

HERMITAGE PARISH COUNCIL.

Chairman: Ms R. Cottingham.

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30 April 2020

Dear Planning Policy Team

Comments on proposed changes to settlement boundary and West Berkshire HELAA Sites Identified in and adjacent to Hermitage Village

The Local Plan Update Newsletter published recently requests comments on the HELAA should be set out in an email setting out the details to the Planning Policy team.

This correspondence is addressing the HELAA on behalf of the Parish Council in relation to Hermitage Village as follows.

Hermitage Parish Council (HPC) has discussed the matter of extending the settlement boundary in relation to all the sites contained within the HELAA and the Parish conclusion is very strongly felt that it should not be extended.

In coming to this conclusion, HPC considers the following main, general points to be relevant and asks that West Berkshire Council take full account of them:

HPC General Points

1. Boundary extension is probably needed solely in order for WBC to ratify allocation of the proposals ref HER5, HER4 and HER1 in the HELAA. So with this in mind and having read WBC guidance notes on settlement boundaries, it feels that this proposed expansion of Hermitage settlement boundary is being presented to it by WBC as inevitable! HPC strongly object to this approach.
2. The area encompassed by this extended envelope is significant and, if granted, could be further extended uphill to Slanting Hill permitting a concentration of dwellings, possibly on a scale similar to the existing Forest Edge development at the North end of Hermitage.
3. Were this to be approved then Hermitage would move from the definition of a village, that is that it is bigger than a hamlet and smaller than a town; and therefore it's potential population growth would precipitate Hermitage becoming a town. The Parish Council is strongly against any such developments. Some geographers apparently specifically define a village as having between 500 - 2500 inhabitants, i.e. a size at which Hermitage, with over 2000 inhabitants, sits at the top end of the definition and therefore should have growth capped at this level. At the time of the 2011 census, Hermitage had just under 2000 residents. Nine years of population growth and infill development

since then risks Hermitage becoming redefined as a town. Extending its settlement boundary radically compounds this risk.

4. Hermitage lies firmly within the Wessex Downs AONB. How can extending Hermitage settlement boundary sensibly fit with the declared AONB status? Expansion of the settlement boundary as proposed will irrevocably remove a significant chunk of green space within the defined AONB.

5. Mindful of recent extensive flooding of fields adjacent to Hermitage School and Hermitage Green, Station Road and Faircross Farm, (photos available if required) evidence of speeding traffic through the village and congestion, any proposal to extend the existing settlement boundary should be resisted. At a minimum, further infrastructure impact assessments are needed of traffic management, school and GP surgery capacity, and surface drainage/flood risk

HPC has some specific comments regarding sites identified as HER1, HER4 and HER5 in the HELAA.

Specific Points reference HER1

1. Boundary extension is probably needed solely in order for WBC to ratify allocation of HER4 and HER1. So with this in mind and having read WBC guidance notes on settlement boundaries, HPC contends that this proposed expansion of Hermitage settlement boundary is being presented by WBC as a tool to accommodate development which potentially expands the population of Hermitage beyond that reasonable for a village within the AONB.

2. The area encompassed by this extended envelope is significant and, if granted, could be subject to requests to further extend uphill to Slanting Hill permitting a further large scale concentration of dwellings, possibly on a scale similar to the Forest Edge development.

3. HP contends that there is a strong relationship between this proposed site and the adjacent open countryside such that any development would significantly damage the north western view across the AONB to the detriment of the village and the AONB. A full up to date landscape assessment should be undertaken before this site is considered. The Parish Council believes this proposed site should not be considered developable.

Specific Points reference HER4

Regarding Appendix 4 of the HELAA in relation to site ref HER4: Land adjacent to Station Road, Hermitage; HPC comments as follows:

Stage 1: Site Identification

1. Previously Developed Land/Greenfield, site HER4 is classified as greenfield. Although the site includes the former Hermitage Station Masters House and a small scaffolding business, coupled with a disused railway platform these latter are in reality only a small proportion off the total 2.9 hectares of land which make up HER4. They are concentrated at the South East corner of the proposed development, representing less than 10% of the total land area. Consequently, this site should be considered as Greenfield.
2. A disused railway embankment, which runs the entire length of the south eastern boundary of the site, constitutes a substantial green buffer zone protecting the views across the NW Downs AONB from East to West from Slanting Hill, shielding the housing within Hermitage Village and in the interests of retaining the integrity of the AONB this should be protected at all cost.

