

FIRBECK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting of the 12th January 2021 (held remotely via Zoom under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 R4(1))

Present: Cllr C Stanton (Chair), Cllr C Jopling (Vice-Chair); Cllr D Pittard, Cllr J Pittard.
18 members of the public including Alexander Stafford MP

3342 Apologies – To Receive and Approve Reasons for Absence. Nil.

3343 Declarations of Interest. None other than standing interests.

3344 Public Discussion Period.

a. Firbeck Hall. The updated plans for the re-development of Firbeck Hall prompted much comment from the public in attendance. Whilst development of the Hall was supported in principle, issues of concern included (very similar to those raised previously):

- i. Traffic – concerns surrounding the increase in volume, noise and headlights affecting neighbouring properties.
- ii. Water supply – a long-standing concern of capacity which may affect others on the same pipeline.
- iii. The strain on the village and its amenities due to the significant increase on the original application.
- iv. Documentation errors within the application, especially concerning access to the site, a ‘flawed’ traffic management survey and several areas lacking in detail.
- v. Concern over the proposed vehicle access on Lime Avenue, which appears not to have been applied for.
- vi. A lack of awareness in the village of the extended plans as there has been no chance of an ‘open day’ due to the pandemic.

The owner of the development was in attendance and clarified the reason for the extended development was due to the overall cost of the development. The proposed site facilities included in the updated plans were intended for residents only and was hoped would lessen traffic impact on the village by reducing unnecessary journeys.

3345 To Discuss and Agree a Response to Planning Applications RB2020/1819 and RB2020/1824.

A draft response had been prepared by the Chair and circulated to members prior to the meeting. Members reviewed the draft, considering comments raised in the public session. Amendments were agreed and the response was to be submitted to RMBC. The response is attached to these minutes.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8:05pm.

The next meeting of the parish council would be held at 7pm on Wednesday 27th January 2021 online via Zoom.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

Introduction

Firbeck Parish Council (FPC) wishes to make the following comments in relation to planning application numbers RB2020/1819 and RB2020/1824, both of which relate to the proposed major re-development of the Firbeck Hall site.

In addition to discovering from the application form that the applicant had been in pre-application discussions with RMBC (RB2019/1863 submitted 27/11/2019), and that there had been no public consultation, the parish council was dismayed to discover that the applications were for a substantially different development - double the size in terms of the number of households, the type of buildings to be constructed, the target demographic and overall use of the site - from the development for which permission was granted in RB2017/0875 & 0890. The new application seeks to add 40% more households to the Firbeck area rather than the 20% in the previously approved application.

These applications are major applications as defined by Rotherham's Statement of Community involvement 2019 paragraph 38 (below*) and they are not merely a slight modification to existing permissions. Accordingly we feel that RMBC should have advised the applicant to conduct public consultation with the local community and should have required the developer to comply with the best practice advice contained in that statement by submitting a Statement of Community involvement. In this respect it must be noted that the Friends of Firbeck Hall organisation does not claim to be the voice of the community and is known to take a position of impartiality on planning applications.

*[Depending upon the scale, nature and potential impact of the development proposal on the local community, it is advised that developers carry out their own pre-application public consultation. For instance, it is considered best practice that major planning applications be accompanied by their own Statement of Community Involvement. A major planning application is 10 or more dwellings (or a site larger than 0.5 hectares) or 1,000 or more square metres floorspace (or a site larger than 1 hectare).]

FPC has done its best to ensure that residents in our parish and the broader Firbeck community are appraised of the new applications. Our efforts in this regard have been, of course, severely hampered by the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic and we have not been able to undertake anything like the public meetings and discussions we would have organised in normal times.

Nevertheless, it is clear from observations and comments we have received from residents that there is grave concern about the potential impact of the re-development proposed and very cogent arguments have been made to us on material issues concerning the proposals.

