

Working to Protect the New Forest



PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reply to: -

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Sent as attachment to Email only
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Clare Ings
New Forest National Park Authority
Lymington Town Hall
Avenue Road
Lymington SO41 9ZG

Dear Clare,

Application 15/00179 LAND AT FOXHILLS, ASHURST 11 NEW DWELLINGS (6 AFFORDABLE), Oubuildings; Associated Access, Landscaping and Drainage; Park and Stride facility

1. New Forest Association (NFA) objects to application 00179. This application is mad and mad applications make for poor planning. It introduced two dangerous precedents and risks the identity of Ashurst as a New Forest village.
2. Were the application from a development company, all would recognise it as an attempt to open up locked land for future development, the community-orientated gambit that opens up the board for the fleets of construction lorries. However in this case the applicant is the Trustees of the Barker Mill Estate and the land in question is owned by the Estate or Foundation.

It is of interest to outline the history of this development. The schools asked Barker Mill for land on which to park cars and the Estate responded by offering to sell the school sufficient at a fair price. The schools rejected the Estate's offer. From this simple position we have moved to a multi million pound development that has alienated the schools from their village and Barker Mill from its traditional friends.

The Trust, which has already spend a fortune on preparing 5000 pages of documents, employing a public relations firm and other consultants, is to spend £600,000 on a car park and track and supply a number of affordable homes. The Trust is funding these freebees by building a housing estate, 60% of which, (using the NFNPA system of calculation by number of bedrooms), are market houses. Or rather quasi-market houses as the applicant intends them to be for rent, restricted to "local" people and rules out the possibility of any extra infilling development on the site. The Trustees, much braver men than me, accept that it will take 30 years for the investment to break even and yet, in an age characterised primary by it's unpredictably and with daily pronouncements on house building from a rash of political parties, are content that this mad venture is in the interest of the Trust.

The link between approvals and S106 agreements has become more fragile in recent times as the Government seek to "unstop" developments by introducing challenges and tests. The tests are set out in regulation 122 and 123 of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 as amended. One test states that the works concerned in the agreement *must be directly related to the development*. It is the planning officer's view that as the *Park and Stride* (P&S) is included within the same application as the housing development, it directly related to it and an agreement could ensure the completion of the P&S prior to occupation of dwellings. NFA contends that, at the very least, this view is challengable in principle and could push the break even date still further away.

Tests of reasonableness in determining contributions to affordable housing in developments in the National Park generally use a 25% return on capital. The return on this project is a tenth of this. While it is not suggested that

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the applicant is acting other than in good faith, it is a fact that it is within his power to overturn the agreements at any time by negotiation or appeal.

3. Supporters claim there is a need for this scheme to reduce the hazards facing children on their way to school. Near misses are recalled, things waiting to happen are predicted and the refusals of parent to allow their charges to walk or cycle on their own are repeated. Any mixture of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles is hazardous and all parents take as their as sacred charge the protection of their children and grandchildren. In these circumstances it is impossible to assess danger from anecdote and one must rely on the relevant authorities and statistics. There is a need at nearly all our schools for improvements to access but in the case of the Foxhills schools it is not possible to argue urgency or safety - there have been no accidents outside the school, previous efforts by the school to limit the vehicle/pedestrian mixture by parking restrictions have been rejected by the relevant authority, and the Local Road Safety Index rates Foxhills as the third safest school out of 33 schools within a 5-mile radius. Some note must also be taken of the failure of parents and governors to try to raise money for the earlier BM offer of land. The now-proposed car park is a tenth of an acre and, as agricultural land, would cost only a few thousand pounds; the cost of the whole scheme, if using NFNPA preferred material, would amount to only a couple of tens of thousands of pounds. The common way, almost the usual way, to achieve such improvements on schools' peripheries is to raise money from parents and village. Without knowing the particular circumstances; NFA contends that the schools' failure to go down this route must reflect to some degree the priority placed on the project.

4. It should be noted that 79% of students come from the Southampton side of the New Forest National Park. The purposes and duties of the New Forest National Park Authority do not include providing community facilities for other than the local community. The Southampton-side children are very welcome, but not to the point where improving there lot and numbers can only be achieved by eroding the NP's special qualities through breaches in planning policy.

5. The first benefit of the development is the proposed P & S scheme and it may improve things; certainly the traffic consultant paid by the developer will say it will. Debates about its effectiveness rage, after all it is costing £600,000 and is endangering a village's New Forest identity.

