

Whitestone Parish Council - Objection

PLANNING APPLICATION 20/1380/OUT - Land At Redhills, Exwick Lane, Exeter Devon - Outline planning application for up to 80 dwellings and associated infrastructure (All matters reserved except for access) - Revised Scheme.

Whitestone Parish Council strongly object to this proposal for the following reasons:

Firstly it needs to be clearly established that this development proposal would have severe implications for the residents of Nadderwater and Whitestone, this application proposes significant changes to the road network which forms the gateway route to the village.

The plans appear to suggest that the developers propose creating 2 priority traffic areas (i.e. stop or go). One sited opposite Barley Villas and the other will be at the top of Redhills. They will also widen this second section which will necessitate the removal of all the veteran trees from the established hedgerow so as to incorporate a new footpath. This tree lined route from the Edge of Exeter heading into the countryside will be drastically changed and will inevitably cause a build-up of queuing traffic around the St. Peters Mount roundabout, waiting for traffic coming down with a similar occurrence near Barley Villas. This will mean engines running continually polluting a localised area on the edge of our rural village and the air quality will be significantly affected not to mention additional noise nuisance. This will cause traffic chaos especially at peak times and the school run. Due to the steepness and topography of the location, it is realistically anticipated that all movement from the site will be by private car thereby creating a housing development which in the main will be completely car dependent. In this respect there is real concern that Barley Lane could become an even greater rat-run as drivers look for alternative routes in an attempt to avoid an increased bottleneck of traffic up and down Redhills.

This site is located in an area designated the urban fringe of the City and this development would greatly add to the levels of pollution for the area. It is important to note that it also borders the existing Air Quality Management Area boundary for Exeter due to these roads being extremely busy as a major route in and out of the City and notably Station Road which bridges the River Exe and leads to the Red Cow (Exwick) Level Crossing which is designated one of the busiest level crossings in "EUROPE", there are operational red lights and barriers for at least 14 trains per hour and therefore traffic is continually backed up along Station Road. We question how this would fit with Exeter's declared Climate and Environment Emergency strategy?

The Redhills Walk, part of Exeter's Green Circle walking Route crosses the Redhills road to access the Barley Valley Nature Reserve, the brochure boasts; *"This part of the GREEN CIRCLE explores the green areas and viewpoints in Redhills and the western fringes of Exeter. There are one or two steep climbs between the River Exe flood plain, with its allotments and playing fields, and these leafy hills."* On footpath, pavement or quiet road (generally smooth surfaces; occasional kerbs).

Due to the location of this site it is not considered that is viable and able to meet the criteria for a social, economic and sustainable outcome. This area is not readily suited to access via walking or cycling and there is no direct bus route therefore increasing car dependence. The nearest shop would require the use of a car to be able to reach it. It is also important to take into account the change in shopping habits and how shopping on line has increased tremendously which in turn has increased home deliveries significantly, from early morning to late at night, which renders any traffic desk study calculations from existing statistics invalid.

Exeter City council has made a commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030. In this regard they have stated that; A Parks and Greenspace strategy can contribute by:

- Green corridors and safe off-road walking and cycling routes
- Planting to screen from vehicles and airborne pollution
- The management, maintenance and planting of trees, shrubs and grass public greenspaces to absorb carbon dioxide

- **Retention and improvement of greenspace as a haven from traffic.**

In addition, due to this site being on the ridgeline, dark night skies are an extremely important factor, the developers have favoured little lighting, albeit 80 additional houses would light up like a Christmas tree. This goes against the advice from the crime liaison officer who suggests that street lighting is a must thus providing little or no opportunity of dark spots for crime to take place and members of the public to be safe. There appears to be continual conflict within the fanciful ideas presented in the plan to the reality of real life.

Furthermore, there is a complete failure in necessary infrastructure as the NHS have already stated that they do not have the capacity to accommodate this additional burden of 80 families. As Whitestone residents we also access those same medical services in Exwick and it has to be stated that on occasion it is incredibly difficult to get a suitable appointment and that is without adding an additional 80 families. The broader issues relating to the impacts on placements for local schools has to be highlighted as there is no capacity locally for this development and as far as we understand no spare capacity elsewhere in Exeter for the foreseeable future. Many of the children from Whitestone and surrounding area attend Exwick Heights Primary School and travel to other Exeter secondary schools. There is a major concern that this proposed development would cause further issues/hardship for families in the Whitestone Parish on provision for school placements.

If this development is approved there is no guarantee that purchasers will be from within Exeter so the argument that it helps with the local housing crisis is not proven and as a consequence buyers from outside the area will add even further drain on our public services and NHS provision.

If this application at Redhills is approved there is also widespread apprehension that the development at Atwells Farm will then be considered and we have already voiced our concerns regarding this development under the GESP scheme. This area provides the rural backcloth to the City and currently provides the much needed strategic break between the City and countryside, if this is allowed to be destroyed urban sprawl will take hold which in turn limits the ability of natural landscape to capture carbon dioxide and will hinder efforts to become carbon neutral.

Additionally the Exeter local plan has already highlighted that not only is this area extremely important in respects to its distinctive landscape qualities but is also an important wildlife corridor and the natural habitats of the City must be protected along with the fact that the hills to the north and west of the City, particularly the ridgelines, give Exeter a distinctive character. (See 11.7 of the ECC Landscape Policy).

Policy 11.19 There is often a close relationship to be found between the landscape quality of a locality and its wildlife value. This is because wildlife value is intimately linked to habitat type which, in turn, has a major influence upon landscape type.

Any further development in this area will have a severe knock on effect to the village of Whitestone, Nadderwater and Tedburn St Mary. Over the last few years we have repeatedly reported the use of Whitestone Village as a rat run and is already a major cause of concern regarding excessive speeding through the village, for which Councillor Alan Connett has taken our case to DCC Highways.

