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Jol 19/03416/OUT

Mr & Mrs I M Bissett
Sunnyhurst
Combe Hill
Templecombe
Somerset
BA8 0LL

Mr D Kenyon
South Somerset District Council
Development Management
The Council Offices
Brympton Way
Yeovil
Somerset
BA20 2HT

27 January 2020

RE: APPLICATION NO: 19/03416/OUT – DEVELOPMENT OF LAND AT MANOR FARM, COMBE HILL, TEMPLECOMBE SOMERSET

Dear Mr Kenyon,

I am writing to register our objection to the proposed planning application. The basis of that objection is spelled out in the following paragraphs.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

The assertion that the proposed development will facilitate and encourage safe pedestrian access to existing village facilities is delusional, misleading and fails to acknowledge the limitations imposed by the existing road infrastructure, namely the A357. Considering the 2 proposed pedestrian access points to the development: (PLANS ITB 14408-GA-031 and ITB 14408-GA-019 refer).

East Street: The proposed new footpath accesses East Street, a country lane without any pavement. The subject document includes the provision of 'Pedestrians in Carriageway' signage to mitigate this. However, what this plan fails to recognise is that East Street then joins the A357 at probably one of its most dangerous sections, namely on a blind bend and where the road starts to narrow towards the village centre. There are no footpaths and, due to road width restrictions, no facility to incorporate such. Any resident of the new development who chooses to use this route to access village amenities will therefore have to negotiate a narrow, busy section of the A357, competing with a steady stream of heavy goods vehicles before they reach the sanctuary of a footpath.

Manor Farm Entrance: The development proposes to incorporate a newly-constructed 1.5-metre-wide footpath from the existing Manor Farm entrance along the eastern edge of the A357 to a new pedestrian crossing. The A357 at its narrowest point on this stretch of road is 7.3 metres – this will be physically reduced to 5.8 metres by the introduction of the proposed footpath and realistically to around 5 metres useable road width (allowing 0.4 metre clearance between any vehicle and the road/footpath edge). This is insufficient to allow 2 HGVs of the type that routinely use this stretch of road¹ to safely pass one another. The proposed footpath will also force the re-routing of the road white centre line accentuating the existing bend in the road and further reducing visibility.

The proposed footpath will be bordered on one side by a high stone wall and on the other by oncoming vehicles and HGVs travelling at speeds up to and in excess of 30 MPH whose visibility of

¹ Aggregate, Cement, Steel and Feed lorries, milk and oil tankers, buses, school buses and heavy farm vehicles.

footpath users and oncoming traffic (now unable to pass 2 abreast) is limited by the twists, turns and rises in the A357. This proposed footpath will be a scary and dangerous place to be and an accident waiting to happen.

Of note also is that the Manor Farm pedestrian access is situated at the furthest southern extremity of the village boundary as far as it can be from existing village amenities. For example, a walk to school with children for any parent brave enough to use the proposed footpath will take 20 – 30 minutes. Despite claims to the contrary and noting the dearth of village amenities to walk too, it is difficult to envisage wide scale pedestrian usage to and from this proposed development. Residents of the proposed development will therefore inevitably use their own vehicles to move around Templecombe exacerbating an already congested road infrastructure.

VEHICULAR ACCESS

The only vehicular access to the proposed development is the existing Manor Farm entrance. This junction, situated on the edge of where the speed limit changes from 30 to 60 MPH suffers from poor visibility in both directions due to the twists, turns, rises and falls in the A357 at this point. It is dangerous and unsuitable to be a significant road junction serving a development of 80 houses even before the width of the A357 is further reduced by 1.5 metres to facilitate the proposed footpath (see comments above).

BENEFIT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

The NPPF requires that new housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of the local community. It further states that “limited development should meet local need, support local services and economic activity appropriate to the scale”. This proposed development fails to meet these criteria. This, together with the plethora of other development applications both proposed and approved for Templecombe has the potential to cause irreparable damage to the rural character of the community that it is supposed to benefit.

The Manor Farm development application seems to suggest that it will benefit the local community through supporting local businesses, presumably the Fish & Chip Shop, Coffee Shop and local convenience store (soon to be usurped by branch of Co-Op that has replaced the village Public House). It is argued that any minor benefits to these small businesses will be far outweighed by the detrimental impact of increased demand for school places, already limited medical facilities and inevitable vehicle congestion.

HEELA RECOMMENDATIONS

The HEELA document readily exposed to the public at the SSDC Planning Consultation events during August 2019 included a recommendation that development of the Manor Farm site should not exceed 35 houses “due to conservation issues”. Presumably this SSDC decision was based on some logical and considered ‘big picture’ planning argument that is contravened by the proposed development application, which should be rejected accordingly.

The failure of SSDC to uphold its own planning recommendations might otherwise be construed as weak and rank alongside the accidental, erroneous and some might say ‘convenient’ re-classification of the Manor Farm as a ‘Brownfield site’ in 2017 (a decision that was subsequently reversed only when challenged in 2019).

LAND APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT AND NOT TAKEN UP

The NPPF requires that any new development should meet the local need. This planning criteria is not met. There is no local need for this proposed development in Templecombe as evidenced by the amount of land already approved for development yet not taken up. Of note is the admission by the planning consultants that, following a public consultation event, 75% of residents who attended did not support the proposed Manor Farm development.

DRAINAGE

Proposed drainage arrangements are a significant cause for concern, noting that all surveys were carried out during the course of a hot, dry summer that followed a hot, dry summer the previous year. Findings may not be indicative of a 'worst case' and indeed anyone who has recently walked through the fields to the east of the proposed development will have noticed the standing water sitting on the surface. The developer's findings must be critically and independently reviewed as part of the approval process.

Of note also is the requirement for the proposed on-site drainage system to be managed and maintained, for the life of the development. The proposal seems to suggest that this activity would be undertaken by a management company until responsibility is transferred to SSDC. If responsibility for the conduct of this essential responsibility cannot be enforced, or SSDC are unwilling or unable to take on this responsibility in the future, this planning application must be rejected.

SUMMARY

The proposed Manor Farm development is not needed by the local community, will not benefit it in any way and will irreparably damage the rural character of the village in an area that is widely acknowledged to be of huge historical and archaeological significance. This application contravenes SSDC's own planning recommendations as iterated in the HEELA. The application completely overlooks the dangers and unsuitability of the Manor Farm vehicular access while maintaining the pretence that it will encourage safe pedestrian access and reduce dependency on motor vehicles; it will not. This pretence is undermined by the failure to recognise the limitations and dangers posed by the A357 and the volume of traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles, that daily travel this stretch of road between Henstridge and Wincanton. This planning application must be rejected accordingly.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Ian Bissett
Mrs Bridget Bissett

Copy to:

Right Honourable David Warburton MP