

SALEHURST & ROBERTSBRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

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17th September 2015

Dear Sirs

RR/2015/1929/P – Grove Farm, Robertsbridge

This application was considered by the Parish Council Planning Committee on 3rd September (a considerable number of parishioners attended, who had the opportunity to express their own views on this application prior to the meeting).

The Parish Council (PC) objects to this application for the following reasons:

Policy: The applicants put forward the reasons why they believe this application is supported by various policies, both national and Rother District Council (RDC). The PC believes that their arguments on policy are flawed for the following reasons:

- 1 Rother Local Plan 2006: Policy VL7 is quoted as support for this application. The PC does not believe it should be used in aid of this application because
 - a) Para 13.41 of the 2006 Plan states 'in view of the site's greenfield status and location within the AONB [both points the PC considers of paramount importance in assessing this application] the release of this site is subject to Policy DS6. Policy DS6 states in sub para (iv) 'the following sites will only be released if found necessary to meet Structure Plan housing requirements up to 2011: (a) (Land at Rye) (b) Land adjacent to Grove Farm Robertsbridge'. Therefore the PC believes that Policy VL7 had already ceased to be an extant policy of RDC, before even the public consultation on the Core Strategy. VL7 had ceased to be a policy at latest at the end of 2011, as by that date it had not been found necessary to use it to meet housing requirements.
 - b) If RDC does not accept the previous argument, the PC believes that Policy VL7 cannot be properly recognised as valid as it is out of date, particularly with regard to the conditions referred to therein, which were set in 2006 (nine years ago!); para 22 NPPF requires a regular review of allocations but RDC has not implemented any review of this allocation since 2006 especially the contributions towards Robertsbridge Community College, and to the Policy's failure to conform to the principles of sustainable development set out in NPPF para 7.

- 2 National Planning Policy Framework: the PC believes the following paragraphs of NPPF are relevant in considering a refusal for this application.
 - a) Para 7: this application fails each of the three tests for sustainability. It is not, in the PC's view, in 'the right place' for reasons we shall set out further; it does not supply housing 'to meet the needs of present and future generations'; by failing to deal

positively with the Listed Barn and other farm buildings on the site, it does not contribute 'to protecting and enhancing our national, built and historic environment'.

- b) Para 12: this states that proposed development that accords with an up to date Local Plan (the RDC Core Strategy of September 2014) should be approved. We shall set out below why this development does not so accord and therefore should be refused.
- c) Para 17: this states in bullet 8 that a core planning principle is to encourage the effective use of land that has been previously developed. This proposal does not do that, despite the fact there are at least two brownfield sites in the parish where potential developers are already preparing their proposals.
- d) Para 28: second bullet requires the promotion of the development and diversification of agricultural businesses. The site of this application is a working farm and thus the proposal does not meet this principle.
- e) Para 47: first bullet requires the Local Plan to meet the full objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing. This application clearly does not do that in view of its low provision of smaller accommodation.
- f) Para 54: this refers to planning 'housing development to reflect local needs'. Robertsbridge needs starter homes to retain its young people who leave for cheaper housing elsewhere. As stated above, this application does not reflect those needs.
- g) Para 58 states that planning decisions should (second bullet) 'establish a strong sense of place' and (sixth bullet) be 'visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping'. This application fails in both these areas.
- h) Para 100 refers to flood risk and in particular 'making (development) safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere'. This application (as referred to later) fails on this point.
- i) Para 109 demands of the planning system that it protects and enhances valued landscapes. The PC considers that this site, which constitutes the entrance to the village, is a valued landscape which should be protected.
- j) Para 111 requires that great weight be given to conserving landscape in AONBs. This is land in the High Weald AONB and deserves that level of protection.
- k) Para 116 states that planning permission should be refused for major developments (in the context of Robertsbridge, the PC considers this to be a major development) 'except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest'. This application fails both tests.

3 Rother Core Strategy 2014: the PC considers the following policies to be relevant to the consideration of this application and provide grounds for a refusal:

- a) Policy OSS3(iii), (vi) and (vii): this application does not accord with each of these sub-headings, in that it does not satisfy the need for local housing; it is the PC's view that it is harmful in the context of the character and qualities of the landscape and it goes against the effective use of land 'especially previously developed land'.
- b) Policy OSS4: this policy follows closely the criteria set out in the NPPF and this application fails the following tests:
 - meeting the needs of future occupiers: it does not provide for future elderly population or disabled users;
 - it unreasonably harms the amenities of all adjoining properties but in particular the listed buildings at Yew Lodge and George Hill House;
 - it detracts from the character and appearance of the locality; development on this site would be highly visible, instead of green fields, both entering the village from the south, and looking in the opposite direction, since part of the site is already included in the Parish's Conservation Area, and the site permits the rural landscape to enter towards the centre of the village along the main road;
 - it is not of a density 'appropriate to its context' being clustered in areas, and overall there are too many houses provided for the size of the rural site;