The following are extracts from the Exeter City Council local plan which are highly significant in the determination of this application.

Exeter City Council LOCAL PLAN STRATEGY

Policy 2.6 This means that, wherever possible, development should take place on previously-developed land within the urban area and particularly within existing centres, where there are local facilities and a choice of transport, and that the opportunities to use means of transport other than the car are enhanced. A reduction in the use of the car is important because of the potential environmental benefits, particularly through improvement in air quality and the conservation of finite fuel resources, and it is important for business through reduced traffic congestion.

Policy 2.11 Key Objectives:

- (vi) to improve the choice of travel mode so that people can walk, cycle or catch public transport, rather than drive, between home and those facilities which they need to visit regularly;
- (vii) to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness through high quality design;
- (viii) to conserve land and energy resources, reduce pollution and noise, protect the natural and built heritage and contribute to the conservation of the abundance and diversity of wildlife and its habitats.

Policy 2.12 Policies AP1 and AP2 provide the basis on which the allocations in the Plan have been made and set out the key tests against which new proposals will be judged.

AP1: DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE DESIGNED AND LOCATED TO RAISE THE QUALITY OF THE URBAN AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND REDUCE THE NEED FOR CAR TRAVEL. PROPOSALS SHOULD BE LOCATED WHERE SAFE AND CONVENIENT ACCESS BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WALKING AND CYCLING IS AVAILABLE OR CAN BE PROVIDED.

AP2: PRIORITY WILL BE GIVEN TO MEETING DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ON PREVIOUSLY-DEVELOPED LAND AND WITHIN EXISTING CENTRES. A SEQUENTIAL APPROACH WILL BE APPLIED TO THE IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF NEW SITES FOR OFFICE, HOUSING (SEE POLICY H1), RETAIL (SEE POLICY S1) AND COMMERCIAL LEISURE USE.

Policy 11.0 LANDSCAPE SETTING AND NATURE CONSERVATION

Objectives:

- to protect the features and characteristics of the countryside which form the setting of the City and which establish its distinctive identity;
- to protect sites and features of nature conservation importance.

Policy 11.1 Exeter is a relatively small City with strong rural connections and a long established character. Out of a total area of 4,718 hectares, approximately half is outside the built-up area. **As the City has grown the establishment of the Valley Parks and protection of the countryside on the urban fringe, through the Local Plan, has effectively integrated the rural setting with the urban area. The hills to the north and west of the City, particularly the ridgelines, give Exeter a distinctive character.**

Policy 11.2 The importance of ecological considerations in the environment is widely recognised. Ecology is concerned with the relationship between the activities of plant and animal life and the interests of man.

As the City expands, the natural habitats of the City must be protected.

Policy 11.4 The Council has carried out a landscape appraisal of all open countryside in and around the City. Based on this appraisal, open land is identified which is to be **protected from development** because of its intrinsic merit and its contribution to the distinctive landscape setting of the City.

Policy 11.5 The continuous nature and sheer size of hills to the north are of major landscape significance, providing the largest and most important part of the landscape setting and containment of the City, which is so essential to its character. The hills extend for 5 kilometres east to west and represent about one eighth of the City Council area outside the urban limit. **Although physically separated, this area continues west of the River Exe Valley to include the hills to the north and west of Exwick.** Together with the lower lying land of the adjoining valleys of the River Exe, Culm and Clyst, the landscape also forms an integral part of the wider rural scene.

Policy 11.7 On the opposite side of the City the land between Cleve House and Whitestone Cross is similarly dominated by a ridgeline that is an integral part of the hilly countryside to the west of Exeter and which forms an attractive rural boundary to the densely developed residential areas.

Policy 11.19 There is often a close relationship to be found between the landscape quality of a locality and its wildlife value. This is because wildlife value is intimately linked to habitat type which, in turn, has a major influence upon landscape type.

Policy 11.34 Particular regard will be given to the protection of wildlife corridors through and around the City and linking areas within the City to the countryside beyond. Wildlife corridors act as routes for animals (mammals, birds, insects) and plants and may provide a valuable role in conserving wildlife in the City. They provide valuable 'highways' to urban areas thus effectively ensuring that several small habitats become one large overall habitat. They may help prevent loss of specialisation and diversity associated with small isolated habitats. They form essential stepping-stones for the dispersal and mixing of genetic diversity.

Policy 11.35 Wildlife corridors are significant on different 'scales' within the City. On a City-wide scale the River Exe and adjoining land either side connects the countryside on the north of Exeter with the marshes and estuary to the south, while sub-links along rivers, streams, their banks and floodplains and green spaces (in a herringbone fashion) allow wildlife to disperse throughout the City. At the other end of the scale a length of hedgerow might be particularly important in allowing wildlife to move from a piece of woodland to an area of residential gardens. Exeter also has several streams which dissect the City. These have existing value and have considerable scope for enhancement.

Policy 11.36 The value of wildlife corridors encompasses more than just the movement of wildlife. They can, and usually are, significant landscape and amenity features in their own right and contribute towards the greening of the City and the quality of life of residents and visitors.

Conclusion

In respect to the foregoing Whitestone Parish Council unanimously object this application and request refusal. It is considered that this will cause harm to the landscape and biodiversity and cause increased traffic congestion and damage to the air quality. It would put additional pressure onto the NHS services and education placements. The plan goes against your published environmental credentials to be carbon neutral and the removal of an established hedgerow with veteran trees is unsustainable. The development only offers a small amount of affordable homes and is not in line with the Liveable Exeter scheme to develop brownfield sites which would reduce the pressure to build on greenfield sites.