Back in 2017 Firbeck Parish Council was, in general, but with some reservations, supportive of restoring Firbeck Hall and bringing it back into use in accordance with approved applications RB2017/0875 and RB2017/0890 as we considered that those plans offered the mix of residential property that would result in new households across the demographic some of which in particular would give a chance of more affordable housing in the village.

Having considered applications RB2020/1819 & 1824 for the new development and taking into account representations made by our residents and others, Firbeck Parish Council objects to the applications which seem to us to run counter to RMBC local plan policies and national planning framework policies and guidance. There are in addition material considerations which render the proposed development unsustainable in this location for reasons including:

- Unsustainable over-development
- Transport

- Water supply
- Impact on local business
- Heritage buildings
- Green belt
- Footpath

1 Unsustainable over-development

1.a. No planning need

FPC would like to point out that RMBC's own strategic assessment of further development within the borough has concluded that there is no planning need for further dwellings in Firbeck over and above the permission presently granted and this is written through into Policy CS1 paragraph 5.2.32 as follows:

Given their size and lack of local facilities, the strategy for villages within Rotherham's Green Belt is not to provide for any further development in these locations except where affordable housing proposals meet the requirements of Policy CS7 Housing Mix and Affordability.

Therefore, any new development would run counter to RMBC policy.

1.b. Unsustainable location for the demographic

The Applicant tries to make an argument that there is little to no provision for the over 55's in the borough, therefore inviting RMBC to conclude that the development would fulfil a planning need.

However, Rotherham's planning policy for Firbeck as a green belt village is **not** to provide for any further development because of the village size and lack of local facilities.

FPC suggests that the lack of local amenities for an over 55 demographic in Firbeck would be sufficient in itself to warrant refusing permission even if the Core Strategy had made a further housing allocation for the village.

Experience tells us that many people actually leave Firbeck as they get older and move to places such as Tickhill principally to access amenities more easily particularly when no longer able to drive. RMBC CS - "As people get older they become more dependent on all elements of mobility creating a greater reliance on demand responsive transport and access to public transport for social amenities."

Policy SP64 states "Residential development should have good access to a range of shops and services. On larger scale residential developments of 10 or more dwellings the majority of homes (minimum of 80%) should be within 800 metres reasonable walking distance (measured from the centre of the site, taking into account barriers such as main roads, rivers and railway lines) via safe pedestrian access of a local convenience shop and a reasonable range of other services or community facilities".

Firbeck has no local shop or services. It is not a location which meets any of the criteria of SP64. The closest facilities are:

- Convenience shop - Langold - no public transport
- Cinema - Worksop - no public transport
- Allotments - Laughton - no public transport

-Museums and art galleries – Rotherham and onwards to Sheffield – five daytime buses out of the village and effectively four back
-Doctors' surgeries - Maltby & Langold - no public transport, Dinnington -Woodsetts - theoretically accessible by bus but reliant on the infrequent bus service to get there and more particularly back.

2 Transport unsustainability

In the Transport statement filed with the 2017 applications, we note that that the then applicant was advised that the site was unsustainable in traffic terms. (see Appendix 1 and the e mail dated 7 January 2016 from Darren Ormshaw of Building Link Design to Barry Roberts of Enzygo fourth paragraph "The site is very unsustainable in land use terms having limited access to very limited public transport and the very few amenities within the village of Firbeck. The development is inevitably going to lead to significant car dependency for the new occupants of the dwellings. That comment was for a development with 33 households rather than the present applications for 62 which will considerably exacerbate the acknowledged unsustainability.

The transport statement supporting the present application is so littered with inaccuracies as to the site and vehicle access / interaction with the highway network as to be totally lacking in any credibility suggesting as it does that a bridle path (Salt Hill) and a private road (Park Hill Drive) are vehicular routes out of the village. It also completely overlooks the small bridge over Firbeck Dyke and the narrow lane from the bridge to the A634 on which it is impossible for two vehicles to pass. This route is the only access to the Village from the A634 and the Parish Council would not wish to widen the lane or bridge for fear of generating further or faster through traffic. Vehicular use of Lime Avenue is something that has not happened for decades, if ever and, if permitted, would be a serious loss of amenity value to residents there.

