

Thursday July 26th, 2018

Your reference: 18/01024/MAJ
Springwell Nursery Garden Centre, Ide, Exeter

Dear Teignbridge District Council Planning Department,

Thank you for granting an extension to your deadline for comments from Ide Parish Council regarding the application for the erection of a new garden sales area building including cafe/restaurant, storage/warehouse, new public car parking area and turning area at the above site.

Planning applications are normally discussed and commented upon by a sub-committee of Ide Parish Council, but as this is a major application it was discussed at last night's meeting of the full Ide Parish Council, where a subsequent vote has resulted in us submitting an objection to this major planning application for a large-scale retail outlet.

Whilst a garden centre to replace that which stood on a part of the site a few years ago would've been welcomed by the residents of Ide, this application cannot be seen as permissible development.

The proposed development, we believe, is seeking to pass off an out of town shopping area as a garden centre, as indicated by the complete lack of outdoor retail space.

Scale:

The application is for a retail unit with 15 times the retailing space than the previous garden centre. It also proposes 204 car parking spaces. It is out of proportion for the needs of a garden centre.

Such a huge development in a rural setting, on land designated AGLV, is clearly out of scale, and can only be regarded as overdevelopment.

It is also of concern that the applicant owns a large amount of land east, south and west of the site, from Pole House Lane across the A30 dual carriageway, and is a highly-successful property developer. Large-scale retail-sector garden centres expand, and become sites for other businesses; we would urge the planning authority to consider it highly likely that this application is will become part of further phased-development.

We also find that the applicant, in planning a large retail unit high on a slope, has not attempted to satisfy Teignbridge District Local Plan policy S6 'Resilience' section b) regarding climate change especially with regard to wind/storm damage: *'buildings, communities and infrastructure should take account of the likely changes in temperature, rainfall and wind in their design.'*

Location:

The applicant's supporting statement states that the proposed large-scale development would be sited in an area of only 'moderate landscape value'. This is at odds with TDC's categorisation of land as being within an AGLV area, as designated in TDC Local Plan 2013 – 2033. Under the Town and Country Planning Act this means that the proposed site is an area of land having a particular scenic value, and is therefore to be protected by local authorities such as Teignbridge.

Traffic and access:

The 'traffic report' that the applicant's agent has commissioned and supplied is, in our belief, selective, subjective and contentious.

The report claims that Ide Village Road, or the C50 as it is more commonly known within the village, onto which customers and service vehicles would enter and exit is not a busy highway. This is inaccurate. The traffic levels along this road have increased dramatically over the past few years, and was one of the factors in a recent proposal for a 'Park & Ride' site nearby not proceeding.

We would also point out that the traffic report focuses heavily on what they regard as the busy times for visitors to garden centres, these being Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

This does not, however, take into account the fact that, given this application is for a retail outlet for gardening materials (in the fullest sense), rather than a nursery (we note lack of outside space for anything other than car-parking) then there will be a considerable amount of non-car traffic accessing any proposed retail development on this site. This would be lorries and vans. We find it highly unlikely that such vehicles would be accessing the site only on weekend afternoons.

The traffic report also paints a rather over-optimistic picture of the proposed access, stating that the verge is 7 metres wide. The verge is wide along parts of the C50, but not at the proposed point of entry.

The entrance is also on the inside of a bend, with visibility restricted by still-growing large trees to the east, together with an overgrowth of bushes and other roadside wild vegetation.

The speed of traffic along the C50 has long been an issue, with vehicles generally travelling at or near the national speed limit for a single carriageway road i.e. 60 mph. Entry and exit for lorries etc delivering retail supplies would be highly compromising of the public's safety in this respect.

We therefore find that the applicant's supporting statement reflecting as it does the 'findings' and conjectures within the commissioned traffic report is being ingenuous when it states *"there will be no adverse impact on highway safety"*.

We would also point out that given there are no safe roads on which to travel by cycle into Exeter, the footpath, rightly or wrongly, alongside the C50 is used by cyclists – the entry exit point for the proposed large-scale retail outlet would compromise the safety of those members of the public using this footpath given the poor visibility – drivers are unable to see users of said footpath until their vehicles have emerged onto this footpath.

We would also like to draw attention to the applicant's use of TDC Local Plan policy S1a a) *accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport for main travel purposes, particularly work, shopping, leisure [and education;]*

Aside from residents of Ide, the site can realistically only be accessed by motor car – the bus service to the village is less than a handful of buses a day, there is no safe cycle access to or from Exeter, nor viable pedestrian access.

Those visiting the site would for the main part travel to and from this proposed large-scale retail development by motor vehicle from Exeter, along the already highly congested Alphington Road route. Such traffic would be detrimental to the functioning of Exeter as a 'destination city', and run counter to all planning policy regarding sustainability.

Drainage and Flooding

Again, the applicant's supporting statement shows a lack of knowledge regarding the location of this proposed development, stating as it does that flooding is not an issue.

