

FRAMFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Planning Committee Meeting held on Tuesday, 19 October 2021, at 6 pm in the Memorial Hall, Framfield.

Present: Committee Members: Keith Brandon (Chairman), Tony Hall (Vice Chairman), Peter Friend and Maria Naylor.
In attendance: Ann Newton (Parish Clerk).
Public: 28 including one representative from Uckfield Town Council.

At the meeting, the order of the items on the agenda may be varied in line with public speaking. However, the minutes are detailed in the order of the agenda.

1. Apologies.

There were none.

2. Declarations of Interest.

Councillors to give notice of declarations of personal, prejudicial and pecuniary interests in respect of items on the agenda. There were none.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting/delegated comments for Approval.

It was agreed that the minutes of the last meeting held and delegated comments (February 2020) having been circulated, be approved, adopted and signed as a correct record. (TH/KB).

4. Planning applications for consideration

- **WD/2021/2198/MAO – Outline planning application for the erection of up to 290 dwellings, associated landscaping, informal open space and strategic SANG, with access from the B2102. Land at Bird in Eye Farm, South of Bird in Eye Hill, Framfield, TN22 5HA.**

<https://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=155234>

Many members of the public in attendance voiced their strong objections to the proposals and there were many questions from the floor.

STRONGLY OBJECT:

The Parish Council strongly object to this application. It is noted that the applicant is only seeking approval as part of this outline application for the principle of development and access. Any other matters such as appearance, landscaping, layout and scale will be subject of an application for approval of reserved matters, before the development can take place.

The pedestrian Isochrone within the D&A statement is of little value. It shows walking distances based on the proposed site being the epicentre. However, it does not take into account that the majority of this radiating circle is within open countryside fields mainly laid to agricultural fields, with limited accesses, roads and footpaths. The only relevant part is that of Uckfield to the west. This highlights that the proposed site is on the extremities of any existing development. By all accounts, it is completely out of the development core area for Framfield and is therefore not sustainable in its own rights. The proposal is to link this site with the Uckfield town footpaths from the corner of the development by Uckfield hospital on Framfield Road. In the opposite direction, the link to Framfield will be by a muddy trek across public footpaths through fields – completely unsuitable for those with mobility issues and those with buggies etc.

It states the site access as a “rural retreat. The new site approach from Bird in Eye Hill is set in the countryside. The initial experience will be of a new road passing a farm complex, rural in character”. The concern is that the farm experience will be gone, as the development is building

across the agricultural land that would have been farmed, albeit there is some reference to continuing farming of some sort. There will be some disjointed views of the Grade 2 Oast listed building and a few light industrial units from within the site. This is referenced as an enhancement despite currently being able to see sweeping views of it when looking up from the hospital area. It will be great for the owners of the new houses who may be able to view this historic building, as they will surround it on 3 sides, but it will present no benefit to anyone else, or the rural setting in which it is now as the wider views will be blocked by the development.

They have demonstrated that linking the two signalled junctions in Uckfield via a SCOOT type system (essentially a smart computerised traffic light signalling system) and suggest it will provide sufficient capacity to accommodate the proposed development traffic. Analysis already shows the current junctions to be near capacity, but the developer has manipulated the figures based on out-of-date modelling.

They have included traffic from other committed development on Mallard Drive (146), Ridgewood Farm (1000), and Eastbourne Road (90). ESCC Highways are undergoing a strategic highway modelling exercise, and this has not been completed yet the applicant recognises this and that ESCC Highways have said they will be unable to recommend approval of any large-scale development. The developer disagrees with the reasons to prevent development and has decided to carry on, despite expert professional local authority comments. Disappointingly, as part of the County Council strategic modelling, developers have been invited to participate, which on balance sounds like joined up thinking. However, this developer has clearly jumped the gun and queue, showing that they are not prepared to work collaboratively with the relevant authorities, other developers and community to achieve the best results for all.

There is a proposal to relocate the access to the site 30m towards Framfield. According to the developer's documentation, the Highway Authority fully support this, despite completely dismissing the Parish Council's lobbying to get the speed limit reduced over several years.