- key design principles are not enunciated by the indications of design ideas offered, which include inappropriate and non-vernacular building materials.
- c) Policy RA1 stipulates the needs of rural villages should be addressed by:
- ‘high quality response to local context and landscape’ – this is not provided in any way by the siting or the design (insofar as the design is fully identified at present) by these proposals;
 - the applicant chooses to ignore totally the requirement set out in Policy VL7 (if RDC regard this as a still valid policy) of ‘improved access arrangements for pedestrians and cyclists to Robertsbridge Station’ and is therefore in conflict with this policy.
- d) Policy RA2 seeks to:
- ‘maintain the farming capacity of the district and to support the agricultural industry’ and to ‘support rural employment opportunities’; this application palpably does neither;
 - ‘retain traditional historic farm buildings’; this application gives no such assurances.
- e) Policy SRM1: there is no energy strategy as is required by sub-para (i) in this policy. Nor is there any compliance with sub-para (viii) regarding providing recycling facilities.
- f) Policy SRM2: there is no evidence of compliance with sub-para (v) of this Policy, ‘incorporation of water efficiency measures’, by the proposers.
- g) Policy LHN1: this application does not comply with this policy, in particular to sub-para (i) not being of a mix which reflects current and projected needs and sub-para (vi) not integrating affordable housing with market housing.
- h) Policy RN2: this application in particular does not meet sub-para (iii) to preserve and ensure clear legibility of local building forms (ie the Listed Barn and associated buildings) nor to sub-para (vi) in that even the archaeological report presented indicates more work needs to be done.
- i) Policy EN3: this policy requires (i) a positive contribution to the character of the site; the proposals detract considerably from the current visual landscape quality and (ii) a design solution which demonstrates empathy with the site and context; the proposals do not because of use of inappropriate materials, lack of adequate landscaping, imposition on the current built environment including listed buildings and a farm, and mass of development totally inappropriate to a rising edge in the village landscape setting.
- j) Policy EN7: this application fails to meet the criteria set out in sub-para (i) as it does not indisputably demonstrate that the development will NOT increase flood risk elsewhere and it does not even contemplate the ‘possibility’ of reducing flooding.
- k) Policy TR2: this application does not meet sub-para (iv) by refusing to countenance the improvement of pedestrian access to the Station.
- l) Policy TR3: this application fails to meet any of the requirements set out in this policy.
- m) Policy TR4: this application fails deliberately to meet the car parking recommendations laid down by ESCC to a very significant amount, which the PC considers to be critical (see later comments about car parking).

Other comments: The PC would wish to endorse the extremely considered and thoughtful comments made by all those people who have made submissions on this application, and would wish RDC to take these into consideration.

The PC does not wish to repeat comments already submitted by others, or to repeat those described in the policy section of our response, but does feel the need to emphasise specific comments about the application.

Development proposals: The application fails to recognise that part of it is in the Conservation Area.

It fails to make any positive proposals for the Listed Barn or the buildings within its curtilage, despite being asked by various people to do so during the pre-application stage.

The development would overlook already built development on both sides of George Hill.

The application takes no cognisance of the 24" water main running across the site and the limitations of development within 7 metres thereof.

Transport implications: The access to the site is narrow and up an incline.

There is already serious congestion on George Hill particularly between 8am and 9am, and 3pm and 4pm during the school runs to both the primary and secondary schools (for the secondary school a number of coaches are required which regularly experience access problems along George Hill). The proposers chose not to monitor this latter time period, which is the worst time of the day for congestion and vehicle movements.

Their transport analysis makes no mention of car parking on George Hill, only vehicle movements, nor to the loss of car parking spaces caused by the creation of the access point for the proposed development.

The PC believes that the development would, without any amelioration, cause an increase in accidents at the junction of George Hill and the A21. This junction has a poor accident record, but the statistics do not of course mention near misses, which the PC knows are frequent. No account is taken of the possibility of development on the site (Countrycrafts) on the opposite side of George Hill, which is within the parish development boundary.

Flooding: the developer's own reports (archaeological as well as the FRA) clearly demonstrate the current inability of the site to cope with surface water. The FRA contains no assurance that current development proposals would not worsen the current situation, where floods already occur down George Hill into the High Street and Pipers Lane. One only has to look at the current houses there already equipped with permanent flood protection measures.

Environmental : the PC would stress that the site is greenfield, when there are other possible development sites in the village which are brownfield, and current government proposals indicate a wish to move to a sequential test for development i.e. brownfield first before greenfield. The application does not indicate any proposal to achieve the 30m tree belt required by Policy VL7(vi) (if still valid).

Other: the impact of the development on the primary school and the nursery provision in the village is not referred to anywhere in the application.

The application is working against the emerging Neighbourhood Plan process which only commenced in January 2015 and has not reached draft plan stage, but is aimed at creating a holistic solution for the development needs of the parish.

There is a general malaise across all the technical reports prepared for the application of, we suspect, being rushed and/or incomplete. In particular:

- some reports are out of date
- the ecology report was carried out in January 2014, rather than over a year-long cycle, which, given the length of time the developers have had an interest in the site, would clearly have been achievable

- the heritage report refers to the whole of Grove Farm being developed, when the proposal is only for part
- the FRA does not investigate pre-existing off site flooding
- several reports make strong recommendations for additional surveys to be carried out, which clearly have not been done; or for work to be undertaken, e.g. to stabilise and improve the tree cover, which has not been undertaken
- there are innumerable inaccuracies in the reports – references to ‘Town Hall’, ‘Town’, the number of public facilities in the village which are inaccurate or out of date which demonstrate a general lack of care and supervision in the way the reports have been presented.

Summary: the PC believes that the application should be refused for the policy reasons set out above and for the failure of the application to deal with the special issues surrounding the site, its place in the village landscape, the need for specific types of housing, the traffic issues (in particular car parking), flooding and the environmental heritage and archaeological conservation issues peculiar to the site.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'K Ripley'.

Karen Ripley (Mrs)
Clerk to the Council