

INTRODUCTION

North Dorset District Council has again submitted a planning application for housing on the informal children's play area at Mary Gardens in the heart of Okeford Fitzpaine. This site is a green space where children from adjacent housing can play safely in close proximity to their homes with limited supervision and it has been used in this way for many years. Garden space in the adjacent social housing is extremely limited so this a valuable play space for the children of the tenants. The site was historically used as an orchard and also to run poultry.

This is the FOURTH application that that the NDDC has made in the last FOUR years all of which, following strong objections from residents and the Parish Council, have been refused for the same planning reasons:

"It is considered that the principle of development on this site would result in a significant loss of amenity to the local area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the aims of Policies 15, 24 and 25 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (LP1) and the National Planning Policy Framework."

The applications made in 2017 and 2018 have, following objection by the Parish Council, been referred to the North Dorset Planning Committee which according to the definition of the committee is '*responsible for the determination of planning applications.*' This is the ultimate body for determining the outcome for a planning application. On both occasions the Planning Committee has supported the Parish Council and refused the application.

The North Dorset Local Plan Policy 15 is the key to the objection and this states that 'The Council will seek to protect and enhance existing open space, character areas, outdoor sport and recreational facilities and to provide new facilities to support growth. This will be particularly relevant in relation to play space for children and young people but also in relation to allotments, cemeteries, nature reserves and the multiple benefits that green infrastructure elements can deliver.'

Further, the draft Okeford Fitzpaine Neighbourhood Plan (OFNP) has designated the site as 'Local Green Space' in order to protect it from development and again NDDC have chosen to ignore these wishes of the villagers, despite being made fully aware of this designation.

PLANNING POLICY

The timing of this Appeal appears to be opportunistic, bought about by NDDC's current inability to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply and the consequent relaxation of Local Plan policies that determine site allocations. This 5-year housing land supply has also affected the progress of the OFNP (see below).

Currently there are 3 major Planning Applications for development for Okeford Fitzpaine village. 2/2017/1952/OUT for 31 dwellings, 2/2018/0125/OUT for 27 dwellings, and 2/2018/0458/OUT for 45 dwellings. If they are all agreed then there would be an increase of a total of 103 dwellings.

In respect of Okeford Fitzpaine the 2011 census data details that there are 404 dwellings in the parish. However the village of Okeford Fitzpaine had only 335 dwellings. Based upon the most up to date monitoring information, since the start of the current plan period (2011) there have been 49 dwelling completions or commitments at Okeford Fitzpaine. The total number of dwellings that would result from these proposals (if they were all granted planning permission and developed out) would be 103 dwellings. This figure of 103, in conjunction with the existing 49 dwelling completions or commitments at Okeford Fitzpaine, would result in a total of 152 dwellings. This would equate to a 45% increase in the total number of dwellings at Okeford Fitzpaine based on an existing figure of 335 dwellings as at the 2011 census. The additional 3 dwellings proposed in 2/2018/0424/OUT would bring this to a 46% increase.

Consideration should be given to whether this level of growth is appropriate at Okeford Fitzpaine given the aim of the Policy 2 (Core Spatial Strategy) set out in LPP1 to focus development at the four main towns within the District and the fact that the focus of development at Stalbridge and the eighteen larger villages, including Okeford Fitzpaine, should be on meeting local and essential rural needs.

The Objectively Assessed Need for housing in Okeford Fitzpaine conducted by AECOM in support of the OFNP identified 105 additional dwellings to meet local needs in the Plan period 2011-31. This can be met by 2 of the major site planning applications and delivered within the shortened timescale dictated by the 5-year housing land supply issue. Clearly there is no local need (market or affordable housing) for the 3 additional market dwellings in 2/2018/0424/OUT.

Consideration should also be given to whether the level of growth in Okeford Fitzpaine will be at the expense of other villages within the Stalbridge and the 18 Larger Villages grouping being able to meet their own needs. Since the start of the plan period (2011), some 600 dwellings have either been completed or are subject to existing extant consents within the countryside (including Stalbridge and the villages). In addition 180 dwellings have been granted planning permission (pending decision – S106) at Stalbridge. At the November Planning Committee a further 38 dwellings will be considered for approval of Planning Applications for the Countryside. In terms of LP Policy 6 and the provision of at least 825 dwellings, there is danger of oversupply of dwellings in the countryside. Collectively the proposals could result in the development of 155 dwellings if granted planning permission. It is considered that as Policy 6 requires at least 825 dwellings to be provided, the proposals would result in an oversupply of dwellings in the countryside. Consequently, they may prevent future proposals at the eighteen larger villages, which sought to provide for local needs/essential rural needs, being granted planning permission.

The conclusion from the above must be that this level of development in just one of the Larger Villages is undesirable and there is clearly no need for the dwellings proposed in 2/2018/0424/OUT from a planning policy perspective. This must be an unsustainable level of development in such a short period of time and as a result be contrary to the NPPF.

PLANNING APPLICATION 2/2018/0424/OUT

As explained in the Introduction this site is a green space where children from adjacent housing can play safely in close proximity to their homes with limited supervision and it has been used in this way for many years. Garden space in the adjacent social housing is extremely limited so this a valuable play

space for the children of the tenants. The site was historically used as an orchard and to also to run poultry.