This access and road will be a dual use road for the 290 dwellings, the farm and the light industrial area. The visibility in both directions is less than 100m. The speed coming from Framfield direction is predominately faster than from Uckfield. 290 homes worth of cars, tractors and lorries all out of this access, even if the speed limit were reduced to 30 MPH, is an accident waiting to happen. It is not a straight run up to this access, they are bends on an incline in both directions. The applicant at one point has referenced that local people will know about the new access and drive accordingly. This is not always the case, and it doesn't take into account any non-local traffic. The proposal is that the speed limit is extended to a few metres past the proposed access. If a vehicle is travelling from Framfield, the fastest part of this section of road is on the lead up to the proposed access. As you come around the blind curves in the road between 40 and 60MPH, you will have 1 or 2 seconds to react and change from (potentially) 60MPH to 30PH. This is a dangerous proposal that has been stated as acceptable by ESCC. It is just madness.

During the Parish Council's extensive talks with ESCC Highways over several years, we were told that reducing the speed limit could in fact make things worse than they are already, as it is not just a case of changing a sign and concluded by saying that the police are unlikely to enforce it anyway. The Parish Council ask the question as to why this would now be acceptable with 290 new dwellings, when it wasn't before when there were no material changes. ESCC previously refused to allow the Parish Council to self-fund a VAS (Vehicle Activated Sign) within Framfield yet appear to be accommodating to road safety changes by the developer. If this information is correct, the Parish Council are disappointed with the decision-making processes within the county council.

The developer's latest surveys were done in October 2020, and they appear self-assured that nothing had changed since the first ones done in 2019. They have failed to take into account that we were in the middle of a global pandemic and lockdowns during this period, and figures are likely to be distorted due to the irregular and restricted vehicle movements during the governments instructions to stay at home or only travel if essential. They state that Bird in Eye Hill is relatively lightly trafficked and vehicle speeds are below the speed of 60MPH. Due to the topography of Bird in Eye Hill, road safety and the safety of residents is not purely based on vehicles exceeding the maximum speed limit. It is quite feasible that e.g., 40MPH is inappropriate or dangerous in a 60MPH zone, as is the case for Bird in Eye Hill. Many factors make up the risk level of road safety, not just speed.

As any local resident will know, Framfield Road in Uckfield is a nightmare already. Cars parked both sides, queuing to get up and down past the hospital, and that is not taking into account the wider ramifications of impacts to the infrastructure beyond the immediate area. The chances are the majority of the 290 dwellings worth of vehicles are going to head into/and through Uckfield. Computerised traffic light junctions (SCOOT) will not be able to change the fact that it is not only going to be traffic from this direction that is trying to negotiate the lights in Uckfield, but it will also be the other approaches as well. With new major developments already underway in Uckfield (and others planned) there are multiple bottle necks that will naturally interfere with electronic monitoring elsewhere, causing continued and possibly worse traffic congestion. If traffic does leave the proposed site and turn towards Framfield, there is going to be ramifications on the safety of our rural roads, including horse riders, pedestrians, farm machinery, road vehicles etc... The roads such as Sandy Lane and Brookhouse Lane are single track in places, and not designed for high volumes of traffic or heavier flow, yet are key rat runs, especially when roadwork diversions are in place. ESCC do not classify these roads, and despite potential increased traffic, risk and poor road conditions, there will be no improvements or enhancements. This is confirmed by the fact that the developer has made no reference to it in their application.

They reference facilities within "easy walking distance" of the proposed site. The Parish Council welcome the fact that this is one area of their application that they even mention Framfield. However, walking across muddy fields to Framfield is not 'easy walking', especially for those with mobility difficulties. A lot of these so-called facilities are not going to be of use to the average householder on a daily basis either. Referencing walking distances to a catering supplier or civil engineering company is not something most of us will visit. There is even reference to facilities that are no longer in existence.

There is already a case of oversubscribed schools, doctors, dentists etc along with lack of facilities such as adequate supermarkets. How is this application going to improve the services to which it is going to need when built?

