



ST CUTHBERT (OUT) PARISH COUNCIL : PLANNING APPLICATION COMMENTS

Application Ref No:	2024/1322/OUT
Address:	Land At 353314 146683, Glencot Road, Wookey Hole, Wells.
Date of response:	21/08/2024

Please explain below the main grounds on which you consider the application should be either refused or approved:			
Material Considerations	approval	neutral	refusal
1. Overshadowing			
Comments:			
2. Overlooking, loss of privacy or overbearing nature of proposal			
Comments:			
3. Design & appearance, impact on public visual amenity			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>a) APPEARANCE: Development would have severe, irreversible impact on AONB and the overall prospect of Wells from all visible directions.</p> <p>b) STATUS: As a site granted 'Green Gap in the Mendip Local Plan 2 this development should not be allowed to proceed as it would severely distort and despoil the view of this area between Wells and Wookey Hole. Somerset Local Plan affords this site protection to ensure space between Wells and surrounding villages, Wookey Hole and Haybridge. EN7 states that 'Development will not be permitted where it will have an adverse impact on the scenic value or integrity defined on the proposals map.'</p> <p>c) OVER-DEVELOPMENT: The visual effect from the south, with other recent developments, would be a sea of roofs stretching to the tree line of Arthurs Point, and ruin the visual splendour of this backdrop to the AONB.</p>			
4. Layout & density of building			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>Both layout and density were considered an inappropriate development so close to the AONB, already swamped with new developments.</p>			
5. Effect on listed buildings and/or conservation areas			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>The development's proximity to the AONB and the site itself would undermine both of these measures which are designed to protect and preserve certain areas from the creep of, and damage from, excessive housing development.</p>			
6. Loss of trees			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>WILDLIFE HAVEN: The development suggests a breach to a mature hedgerow that is over 50 years old, which represents some shelter for large amounts of wildlife and is a feature that is much needed in the light of other destroyed hedges and homes for wildlife in the vicinity.</p>			
7. Loss of ecological habitats			
<p>a) BATS: The presence of a nationally rare greater horseshoe bat population roost in Wookey Hole Caves has been acknowledged (BGS, 2017.) Bats' echolocation instincts require landscape features to access their foraging areas and afford them protection, these being jeopardised by the proposed development. In addition, Bats roost in the nearby quarry and in the old Lime Kilns in Lime Kiln Lane also close to the proposed site. Bats require a 4mile radius from known nesting sites to be able to successfully feed and thrive; this development is less than 2km from their known nests. Light from current developments, let alone further development closer to their roost, is highly likely to impact on their existence.</p> <p>b) NATIVE WILDLIFE: Shelter & food sources of woods around Arthurs Point offers homes and feeding sites to diverse wildlife such as badgers, hedgehogs and wild deer. The surrounding fields then become an animal thoroughfare which is already severely curtailed by developments to the south of Wookey Hole Road.</p>			
8. Access, highways safety or traffic generation			
<p>Comments:</p> <p>a) TRAFFIC VOLUME – the local CSW group have data that prove the applicants' statistics on the volume of traffic are grossly underestimated.</p> <p>b) SAFETY: The width of the Wookey Hole Road where the entrance is proposed is insufficiently wide to cope with current traffic demands.</p>			

c) **TRAFFIC GENERATION:** Wookey Hole Road and Glencot road is used as a rat-run for drivers avoiding the traffic light density on Wells, to get to either Ash Lane & the A39 from Cheddar and the A371, via Haybridge.

9. Inadequate parking & servicing

Comments:

- a) **PARKING:** presence of on-road parking (& site vehicles) on the Wookey Hole Road on the south side by both the Bishops Green and Priory Field developments already leads to regular near misses where vehicles have insufficient space to pass each other and regularly have to cross the road's central white lines
- b) **WIDER PARKING ISSUES:** Wells has a shortage of parking facilities. The introduction of a further 90 dwellings can only exacerbate the parking problems within the city and discourage people from supporting their local high street.
- c) **SEASONAL ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC:** the weight of seasonal tourist traffic going to Wookey Hole Caves, which can reportedly lead to queues from the village tailing back to the proposed site adds to a burgeoning traffic crisis.
- d) **BUS ACCESS:** Existing bus routes do not facilitate people travelling to major employment centres for typical working hours, therefore public transport use is heavily restricted.

10. Noise, smells or disturbance from the scheme

Comments:

NEIGHBOURING BUSINESSES: The site abuts industrial businesses, St Cuthbert's Paper Mill, Station Garage, L A Moore Reclamation and Pyrocore Pyrolysis facility. The local noise and operations of these businesses could be a source of anxiety for residents in the new development as well as building works being a potential disruption to these businesses.

Waste-Water: Water-way pollution due to raw sewage is a hot-button issue at the moment given the high level of "Overflow" that has occurred from waste management companies in the past few years. Higher levels of testing and awareness have revealed how much damage is being done to our rivers by the practice. Installing 78 new houses into the area will overwhelm our already over-taxed pumping and sewage management system and will likely lead to raw sewage making its way into our water-ways. This will create not only a severe public health hazard but will also lead to noxious smells for any properties near our rivers. Combine this with our river's propensity for flooding when heavy rainfall occurs and this will lead to residents being unable to avoid effluent damaging their homes and property.