The proposed retention of a very small area of the site as a play area in the Planning Application, shown with tree planting in the plans severely diminishes its value as a play area and may well be the cause of friction from the purchasers of the new housing, whose gardens are very limited as planned.

The Open Space Appraisal (Matrix Partnership Report 2015) submitted in support of the application is now out of date as it was written before the construction of the new housing and was not cognisant of the recently proposed new developments (see above). The Fields in Trust recommended 1.82 hectares of open space for the approximate population of 740 at the time of the 2011 Census will need to be re-considered in the light of the population growth up to 2023. Therefore the rather arbitrary ratios of residents to open space that it cites as its key evidence for approval are no longer relevant. Further the author has no local knowledge and has not considered that the overriding amenity value of the site is its proximity to the social housing. This allows children to play in sight of their parents with limited supervision whereas other play areas in the village either require crossing a busy road or travelling down a road (Castle Lane) with known speeding issues that has no footpath - thus close adult supervision is required to visit these alternate facilities.

The Ecological survey conducted by the North Dorset Environment Team in 2014 identified the land at Mary Gardens to be of low ecological importance in its current form. Its future use envisaged in the OFNP could be modified from the current 'close mown' grass form to provide greater biodiversity. This is more fully set out in the OFNP where the land at Mary Gardens is designated Local Green Space and would form part of a 'green corridor' running North South through the village helping to offset the increasing areas of developed land resulting from the delivery of the Objectively Assessed Needs for housing.

The Appeal and this 4th planning application has been made via the commercial partnership, (PSP NORTH DORSET LLP) which has been set up between NDDC and a commercial facilitation company. While no member of the Planning Committee is a representative within this partnership, 3 North Dorset Cabinet members (G. Carr-Jones, M. Roake, and D. Walsh) are. In the Case of Councillor Walsh, he holds the portfolio for Planning which causes the Parish Council to question if there is a conflict of interest in that NDDC Planning Committee is effectively dealing with its own Council's Planning Application and Appeal.

In the view of the Parish Council absolutely nothing material about the site and its value to the community has changed since the most recent application, so the Planning reasons for all the previous refusals still holds true in principle today.

The argument that will be put forward by NDDC for approval is that the Council needs the money for the benefit of the residents of North Dorset as a whole, but by the time costs and share of the profits with the commercial partners have been taken into account this is a drop in the ocean of the council's capital budget and will be swallowed into the coffers of the new Unitary authority in the near future.

THE PLANNING HISTORY

A summary of the 4 Planning Applications and their planning policy based refusals is shown below:

1. 07/11/2014:APPLICATION No. 2/2014/1331/OUT Land North Of, Mary Gardens, Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset, SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS 1. It is considered that the principle of development on this site would result in a significant loss of amenity to the local area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the aims of Policy 1.8 of the North Dorset District Wide Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. 12/02/15: Application Number: 2/2015/0228/OUT Applicant: Chaffers Proposal: Develop land by the erection of 2 No. dwellings (outline application with all matters reserved). Location: Land North Of, Mary Gardens, Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset, I refer to the above application received on 12 February 2015 and can confirm that the application has now been withdrawn.
3. 18/02/16: APPLICATION No. 2/2016/0264/OUT Land North Of, Mary Gardens, Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset, SCHEDULE OF CONDITIONS 1. It is considered that the principle of development on this site would result in a significant loss of amenity to the local area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the aims of Policies 15, 24 and 25 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (LP1) and the National Planning Policy Framework.
4. APPLICATION No. 2/2018/0424/OUT Land North of Mary Gardens, Okeford Fitzpaine, DT11 ORX REASON(S) FOR REFUSAL 1. It is considered that the principle of development on this site would result in a significant loss of amenity to the local area. The proposal is therefore considered contrary to the aims of Policies 15, 24 and 25 of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1 (2011-2031) and the National Planning Policy Framework.

These previous decisions by NDDC and the NDDC Planning Committee would indicate that this amenity is not surplus to requirements.

SUMMARY

The conclusion reached by the Parish Council in response to numerous comments by residents over a number of years is that:

1. Land to the North of Mary Gardens is an important amenity to young families of which a number are single parents, in small social housing accommodation. It is a safe play area for children that are too young to cross roads and negotiate the increasing volume of traffic in Okeford Fitzpaine on their own.
2. There is no need for an additional 3 market houses when there are already Planning Applications for an additional 103 dwellings being processed by NDDC. And that is in addition to the 49 dwellings completed since the start of the current Plan period in 2011.
3. The volume of completions/proposed applications is already well in excess of the AECOM Objectively Assessed Need for Affordable and Market housing of 103 dwellings in the Plan period 2011-31.
4. The scale of the planning applications for Okeford Fitzpaine could jeopardise the ability of other Larger Villagers to deliver their OAN due to oversupply.
5. The financial value to NDDC of this asset has already been significantly diluted by repeated unsuccessful Planning Applications, and NDDC should now desist with these applications.
6. The benefit that would accrue across the District from the sale of this asset would be completely offset by the loss of amenity within Okeford Fitzpaine.