Stage 2a: Development Potential

This site lies directly to the East of two developments already going through the planning application processes with West Berkshire Council (WBC), both arising from the previous WBC call for sites and included in the 2015 WBC DPD as HER001 – Land off Charlotte Close and HER004 – The Old Farmhouse. Additionally, another development – The Lawrence Machinery Building / new COOP plus 7 domestic dwellings has been approved immediately to the West of previous HER001. Two of these three sites have not completed the planning application processes and only one has commenced construction. When they are built, some additional 48 two, three and four bed residences will have been added to Hermitage with the potential of some 150 to 200 additional residents added to the village population complete with additional demands upon service facilities (shops, schools, medical practices and transport links). HPC General Point 3 refers reference excessive population growth.

Stage 2b: Suitability

1. Regarding location, the site's south western, western and northern boundaries adjoin the settlement. It is clear from the Hermitage Settlement Boundary Map at Appendix 6 of the West Berkshire DPD HSA that the eastern / south eastern boundary of the site does not adjoin the settlement. Furthermore, this boundary is marked by a substantial disused railway embankment along its entire length and this constitutes a substantial green buffer zone protecting the views across the NW Downs AONB from East to West which must be protected to retain the character of the AONB.
2. The WBC HELAA makes reference to the 2011 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment, which must be taken into account before permitting this proposal as "infill development".
3. When considering highways and access, the site access is proposed to be obtained via Station Road and that this would be possible along with a footway link. Other potential vehicular access points – off Newbury Road (via the 2015 - HER004/HSA25 site) and off Lipscomb Close should be discounted as allowing these would compromise pedestrian & cycle routes, landscaping and environmental buffer zone proposals already submitted as parts of Planning Applications 20/00912/FULEXT and 17/03290/OUTMAJ and 19/02993/OUTMAJ for developments already going through planning process with WBC. Additionally, the stated access from Station Road, Hermitage, is in part a narrow, single lane roadway with passing places and for half its length, only an overgrown private lane in poor repair and totally unsuitable for a development of 55 to 60 houses as proposed by an applicant.
4. Further regarding highways and access, HPC wishes to again raise concern about the impact on the B4009/Priors Court Road/Station Road junction and confirms that it considers further detailed transport assessment is required. This junction with its completely unsuitable 4-way mini-roundabout has been the subject of substantial correspondence from Hermitage Parish Council to WBC regarding the traffic density at the junction, already in excess of 90% rated capacity, and the safety hazards routinely reported to WBC via HPC as raised by many local residents.
5. When considering potential loss of agricultural land it should also be recognised that although the site is small it is still a valuable agricultural holding if properly utilised.
6. Regarding nature conservation impacts HPC requests that an up to date ecological survey be carried out to establish current site conditions and the presence of any protected species on the site.

7. The HELAA states that the 2011 Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) identified that development of the site would constitute considerable back land and infill development which is not a characteristic of Hermitage. It also refers to the statement in the 2011 LSA that the site is part of the open gateway to Hermitage from the south. HPC fully supports this view. The village already has too many infill/back-land sites which detract from the village appearance.
8. HPC considers that the development could cause potential harm to the setting of Barnaby Thatch (Grade II listed) and that a Heritage Assessment is required.

Consequently, HPC supports WBC “Suitability Conclusions” in that suitability is unknown due to the need for further assessment of highways impact, landscape capacity and ecology which should be shared in full with all interested consultees before any decision can be made regarding HER4 for inclusion for development.

Specific Points reference HER5

HER5 is the potentially developable site adjacent to the Hermitage Primary School. This site would push the settlement boundary north to Manor Lane and west into Chieveley Parish adversely effecting the adjacent local settlement of Oare. It is subject to flooding. The developer proposes up to 74 dwellings at a density of 30 dph. However, the WBC HELAA stated allocation for a site at the edge of a settlement within an AONB at 22 dph, i.e., the maximum allowable dwellings should be 33, potentially reduced further by known problems with this site, vis: landscape capacity, two defined footpaths cross the site, landscape buffer needs, adjacent ancient woodland, site drainage issues, adjacent local wild life site. These latter points suggest that the maximum developable capacity of this site should be capped at around two thirds of the preceding calculation, i.e. at a maximum of 25 dph. It should also be noted that WBC HELAA already identifies this site as not developable within the next 15 years. Consequently, **HPC conclusion is very strongly felt that the Hermitage settlement boundary should not be extended to encompass this site.**

Finally, HPC wishes to take this opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the HELAA and hope that the above commentary and attachments are of assistance to WBC.

Yours sincerely

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