The developer has referenced options of improving our dire public transport bus service, albeit with no improvement to bus times outside of the current ones provided. Commuters need services that operate before 07:41 in the morning, and after 17:25 in the evening as well as more frequently during the day. The bus service used to be more frequent, but like everything else it was reduced with the ESCC stating it is not sustainable. Even if the developer did pay for improvements for a period of time, it will likely be unsustainable after the bus company has stopped receiving the extra payments. The parish council would be interested to know how long the developer will subsidise the bus company for the enhancements as this crucial information is omitted. There is only reference to bus services from Monday to Saturday. What will all these people do on a Sunday?

A reduced bus fee is also proposed by means of a voucher scheme for residents of the development. Again, it does not state for how long this will be and presents no extra benefit to residents in the wider area. This is purely an enticement for potential residents of the development and to meet planning policy requirements.

The entire application is filled with out-of-date data, along with ludicrous mitigations and enhancements to support it, such as a car club scheme where members (at a cost) can hire a car on a pay as you go basis. The proposal for this 290 dwelling application is for one car to be shared.

The Parish Council are extremely concerned and find it incredulous that this developer is proposing double yellow lines and parking bays along Framfield Road in Uckfield to mitigate their own development. This would simply push parking to the other side streets that are already over capacity. If this applicant wishes to build a sustainable development, it SHOULD NOT be at the detriment of existing residents. This highly controversial and impacting survey carried out by the developer to look at parking trends and usage was done over a period of less than 24 hours at hourly intervals. This is not a representative assessment of the parking arrangements anyway.

For this development, 143 two-way movements in the morning peak hour, and 147 in the evening peak hour were calculated by the developer, with 1,284 additional trips throughout the day. It is not unheard of to already be queuing at Framfield Road with the junction of the High Street with 10 or so cars in front, all waiting to get down to the Bell Lane junction, before dispersing off on to the other networks. This applicant is not only foolish to ignore the fact that our authorities are trying to look at the bigger picture before in terms of the road networks, but they are also self-centred to put this application forward knowing that there is already a real problem in and around Uckfield. Using statistical figures during a pandemic is clearly no basis to provide accurate data. Again, this is not a representative snapshot of 'normal' road usage, as it was carried out during a global pandemic and lockdowns.

The developer is using the absence of an approved Local Plan as their justification for this proposal to be approved. The site is outside of the Uckfield development boundary, and also outside of the Wealden Core Strategy. There are no mitigating circumstances that would see any benefit of this proposal override that of the negative impacts it will have on the community and environment around it. The apparent lack of a 5-year land supply is no reason to develop rural fields that ordinarily wouldn't meet the policy requirements of the determining council. Wealden District Council should resist any pressure to approve this application as there is no sound justification for it to go ahead.

Framfield is a village that has a core area with isolated single dwellings at the extremities. This proposal is completely detached. There is also concern that this development is pushing Framfield away from a rural settlement and to a suburban extension of Uckfield. With Framfield Place abutting the eastern border of this site, which is part of Framfield conservation area with idyllic scenery, lakes and grade 2 listed buildings, there is little to protect this from the development of 290 houses. The developer pays little regard to the heritage within the application site itself and suggests that Framfield Place is suitably far away to be of concern anyway.

On the face of it, a SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) sounds quite a good enhancement to an area - a nice open countryside area for people to go walking. However, whilst there is an expectation that these SANG's are there in perpetuity, it will fall on the district council, and ultimately the taxpayer at some point to pay for the upkeep of these areas if the management trust is unable to continue. With ever growing economical restraints affecting

everyone, it should be incumbent on the developer to also secure the financial support to such a scheme in perpetuity. The irony of concreting over open countryside and supplying an area to mimic 'open countryside' as a mitigation for mass development is mystifying. Perhaps if this were a city centre development, it would make more sense, but not when we are already in a rural location.