The village is served poorly by public transport and has no amenities other than the local pub and the village hall. Therefore, the basis of assessment in the present report of the number of car journeys in our opinion does not come close to giving a proper indication of likely number vehicle movements for a population which will have to rely on their own cars.

3 Impact on local business

There are concerns regarding the impact of increased traffic on the safety of horses and riders from a neighbouring livery yard, who must use New Road from the bridge over Firbeck Dyke to the entrance of Firbeck Hall, a road they must use to gain access to bridle paths, and on which the business depends.

4 Water Supply.

Residents of The Yews and others supplied from the same main, already experience water supply issues with the ancient private water main from Lime Avenue which they share with the Firbeck Hall site. They were concerned about the possible effect of 33 residences being added to the system and now face the prospect of a further 29 being added. FPC believes that the provision of a new adopted water main to serve the Firbeck Hall site, the houses just beyond the site and the houses in the Yews is essential.

5 Heritage buildings.

The structure of the hall and stable block appear to have been restored to a very high standard. The proposed construction of an apartment block, containing 32 apartments, is out of character with the historic buildings and damaging to the character of the site. Specifically,

buildings such as the apartment block will affect views of the Hall and possibly be visually dominant. The pool house and spa will also detract from the setting of the Hall in terms of location and siting, form and appearance. The wider effects of the development such as light pollution: noise: traffic movements on site and parking will all have an adverse impact on the environment detracting from the setting of the Hall and therefore run counter to core design principles as well as policies concerning the setting of historic buildings.

References - Rotherham Sites and Policy Document- SP 55 - Design Principles
Historic England - The setting of Heritage Assets - Good practice Advice Note 3 (second edition)

6 Greenbelt.

RMBC Core Strategy - CS1 & 4 recognise Firbeck as a green belt village and the strategy goes on to state that most types of development in the green belt are inappropriate and can only be permitted in very special circumstances. CS paragraph 5.2.78 of that policy acknowledges that National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that most types of development in the Green Belt are inappropriate and can only be permitted in very special circumstances.

Special circumstances would appear to include provision of affordable housing or enabling works to finance conservation of an historic asset. Firbeck Hall being a listed building, the 2017 application was granted on the basis of enabling works to secure the fabric of the Hall and Stables following an independently reviewed financial viability assessment for the original scheme. Now that the Hall and stables have been substantially repaired, we fail to see what grounds there are for this further development much larger in scale and different in terms of use on this green belt site. There appears to have been no appraisal of the scheme to identify any conservation deficit and no new assessment of the viability of the development either continuing under the permission already obtained or for this proposed radical enlargement.

We cannot see how the proposed scheme and how it has been presented in any way adheres to the policies and guidelines for development on green belt.

References Historic England- good practice advice note 4 paragraph 12, 14, 49, and 65.

7 Footpath.

At the 1st November 2016 consultation meeting regarding the earlier applications, parish councillors, mindful of access to the estate lost by villagers in recent years, requested a footpath on the estate and the then developer agreed to consider this. Firbeck Parish Council is keen to secure an agreement with the developers over a public footpath route around the ground of Firbeck Hall connecting Salt Hill to footpath no.9 close to the back gate of Firbeck Hall, similar to that shown in the application, as part of a s.106 agreement and we understand that the applicant is willing to discuss this further with us.

8 Material Considerations

There are many other issues about residents have expressed to us concerns and which amount to which material considerations to be addressed in deciding this application:

Overlooking and loss of privacy - Lime Tree Avenue residents and those at the West Lodge in particular, have concerns citing:

- a) the proposed access to the village from the site
- b) the proposed new main entrance and gates

Noise or disturbance resulting from the pool and spa use, including proposed hours of operation.

Smells and fumes from increased traffic on site and chemical treatment of water for Spa and Pool use.

Light pollution from increased development of site

-signed-

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