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DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Development Committee held on Thursday, 16 May 2024
in the Council Chamber - Council Offices at 9.30 am

Committee Members Present: Cllr P Heinrich (Chairman) Cllr R Macdonald (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr A Brown Cllr P Fisher
Cllr A Fitch-Tillett Cllr M Hankins
Cllr V Holliday Cllr G Mancini-Boyle
Cllr P Neatherway Cllr J Toye
Cllr A Varley

Substitute Members Present Cllr C Ringer

Officers in Attendance: Development Manager (DM)
Principal Lawyer (PL)
Senior Planning Officer (SPO)
Democratic Services Officer – Governance

Also in attendance: Cllr T FitzPatrick

1 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Batey and Cllr L Vickers.

2 SUBSTITUTES

Cllr C Ringer was present as a substitute for Cllr M Batey.

3 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

5 BARSHAM - PF/23/2569 - ERECTION OF BUILDING TO PROVIDE PADEL TENNIS FACILITY WITH TWO INDOOR COURTS, CHANGING FACILITIES, BAR AND SITTING AREA; CONSTRUCTION OF OUTDOOR COURT AND PARKING AREA AT LAND AT WATERHOUSE FARM, WATERHOUSE, FAKENHAM, NORFOLK NR21 0LA FOR MR M GOODLEY

Officer's report

The SPO introduced the Officer's report and recommendation for approval. She outlined the site location within the wider landscape and proposed site plan, including landscaping, proposed elevations, and images in and around the site. The Case Officer confirmed the key issues for the application and advised that the proposal was recommended for refusal owing to its countryside location,

accessibility, lack of information and justification for farm diversification and, lack of justification of a new tourist attraction in the countryside.

Public speakers

James Goodly – Supporting

The DM recited an additional letter of support received from Mr Stuart Laws – Vice Chairman of the Parish Council. It was noted that the communication was not from the Parish Council itself.

Local Member

The Local Member – Cllr T FitzPatrick – expressed his support for the application which he considered was a much-needed facility. He reflected that farms needed to diversify to survive and considered that family generational farming should be supported through this transition, particularly in this instance which offered an alternative to diversification through holiday accommodation.

The Local Member stated that the facility would be easily walkable from Fakenham and could be easily accessed by vehicles as it was located off the A148. Cllr T FitzPatrick affirmed that there was an ongoing obesity crisis with residents lacking appropriate facilities to exercise in rural communities. He noted that Paddle was the fastest growing sport in the world and was considered to be easy to learn.

Further, the Local Member noted the tremendous support for the proposal from the community as well as from the Leader of the Council. The proposal additionally received support from the local enterprise partnership.

Other Members

The DM recited a letter received from the Leader of the Council, Cllr T Adams, who expressed support for the application. Cllr T Adams considered the application was of some strategic importance as an opportunity to increase sports provision in the district. He recognised it was atypical for the Leader to address the Committee, but considered this application justified communication. He recognised there was a consensus of support from consultees and the community, with no objections received. Further, it was noted that the application received the support of the Economic Growth and Tourism Manager. It was understood that the applicant had secured finance and funding for the application, though this was at risk if the application was refused.

Whilst appreciating the policy considerations outlined by Officers, he considered the material benefits of the scheme justified departure from planning policy on this occasion.

Members debate and discussion

- i. The DM noted Members were asked to consider a number of competing issues. Officers recognised the health and wellbeing benefits of the scheme, but considered these did not outweigh accessibility considerations and issues with accessing the facility on foot, having to cross a busy carriageway. He reflected that the applicant had been asked to explore alternate sites

closer to built settlements, however details provided were considered to be lacking.

- ii. Cllr J Toye expressed support for the proposal and considered the future expansion of Fakenham, improvements to highway networks and reflected on the need for farm diversification.
- iii. Cllr P Neatherway reflected on the erection of a sports centre in Essex which had been a tremendous success. He accepted Officers concerns regarding accessibility and the reliance on car usage, but argued there was a strong need for such a facility for the benefit of younger residents in this area of the district.
- iv. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle echoed support for the application and noted the lack of objection from the Highway Authority.
- v. Cllr C Ringer asked if there was any provision for cycle parking on site, and asked if this could be conditioned. Additionally, was their provision for electric vehicle parking, and could this also be conditioned?
- vi. Cllr A Fitch-Tillett noted Officer concern that children may walk to the site crossing a busy road.
- vii. The DM clarified that the poor pedestrian access to the site would encourage additional vehicle movements, he encouraged enhancements to the scheme to improve accessibility.
- viii. Cllr A Fitch-Tillett recognised the desperate need for health facilities for young people in the district.
- ix. Cllr A Brown was supportive of the purpose of the scheme. He considered the alternate sites identified in the Officer's report and expressed a preference for site 5, however recognised that a pragmatic approach needed to be taken, noting the funding may not be otherwise secured. Cllr A Brown noted access to the site from the road would be primarily to the facility and not the adjacent farm. Further, the expansion of Fakenham would likely result in highway improvements. He reflected there to be a lack of information for the justification farm diversification and for the alternate sites, which made the application more difficult to consider.
- x. Cllr V Holliday expressed her support for exercise, particularly for children, through considered there shouldn't be a reliance on vehicles to access the facility to exercise. She calculated that with hybrid cars and modest usage the facility would generate 1.47 tons of CO₂ a year, resulting in a sustainability issue. Cllr V Holliday asked if the glass could be reduced visible light transmission glass, in aid of dark skies.
- xi. Cllr G Mancini-Boyle reflected that the facility was proposed for that location given the proximity to existing utilities.
- xii. Cllr V Holliday proposed acceptance of the Officer recommendation for refusal. Cllr Fisher seconded the motion.

THE VOTE WAS LOST by 3 votes for and 10 votes against.

- xiii. The DM reflected on the Members debate and noted that Members placed greater weight on the health and wellbeing benefits offered by the scheme, which the Committee considered outweighed accessibility concerns.
- xiv. Cllr A Fitch-Tillett proposed acceptance of the proposal. She considered weight needed to be given to small family farm diversification and the health and wellbeing benefits the proposal would bring, particularly to young people.
- xv. Cllr A Brown seconded the motion. He distinguished approval of this application despite policy constraints was justified as the application site lay in the shadow of the Fakenham extension.
- xvi. Cllr J Toye agreed that the known future expansion of Fakenham provided additional justification for the application in this area. Cllr J Toye endorsed the proposed conditions identified by Cllr C Ringer.

RESOLVED by 11 votes for, 1 against and 1 abstention

That Planning Application PF/23/2569 be approved. Final wording to be delegated to the Assistant Director – Planning.

The meeting ended at 10.17 am.

Chairman