The C50 at the point of entry/exit has often flooded in the past, and had to be closed, occupying as it does the low point along this road.

Run-off from a large retail development that will consist only of hard-roofed buildings and car-parking space cannot do otherwise that generate considerably additional run-off.

The applicant's statement that drainage will be into soak-away also begs the question as to where this water will go, and we can only presume it will end up the in Alphin Brook, which is both an important site for bio-diversity plus a corridor for the travel of such larger mammals as otters (the applicant's ecological survey states that otters are located nearby, and it is the Alphin Brook catchment area near to the proposed development where they found). We doubt that such water won't include other substances, such as fuel spillage, besides water.

The proposed development therefore fails to satisfy TDC Local Plan Policy 6 'resilience', having as it does no awareness of the issues in question regarding flooding. There is no consideration of the effects that climate change will have upon the sustainability of this development and the impact that that will have upon the area surrounding the site.

Building materials; sustainability

Beyond a broadly-painted brush-stroke, the application is very short on information as to how the proposed development will satisfy TDC Local Plan policy S1 'Sustainable Development' regarding materials to be used for construction. Nor does it mention subsection i) within this policy – *"if possible, construction and demolition materials are re-used on the site"*

On the site currently remains the old garden centre building; there is no mention within the application of satisfying the above policy in respect of re-using materials from this building.

Retail activities

A major area of concern for how the proposed development will impact upon local amenity is the effect it will have on existing businesses within the village.

Currently within the village we have one Community Shop (general store and Post Office), and two public houses. All three of these offer teas and coffees, whilst the two public houses offer, in addition, a full range of meal options from snacks upwards.

Whilst we believe that a garden centre can only offer a proscribed set of items for sale, and the Community Shop does not sell gardening products, clearly when it comes to passing trade and food & drink options, the proposed development, with its cafe/restaurant, will have an impact on the village's business in this respect.

It is also a fact that modern large-scale 'Garden Centre' seem to be free to sell a very wide range of goods, far beyond those for the garden. The sale of items beyond gardening supplies would impact upon the village's Community Shop.

The application also states that it will be selling garden machinery. This does not seem supportable as there is already a business occupying a location on or near the site selling garden machinery, this being Radmore and Tuckers.

The applicant's supporting statement also fails in that it does not make any mention of an intention to satisfy TDC Local Plan policy S6 regarding the sale of locally-sourced products, nor does it make any mention of ensuring that it will only sell sustainable garden products e.g. peat-free gardening products, sustainably-sourced charcoal etcetera.

Ide Neighbourhood Plan

A neighbourhood plan forms part of the development plan and sits alongside the Local Plan prepared by the local planning authority. Decisions on planning applications will be made using both the Local Plan and the neighbourhood plan (and any other material considerations.)

"Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right

types of development for their community where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.”

This week beginning 23rd of July will see the Ide Neighbourhood Plan going to referendum, amongst the people of Ide, in its final Teignbridge District Council-approved form, where we expect a vote in favour of the plan being “made” as a piece of local planning legislature. Even before this referendum, Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that ‘*a local planning authority must have regard to a post-examination draft neighbourhood development plan, so far as material to the application*’.

The proposed large-scale retail development thus now runs counter to official planning policy, via the aforementioned Ide Neighbourhood Plan, given the site in question alongside the C50:

Policy IDE07 ‘Ide Gateway Enhancement Area’

Proposals for development within the Ide Gateway Enhancement Area (as identified on Map 6) will only be supported if they do not have an adverse impact on the rural character of the Village entrance or its approaches along the C50 (Ide Village Road).

A large-scale retail unit at the location identified **would** have an adverse impact; whilst the proposed development would almost exclusively lie outside the area shown on the Ide Neighbourhood Plan map for the Gateway Enhancement Area, it would adversely impact upon the mapped area, and on the rural character of the village entrance and its approaches along Ide Village Road.

Supporting statement inaccuracies

The document repeatedly (e.g. points 7.1, 7.2, 7.7, 8.15, 8.29, 8.30, 8.34, 8.35 etc etc etc) refers to ‘the existing garden centre’ e.g in terms of current employees, facilities for employees, being a well-used local facility etc etc. However, there is no existing Springwell Nursery or garden centre, and hasn’t been for a number of years.

There is, adjacent to the proposed car park site, an existing business, Radmoe and Tucker’s, occupying a warehouse-style building, but this is not a garden centre but an outlet for horticultural machinery.

Also, point 8.11 of the supporting statement states that 'The provision of the new café will not impact on the adjacent public house'.

There is no public house adjacent to the proposed site.

The supporting statement, upon inspection, seems to have been written some time ago and with a lack of accurate information concerning the site, which invalidates its validity as a reference document.

Pete Bishop,
Chair, Ide Parish Council Planning Committee,
26th July, 2018