Not dissimilar schemes exist in Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway where there are car parks around 300 metres from the school. In Brockenhurst and Sway they don't make much difference, whereas at Lyndhurst, where it is impossible to park within 300 metres of the school, there is never congestion around the entrance. Given the overwhelming majority at the pupils come from the Southampton side, the lessons from elsewhere might suggest a drop off and turning point east of the by pass at SU347122 coupled with a lengthening of the car free section of Foxhills up to the school gates might prove satisfactory.

But such suggestions are an indulgence. The proper authority to evaluate the need for such a project, design it from the multitude of possibilities, implement it and pay for it is Hampshire County Council. (See also 7 below). In the event of any future consideration of such a scheme, NFA urges that objectives should include the need to reinforce Ashurst's identity as a New Forest village and to look beyond the school to wider transport needs, in particular those of visiting cyclists.

6. The second benefit of the scheme is the provision of six affordable homes out of the total of eleven. The basis of this mixture is presumably NPPF Para 54 which states *...Local planning authorities should in particular consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.* The six/eleven figure in this development is misleading as the market homes tend to be family homes and the affordable smaller; on the usual bedroom count the proportion of affordable is 40%. Para 54 is clearly not satisfied, even NFDC suggest a minimum of 70%. But the P&S! NFA contends that the meaning of Para 54 is entirely unambiguous and that there is no justification for local residents on lower incomes to be denied their housing needs so that civil engineering work NOT associated with the housing development can be completed.

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NFA commends the applicant on the quality of design of the housing estate.

7. NFA objects to the design of the proposed P&S. Opposition to this scheme is centred on the loss to urban sprawl of the remaining countryside between Foxhills and Southampton. Every effort must therefore be taken to minimise the urbanising nature of the development. But this is not what is proposed and, to quote from the officer in her report on application 14/00705 *The use of tarmac would generally not be considered appropriate, as it would give a very harsh urban appearance; and the preference is for gravel.*

8. Against these benefits are the costs of this scheme. The financing of the Park and Stride facility sets a dangerous precedent. The payment of a community levy against development gain has and remains part of the planning process. BUT. Such levies go to a central fund from which projects are financed according to the priorities set ultimately by the elected representatives of local, county and central governments. However well meaning, we cannot allow a developer and a small group of individuals to dictate that a development takes place if a particular community facility is provided. Procedures exist for the Governors to promote a scheme through the Parish and County and they should use those procedures and not attempt to short circuit them. As this proposal has demonstrated, it is the road to chaos.

9. Against these benefits are the costs of this scheme. The financing of the affordable housing via market housing sets a dangerous precedent. This device has never been needed in the New Forest Nation Park and is not needed now. There is no shortage of money to build houses, indeed there is too much, all that is needed is land in suitable places - it will be snapped up by the housing associations at prices exceeding the going rate for agricultural land. The effect of allowing this development will simply be to set a new norm for exception sites of 40%, 60% market. The District has relied on Barker Mill in the past in this area and is thankful. Further help in the sale of suitably located land could bring lasting benefit in strengthening Ashurst as a New Forest village.

10. Against these benefits are the costs and most serious amongst them is the risk to the identity of Ashurst as a New Forest village. This mixed development is not just beyond the defined village boundary, it is in the 300 metres gap between the eastern most point of the village and the beginning of urban Totton and the South Hants built up area. This is the sixth biggest in the UK and will soon overtake Glasgow and Liverpool to rank fourth after London, Birmingham and Manchester. Totton has already been swallowed up and this development sounds the death bell for Ashurst. The danger signs exist, the road access under the Western Totton bypass from Rushington is already there and the 2011 census includes Ashurst within *Total Totton built-up area population.*

The PC in their response state they *are very keen to ensure that the green belt between the village and the A326 be protected and that this proposed development should not pave the way or been seen as a precedent for other similar developments.* Officers and Members know such qualifications are pointless - so much waste paper. These developments will so damage this strip of greenery that in 2016 when the revised local plan is being examined and areas for future housing next to the villages must be found, this thin defiled strip of land will be most vulnerable. Now it is most precious, in its small way defining the New Forest on the very edge of the metropolis.

11. Against these benefits are the costs. NFA have nothing to add to the eloquent remarks of **Peter Frost** in his objection to the loss of back up grazing.

11. NFA asks members to reject this application. Any local problem should be solved in a way that strengthens this most vulnerable boundary of the National Park rather than destroys it.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Baker, NFA Planning Committee