

LAUNTON PARISH COUNCIL

Mrs Jane Olds, Parish Clerk

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Planning application 21/04112/OUT

The Parish Council met on 6 January and 3 February and considered planning application reference 21/04112/OUT at OS Parcel 2778 Grange Farm North West Of Station Cottage, Station Road, Launton for “Outline application for the erection of up to 68 dwellings (Use Class C3), including up to 8 live-work dwellings, public open space, access, infrastructure and demolition of existing buildings”.

The Parish Council strongly objects to the proposals.

The application site is a greenfield site which has not been allocated in the Cherwell Local Plan. It is at a distance from the centre of the village outside the bounds of the built-up limits of the village. The use of such land would be contrary to policies Villages 2 and ESD15 of the CDC Local Plan and Government advice within the NPPF.

The distance from the village would generate a lack of connectivity to the existing village of Launton which could result in an isolated, and unsustainable, development which, again, would be contrary to policies Villages 2 and ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan and Government advice within the NPPF. It would also be contrary to the 10-minute walkable neighbourhood concept.

The timings / distances suggested in the applicant’s documentation for walking to the centre of the village are ambitious or could only be achieved by flying; it does not appear that the existing public rights of way have been taken into account, although in some cases this would add to the length of walk. It would, therefore, be likely that there would be a heavy reliance on car use to enable visits to even the village shop or school.

For information, residents who live at the far end of Station Road (but still significantly closer to the crossroads than the site) have reported that it takes 15 minutes to walk to school – 20 minutes with children.

Measured times from just outside the site on Station Road to other locations in the village, at a higher than average walking speed, include:

- to the crossroads: 8 and a half minutes
- to Costcutter / Post Office: over 10 minutes
- to Stonelily hairdressers: almost 13 minutes
- to School / Parish Hall: 14 minutes (over 15 minutes if using the public rights of way rather than the roads)
- to Church: almost 15 and a half minutes

The applicant's Travel Plan appears to put most facilities over the 10-minute 'walkable' time. It was noted that the plan states that 800m is a 10-minute walk, but this falls foul of their claimed distances, which show that the important village facilities (shops, pubs etc) are at least 900m from the site.

The walk to the bus (from Bicester to Aylesbury), which only stops on Bicester Road, would be more than 10 minutes from the development. Additionally, it is not operated by Stagecoach, so to get to Oxford requires a change of bus in Bicester. This inconvenience is likely to encourage more unsustainable car use as passengers drive to the Bicester Park and Ride – or further – instead. The applicant's suggestion of providing additional bus shelters was not believed to be of use, particularly in the current locations of the stops.

Station Road is a narrow road which could be considered single-track in places due to the cars parked on the road. It has been closed for almost a year for the East West Rail implementation works and so obtaining up-to-date data is impossible, although, with the anticipation that the road will be opened again for through traffic in March, the vehicle volumes are likely to rise. Additionally, the applicant does not appear to have taken account of the traffic attempting to emerge from the side roads (Blenheim Drive, Sycamore Road, Yew Tree Close, Lanes End and The Green) adjoining Station Road.

The suggested modification of the crossroads at the bottom of Station Road was impractical. Proposals had been investigated for previous applications including the Yew Tree Farm development, but when it came to implementation, it was discovered that very little was possible and all that could be achieved has already been implemented.

There are already large numbers of near misses at the Station Road junction and to increase the traffic numbers would have a greater detrimental effect on the junction. The road is particularly narrow at the crossroads and at busy periods the traffic can back up Station Road.

Oxfordshire County Council's response to this application, in which they claim that they were unable to object because they did not do so for a similar application in 2017, states that "the only significant change from a transport perspective is that the S5 bus route no longer serves the village". The Parish Council believes that this is incorrect, as OCC appears to have completely neglected the 65 houses currently being built off Blackthorn Road, a mere 150 yards or so from the crossroads! Permission for this development was not granted until 2018; the Council is astonished that OCC appears to be unaware of it and the effect it will have on traffic at the crossroads.

The school is already oversubscribed and, according to Oxfordshire County Council in 2017, it was not viable to extend the buildings further. Children living in the proposed development would, therefore, need to be driven to alternative schools which would not comply with the 10-minute walkable neighbourhood concept and would increase vehicular traffic in direct contradiction of sustainability considerations.

The Council did not believe that the water and foul drainage provision was sufficient for the needs of the village as a whole. While Thames Water considers that there is no problem with capacity in their response to the application, it is noted that already at times of heavy rainfall, the pumping station is not able to deal with the large quantities of surface water and that this then has an impact on the sewage capability – this has also been acknowledged by Thames Water Officers. Over the last five years, the instances when villagers have experienced sewage flowing out of the drains and inspection covers into their properties at times of heavy rainfall has increased greatly.

Within the timeframe of the current Local Plan (2011-2031), the village has already been subjected to three significant developments at:

- Woodland Close (11 dwellings – 2013)
- Yew Tree Farm (40 dwellings – 2017)
- Mulberry / “Launton Mews” (65 dwellings – 2018, currently being constructed)

Even ignoring additional piecemeal development such as the two infill houses on Station Road, this would give an increase of 116 houses – 22% over the 2011 level of approximately 520 dwellings. 68 more from this development would be a further 13%, giving an overall increase of 35% in 11 years. That, in itself, is clearly an unsustainable rate of growth for a village community, to say nothing of the fact that none of this recent development has made any significant improvements to the village’s increasingly inadequate infrastructure.

Launton has already provided far more than its reasonable share of the total 750 houses to be provided across the entire district over the 20-year plan period.

There will also be significant loss of wildlife habitat and loss of amenity in an area of the village where many people walk to enjoy the countryside.

In a letter, dated 2 February (attached) from the applicants’ Agent, Savills, they suggested that the tilted balance of paragraph 11 of the NPPF favours their application, and have stated various so-called “benefits” that they claim “clearly outweigh the minor adverse impact”. However, the Parish Council believes that it is exactly the reverse. The very minor claimed benefits are clearly outweighed by the major adverse impacts of this large development. As already stated, it is in an unsuitable and unsustainable location right on the very edge of the village which will increase private vehicle use and do so on a road that already has significant traffic problems.

If the Council were minded to approve the development, the Parish Council would require:

- £200,000 for the re-development of the Parish Hall;
- a sum for sports provision within the village;
- mitigation and amelioration of the effects of the additional traffic at the Station Road crossroads to Bicester Road including the possibility of a ‘shared space design’;
- funding for additional traffic management including vehicle activated signage;
- funding for the Parish street furniture replacement programme;
- funding for adequate sewage / foul drainage provision;

- funding to improve the village paths and public rights of way to make them easily traversable all year round.

I trust that this is helpful to the Committee.

Jane Olds

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Parish Clerk