 1 of the Planning and Affordable Housing Statement, states clearly that there is a "need to consider foul...water when designing your proposals." The applicants have failed to do this in any respect, having even failed, in the 6 months since the first proposals, to contact and receive a map of the sewerage arrangements from Thames Water. The Planning Committee cannot be misled by this procrastination to address a major issue for the village. In short, the applicant's suggestion that the Planning Committee may trust its assurances that the matter will be dealt with post-approval are not to be trusted.

The inadequacies of the village sewerage system have been reported upon at the time of the previous application. These inadequacies have not been addressed with Thames Water committed

to monthly checks down the Sor Valley. An appeal was published in The Shenington Green (no. 58, June 2020) asking villagers to be careful what they dispose of into the sewerage system. This was prompted by a villager living at the east end of Shenington where the sewer leaves the village, who had experienced ongoing problems due to the poor capacity. More homes in Shenington will make this worse.

The site of the proposed development is about 1.5 km from the edge of the River Thames catchment area. This means that mains water has to be pumped up to Shenington by Thames Water from much further downstream. There are already many occasions when the water pressure in the village falls significantly. Any further housing will have unacceptable impact on the service.

Local Plan Village Status and Additional Housing

In Cherwell District Council's Local Plan 2031 ("CLP 2031") and also in their Policy Villages 1, it is clear that Shenington with Alkerton is a village among those with the least capability to deal with anything other than minor development and over the last nearly 30 years the village has accommodated development of nearly 40 properties. Yet, here, in a single application, there is a proposal for 49 further houses and, more to the point, to be built outside of the curtilage of the village in open countryside, it is unsustainable.

The village's status as a Category C settlement cannot accommodate such a massive development and should be dismissed without further consideration, under the Council's own plans and policy requirements, in addition to the Professional Assessment by the Case Officer, included in Elan Homes application, which states the development "would be unacceptable in principle and as such could not be supported."

The Roman Summer report quotes the NPPF in stating that local authorities should "support the development of windfall sites.... giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements.." This is typical of much of the application's documentation being misleading, this is not a suitable site and it certainly is not **within** an existing settlement.

Landscape and Visual Assessment

The Case Officer also directed that a visual assessment would be required. The LVA provided by the applicant clearly demonstrates that from virtually all angles, including that from the AONB, the site has a clear impact on sight lines.

Amenities

The primary school in Shenington has few if any spaces left to cater for what is anticipated to be a potentially significant influx of children. This would mean further pressure on the highway network as parents would be engaged in transporting children both ways at key drop off and pick up times.

The doctors' surgery, a branch of the Fenny Compton surgery, also has little capacity to take on a significant new development with potentially well over a hundred new patients requiring a surgery.

We have no other local facilities such as a shop, garage or post office; any of which are some miles away.

Once again this demonstrates the complete lack of consideration of the impact of this development on the existing community.

Electricity

The Western Power website shows that the primary substation "Epwell" (no. 670090) provides power to a wide area including Shenington with Alkerton. The area includes villages such as Tysoe and Hook Norton where there has recently been considerable housing development. The website states that the substation has no Demand Headroom and an inability to reverse power generation. Previously, Western Power has indicated an overall demand shortfall of over 6 MVA. There seems therefore to be insufficient capacity to serve any extra housing developments particularly with the likely rise in the usage of electric cars increases. There are regular power outages and the local infrastructure seems fragile to say the least.

Contamination

Elan Homes commissioned a report from Discovery CE, geotechnical and environmental engineers to conduct a soil survey. This survey concluded that there are excessive levels of Arsenic, Nickel and Vanadium present in the soil which required "a remediation strategy be compiled for the site and submitted to the relevant local authority". There seem to be no evidence of that strategy document and it is clear that the engineers think that there is a requirement for at least 60 centimetres of clean, neutral top soil to be provided over the whole site on uncovered ground. A question, given this, must arise on any work that is to be undertaken and, more importantly, has already been undertaken on this site by contractors. Did those who commissioned the work notify the contractors of these matters, given that excavation works have taken place since the report's production in November 2021?

Connectivity

Fibre optic cables have been installed as far as a street cabinet near the war memorial in Alkerton. Copper cables serve Shenington from that point. It is about 1 km from the cabinet to Stocking Lane, near the school, which is representative of the proposed development. The bandwidth numbers are highly variable with a typical level of input at 27 Mb/s and upload 5 Mb/s. Additional houses will create a further reduction of the already poor levels of bandwidth.