

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Section 78 Appeal

Appeal by Taylor Wimpey Southern Counties against the decision of Chichester District Council to refuse outline planning permission for the erection of 92 residential units and associated infrastructure.

Site at Land North of Keepers Wood, Lavant Road, Lavant, West Sussex

Local Planning Authority Reference: LV/12/03178/OUT

Planning Inspectorate Reference APP/L3815/A/13/2200123

SRA – Statement of Objections in Support of the Local Planning Authority's refusal of outline planning permission

Background

The Summersdale Residents' Association (SRA) represents approximately 500 households to the north of the city. The SRA has a history of working with Chichester District Council in their efforts to close the shortfall of available housing, as recognised in the 5 year housing supply requirement. The SRA has supported and worked with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) where it felt that the development was 'appropriate'. In the recent past there has been the development of two 'Brownfield sites' at Graylingwell and at the Roussillon Barracks.

Graylingwell

Clearly the way the community deals with mental health problems has changed dramatically and now the accepted way to treat many patients with mental health problems is within the community. The SRA recognised that there was a large site which was no longer required to provide the function that it was originally built to satisfy. The site contained some impressive Victorian buildings along with some of the best open space to be found in the city. The SRA worked with the LPA to ensure that the site was developed sensitively retaining many of the features that made this such an attractive site, such as the best of the existing buildings together with the open space. The SRA favoured integration of the development within the existing community, and encouraged the introduction of a bus service, good cycle facilities and footpaths into the adjoining residential to encourage that integration.

Roussillon Barracks

The Barracks had been a good neighbour to the Summersdale area and it was with great sadness that the SRA learnt that it was finally no longer required by the MOD. However, the SRA viewed the redevelopment of this site as a positive rather than a negative opportunity. Most of the existing buildings were of little architectural value apart from the perimeter wall and the Keep. The SRA

worked closely with the LPA to ensure that the area received the quality development that is clearly evident today, with good communications into the rest of the Summersdale neighbourhood. Residents from that development have joined the SRA and are becoming active members in helping to further shape their local area.

The evidence is clear that the SRA have a long history of demonstrating a positive attitude to welcoming appropriate developments into the area, and the input from the SRA has gone a long way in ensuring that the developments have improved the built environment over what was there before.

Looking into the future, the SRA has been commenting on the LPA preferred Local Plan. The SRA accepts that there is a need to plan for future housing demands but feels that this should be undertaken in a planned way that has been agreed with the local community. The important community support depends on the new build being constructed in the most sustainable locations that can be most economically serviced and that do not create coalescence between other settlements nor destroy important landscapes. Chichester DC, the LPA, is at an advanced stage in the process of developing its Local Plan which is giving careful consideration to the sites within the district that are suitable for development. No development is proposed within the strategic gap between Chichester and Lavant. In contrast, specific strategic gap policies strongly oppose development.

The SRA is totally opposed to this application as its members feel strongly that it is not an 'appropriate site' for development as it sits within the Strategic Gap between Chichester and Lavant. The following submission will provide a summary of the strongly felt objections to the proposals that will critically diminish the strategic gap and if agreed detrimentally affect the northern edge of the City, the village of Lavant and the view of the South Downs forever.

SRA Objections

The SRA will not comment on the technical aspects of the development.

The Residents Association is satisfied that the development can make adequate provision for the protection of the wildlife.

It has no reason to doubt that access to the development can be accommodated with little additional harm to highway safety and the number of vehicles accessing the site will not unduly exacerbate the inconvenience already suffered on the roads by local residents.

The SRA are however deeply concerned as to the inappropriateness of the development and the resulting harm it would do:

- to the openness of the vista;
- in encouraging urban sprawl;
- by the encroachment of the built environment into the countryside;
- by not protecting the separate settlements from coalescence; and
- to the visual appearance of the strategic gap.

A lot of thought has gone into the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (updated March 2013). This site was not included. Whilst its inclusion would add little weight to its merit, its recent exclusion rolls forward the longstanding policy of protection and clearly reaffirms the site as not being suitable for development at least for the foreseeable, 15 years lifespan of the imminent Local Plan. To bring this site forward for development at this time is inappropriate, in both its timing and its location.