In summary, this application is about the principle of development and access. The mitigations and enhancements proposed to support this application are quite absurd. Based on the Parish Council's local knowledge, we would sadly predict a severe road traffic collisions at the proposed junction to the development if it were approved. Whilst someone might be driving too fast, or texting, the risk to what is already a dangerous area, is going to be 10-fold with 290 dwellings added into the mix. The Parish Council cannot support this application based on figures and data manipulated to show achievable and acceptable results. The proposed access and B2102 is barely safe for the most experienced adult cyclist. Young children don't cycle on the B2102 as it is unsafe. The applicant references cycle usage as part of their travel plan, yet in reality uptake of cycling is going to be of limited numbers. The applicant has suggested giving every new homeowner a welcome pack and to appoint a 'Travel Plan Coordinator' as part of their mitigations.

The development provides absolutely no benefit to Framfield or Uckfield, especially in terms of housing need and affordable housing. Other local new developments highlight those properties are not affordable by the low take-up in buying properties. This developer is insensitive to the local community. We previously explained to them the boundaries and needs of our parish, but there is nothing whatsoever in this application that provides a glimmer of hope that Framfield is even on their radar. There are no improvements referenced for the vehicles, cycles and pedestrians that will turn right out of their proposed development. It is all about Uckfield.

Although not the material element of this application, it should be noted there is also great concern to the ecological impact of the site and surrounding area, including the effect on the adjacent Framfield stream, and biodiversity that changes can make to the flora and fauna, including ancient woodlands, which is relevant to this application. Water has to go somewhere... Currently it is absorbed into the open agricultural fields. With several hectares of concrete replacing this, it will need significant mitigations to prevent an environmental catastrophe. Not only will the stream be put at risk, there is the potential that one of Uckfield's top assets – the community hospital, will be more susceptible to flooding, especially as it sits lower than the proposed development. The natural flood plain is likely to expand as a result of this application.

Between their Air quality and emissions mitigations assessment, Habitats, Traffic, Landscape and visual impact, Archaeological, Heritage assessments and so on, they all say the same thing: 'the land is suitable for building 290 dwellings'. The immense accumulative number of mitigations needed to be put in place is astonishing. This is not the action of a conscientious developer. With over £1.4M needed alone for electricity to be supplied to the dwellings, including diversions of pylons. Southern Water have indicated there is no capacity for foul water connection, and yet another point argued by the developer who say there is, using flawed data against the incumbent and professional service owners/maintainers.

With a government drive of net zero carbon, gas boilers will not meet the standards required in the near future, and so other means of heating will be needed. However, the developer is still exploring gas connections. There is little mention to how they will support and mitigate for climate change or implement sustainable energy sources. This is clearly not one of their visions or goals as a business to achieve. There is no regard to how they will make things equal or better than they are already. Some developers go out of their way to offset the impacts of their

building works, but this is simply a mass development plonked in the middle of a field and an 'up yours' to the devastation left behind for our community and environment.

The Parish Council are dismayed and find it abhorrent that Mr and Mrs Berry along with Croudace Homes LTD have no interest, compassion or thought for our community. They have not only presented a blight for our rural area, but it will also cause nuisance, frustration and anxiety to existing residents.

Following a recent Parish Council planning meeting, we are deeply concerned as to what extent the applicant has engaged with the local community. Uckfield and Bird in Eye Hill residents attended and expressed their frustration of not receiving any correspondence directly from the applicant as part of their community engagement requirements. It appears that not all residents were aware of this application until the day of the Parish Council meeting, including immediate neighbours. It appears many streets within the parish and that of some streets within Uckfield were missed off the mailing list. Whilst there was advertising in some local media publications and online, many of these neighbouring residents would have liked the opportunity to challenge the applicant's representatives during an online consultation meeting that took place.

Framfield also has a high population of elderly residents, many who do not engage with the internet or its capabilities. The dissemination of information about this application and their opportunity to be heard is therefore unfairly restricted, as the applicant carried out the public consultation during the global pandemic and lockdown period. This is not acceptable, and every opportunity should be made for every resident to comment on this major application.

The Parish Council implore Wealden District Council officers to refuse this application.

5. Any Other Planning matters for reporting at the Discretion of the Chair.

To include any other planning applications which may arrive after the agenda has been published at the discretion of the Chairman in line with the terms of reference of the Committee.

There were none.

6.Next Planning Committee Meeting – to be advised.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm.

AEN/25.10.2021

Circulation: Planning Committee.