11. Flood Risk

Comments:

- a) **LYING WATER:** Wookey Hole Road and Glencott Road already have shown to hold flood water on both sides of the road.
- b) **RUN OFF** from the proposed development, the lack of natural absorption opposite in new developments and the impact on houses in these developments would lead to exacerbated flooding and water-lying problems.
- c) **CLIMATE RELATED RAINFALL:** SCO PC has already experienced a huge amount of rainfall in the last few years related to ongoing Climate Change. Every year, this has gotten progressively more common and **surface water flooding** is now a very common occurrence all around our Parish. Given much of the Parish's land is located on topographically low ground, our risk of river flooding due to water washing off of surrounding hills is exceptionally high. This flooding often happens quickly and with little time to prep affected properties. The rivers downstream of the planned development are already very liable to burst their banks when heavy rain occurs and adding a new development will only exacerbate this in addition to the sites risk of surface water flooding.

12. Other reason – please explain

- a) **INFRASTRUCTURE:** is inadequate to support existing developments. Pressure on local services, Transport, Schools, Doctor surgeries and lack of additional parking facilities cited by majority of residents as a severe impediment to people's wellbeing, and not addressed by developers.
 - b) **LOCATION:** this development is wholly within SCOPC. The boundary of Wells City Council is some 500m to the western edge of the site.
 - c) **EMPLOYMENT:** with an absence of job-creation schemes and nearby sources of employment, it was believed that many future residents would be commuters to larger cities and thus damage further what is currently becoming a soulless, transitory environment instead of a community.
 - d) **OVERDEVELOPMENT:** SCOPC has shouldered a disproportionate burden of development and the area along Wookey Hole Road has changed immeasurably.
- Gladman's main contention and is that its proposed site is an extension of Wells and all its references to MDC Local Plan parts 1 and 2 are to sections considering the City of Wells.
- The proposed site is, at its closest more than 500m away from the boundary of Wells. It is firmly within the boundary of the North Ward of St Cuthbert Out PC. Over the past few years, the North Ward has had permissions granted to build:
- a. Wookey Hole Rd
 - i. Thales Site David Wilson 173 homes
 - ii. Bovis Alongside the Thales Site 200 homes
 - b. A371 Portway Persimmon/Taylor Wimpey 220 homes
 - c. B3139 Elm Close Gladman 100 homes.

693 new homes imply a population increase of getting on for 2000 people.

According to the 2011 census, the whole of SCO PC it had a population of 3,749, It is believed that the North Ward had a population of about 1000, implying a planned increase of 200%

The Office of National Statistics predicted in 2016 that the population of the UK was to rise from 65.6 million in 2016 to 72.9 million in 2041, a growth of 11%. It is unreasonable to expect the North Ward to suffer such a disproportionate increase as that that has already been agreed.

This proposal would add another 90 homes and 250 people to that total giving an increase of 225%

Both the MDC Local Plans Part 1 and Part 2 show the proposed site as green gap. LP1 is now over 5 years old so its weighting might be reduced under the latest NPPF but LP2 is about to be accepted so that its weighting should be considerable, as was pointed out at the recent MDC Planning Board when considering the Elm Close Development.

e) **LOCAL PLANS:** Both Parts I and II do not facilitate or allow developments in this area but specifically prohibits it. **(See Local Plan Part two on MDC website)**

f) **CLIMATE EMERGENCY:** With the local political emphasis on this, the development itself, the associated reliance on car journeys and the legacy of non-environmentally progressive housing in neighbouring developments, contravenes this will to thoughtfully address the impact of humans on the environment and nature.

g) **RESIDENT FRUSTRATION:** given the heavy development of recent years, the imminent installation of a pyrolysis plant and disregard of local green spaces, residents were dismayed, distressed and frustrated that there seems no will to protect their community but plenty of will to acquiesce to developers, regardless.

h) **INADEQUATE PUBLIC TRANSPORT LINK:** The location of this site is not serviced by a sporadic bus service and would not allow residents easy access to further transport routes so additional vehicular movements causing additional pollution to the environment.

i) **LACK OF PERSISTENT JOB CREATION:** The stated benefit of job creation will not last beyond the development's construction, meaning the boost to job numbers will be temporary. In turn, the sudden influx of hundreds of new residents will only exacerbate the number of job-seekers in the area and will lead to an increase in mid-to-long distance commuting. This, naturally, will lead to even worse strain on the public transport links in the area and inflate the amount of traffic congestion the area suffers as people utilise cars to get to and from their work.

J) **LACK OF PROPER RADIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT:** Radon gas has been detected on developments in the area in the past which are very close to the planned development. Radon gas presents a real threat to residents with prolonged exposure and no proper Radiological Assessment has been carried out and presented to the Planning Department to detect and manage this public health risk.

13.

There were no justified material planning reasons to recommend refusal.

2. OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

REFUSAL

If the Planning Officer disagrees with the Parish Council recommendations, St Cuthbert (Out) PC insist that the application id deferred to the Planning Board East.