The timing of this development is inappropriate for the following reasons. The LPA is making great strides in developing its preferred Local Plan and there has been a lot of input into this process by the various elected and non-elected bodies including the numerous residents associations. Summersdale Residents feel cheated that after taking part in the due process another site emerges as developers are opportunistically cherry picking around the fringes of the City boundary despoiling the strategic gap forever for short term economic gains. It is also inappropriate in its timing. The current recession has seen house building on sites already being developed, slow to a crawl as developers have responded to the current lack of demand by extending the completion dates on their units. Therefore, to agree to the appeal site when the preferred Local Plan is so near completion and which will provide the housing required in an orderly and planned way is premature and unnecessary.

The appeal site touches the Settlement Policy Area (SPA) to the rear of Keepers Wood and Rew Lane. However, the entrance is significantly removed from the SPA and a large triangular area of established woodland exists between the boundary of Lavant Road and the SPA. Whilst the boundary of the proposed development would, in part, be contiguous with the SPA, this is not a natural extension. The woodland marks the arrival at Chichester. A bolt-on, urban development would spoil the clarity of the transition from South Down to the urban fringes of Chichester. Rew Lane, a rural lane of low density housing mostly comprising bungalows, does not lend itself to forming a natural connection with the proposed development.

On exiting Chichester the site would close down the feeling of openness that the strategic gap provides contrary to National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 79. This site is relatively small but the impact of developing it would be great. It is not an isolated pocket of land that is surrounded by urban structures. Rather, it is part of the wider open landscape characterised by views of open fields and Downland hills in the distance. If this development was to go ahead it would contravene one of the main functions of the Strategic Gap, to restrict urban sprawl. In so doing the distinct form and valued character of the City of Chichester, by blurring its boundaries with the surrounding countryside, would be significantly diminished.

The appeal site lies within the countryside. It is made more so by the presence of Keepers Wood an area of thick wooded land that buffers this site from adjoining Summersdale neighbourhood. The loss of this site to inappropriate and unnecessary development would be an encroachment upon one of the finest views out of Chichester. This site contributes to the countryside and provides a beautiful vista over adjoining fields and the South Downs National Park, and the Glorious Goodwood horseracing circuit in the far distance. Irreparable harm

would be done by this development as it would not be safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

The Strategic Gap between two clearly separate historic settlements of Chichester, a regional centre, and the village of Lavant, is already the smallest in the County, measuring some 800m. Development of this appeal site would narrow the Strategic Gap further. This gap, by its very size, is vulnerable to the piecemeal incursions of opportunistic developers which would be particularly damaging to not only the views but also the important purpose of maintaining a functional separation between the two clearly identifiable settlements. If the appeal site was granted permission the gap would be significantly eroded leading to a down-grading of the landscape quality and putting the remaining open land in the Gap at risk of further development and effective coalescence. Therefore the main purpose of the gap to stop coalescence would have failed.

The development would also greatly affect the character and appearance of the Strategic Gap. The site is of great landscape value and of high visual importance as it provides uninterrupted distant views over the countryside and up to South Downs in the recently designated National Park.

Conclusion

Allowing this development would urbanise an important part of the countryside. The housing would block out the views of the surrounding landscapes. The widening of the junction and the removal of highway trees and hedges will completely change the existing rural feel of the road and the transition between town and countryside will be lost.

This is an inappropriate development in the Strategic Gap. It removes the openness of the rural area on leaving Chichester, it removes the view of agricultural use, it creates urban sprawl in to the countryside and does nothing to stop the promotion of further sprawl. It does not protect the individuality of the two quite distinct neighbouring settlements. Furthermore the development would harm the character and appearance of the strategic gap, which in this location comprises a field annually planted with crops reinforcing the rural perception of the site.

The few factors that weigh in favour of the site in terms of helping in a very small way to satisfy the housing shortage, which only arises some 3+ years ahead and not at all if the Local Plan is adopted in that time, do not clearly outweigh the harm to the strategic gap that would arise from this proposal.