

Minutes of an Extra-ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 27th November 2023 in Charvil Village Hall at 8pm

Present Pat Sutlieff, Mike Heath, Isabelle Bray, Narinder Ryatt, Rob Jones, Lee Cripps, and Stephen Lucas

Apologies for Absence

Absent Matt Walker and Jane Hartley

23/8206 Open Forum

Four residents, the planning consultant for Application 232704, and the assistant clerk attended.

One resident came to say that he is not responsible for cutting back the verge outside his home, and that if people were concerned, they should contact the Borough Council. He also wondered whether the increase in heavy lorries could have been a factor in the sinkhole.

The planning consultant then ran through some of the objections that had already been posted on the Wokingham planning portal. She suggested that Charvil was not being treated unfairly because all limited development locations were having to take more homes than in the last Local Plan period, and it was thirty years since Charvil last had a major development. She also stated that the site had been included in both drafts of the Local Plan, and so was clearly regarded as a suitable site by the Borough.

Much has been written about the failure to provide the allotments that were part of the plan for 25 dwellings, but these were withdrawn before that application had been determined because no-one seemed to want them.

There had been issues raised about the effect on the sewerage, and she said that Thames Water would address this.

Some people had suggested that the traffic surveys were done during Covid, but they were done in June 2022.

Others had complained that a crossing on Park Lane was not part of the plan and said this was because there is no suitable location but there would be a pavement on both sides of the road.

Regarding the sinkhole, there is no evidence to suggest development was anything to do with this, but when asked, she did admit that the surveys of the site had not investigated this possibility, and that it may now be necessary to do an extensive ground survey of the site.

She said she understood people's concerns about the lack of GPs and dentists, but this is not something the developers have any control over, and she would happily lobby for their CIL to be spent locally.

23/8207 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cripps stated that he lived close to the site of Application 232704.

23/8208 To consider Planning Application Number 232704, Outline application for the proposed erection of up to 75 dwellings with only access to be considered via Park Lane. All other matters (with appearance, landscaping, layout, and scale to be reserved) on land west of Park Lane, Charvil.

Councillor Jones presented some slides on the geology of Park Lane and explained that the wider area is prone to sinkholes due to the mix of Lambeth Clay and chalk. Surface water tends to look for ways to go through the soil, and where there is disturbance, this can lead to fault lines to the chalk, which can then cause sinkholes. The hole in the car park is the third such hole in a line going across from the application site to the playing fields, and it would be wise to see if sinkholes could appear on the development site. This would not be a reason to refuse development on the site, but the measures that may need to be taken can also cause a raft of problems. He then referenced a similar site in Shiplake that remains unbuilt because the solutions to the sinkhole issues would lead to other unacceptable impacts. In addition, there is a significant likelihood that the suggested SUDS would not work because the water table is so high at the bottom of the site, where they are proposed to go. Councillor Cripps asked whether the HGVs could cause the sinkholes, and Councillor Jones thought this unlikely.

Other issues apart from the sinkhole issue were then raised. The Council accept that homes are necessary, but they need to be the right homes in the right places, and this is not the right place. The level of amenity is poor, and the site is unsustainable in that it will be largely car dependent like the rest of the village. As it is, Charvil already has high car dependency, and this will only add to the already over-burdened local road network, exacerbating the air quality issues in Twyford, and the long queues over Sonning Bridge. There are also inaccuracies around the bus service – there is no Sunday service, and the two buses each hour come within minutes of each other, so in effect it is an hourly service during the day. The traffic survey conducted by the applicant was conducted in 2022, but our own survey from this summer shows a significant increase in traffic at peak times, possibly due to the Elizabeth Line making Twyford a more popular station from which to travel to London. The walking time to the station is also rather optimistic as it takes an adult walking briskly 35 minutes.

The primary school is very close to the site, but is already full, so any school-age children would not be able to get a place, and would have to be driven to other schools – as time goes on, while the children from this development would get places, children in other parts of the village would have to be driven elsewhere – either way, extra car journeys for school traffic would be generated as a result of the extra dwellings.

The closest secondary school is not within catchment, but instead, children would have to negotiate crossing two busy main roads before accessing the route to school – this results in parents driving their children at least part of the way to school – so the extra journeys generated by the development will likely be much higher than estimated in the plan.

Councillor Heath pointed out that the reason the village has not had any major development in recent years was because it is a Limited Development Location – and the last large development was again because the Borough could not show a five-year housing supply.

Councillor Ryatt stated that Park Lane was already at a standstill in the morning, and Councillor Sutlieff was concerned that although the accident data does not show it, the mini roundabout at the end of Park Lane is hazardous.

As far as the application itself is concerned, the issue to be determined at this stage is the access road. This is between the entrance and exit of the primary school, but because the exit is to the left of the access road, all traffic will have to drive past the new access, which is potentially dangerous.

Because of the lack of a pavement on the school side of the road from the East Park Farm roundabout, children will have to cross close to this new road, so with all the extra hazards and lack of a crossing, the children walking to school will be severely impacted. A crossing is necessary but has been expressly excluded from this plan.

The Borough Councillor has asked whether the plan could be paused while geological checks are made.

Councillor Jones thought that this was as much about politics as planning, and as such we should start a petition. It was agreed that this should be done both electronically and in hard copy.

Two residents left at this point, at 8.50pm.

23/8209 To consider and approve appropriate action and costs that have arisen, or are likely to arise from the sinkhole at East Park Farm

The clerk gave an update, that the car park had been surveyed and that the result of this would be sent to Wokingham, but there is no guarantee that this would be shared with the Parish automatically.

There was discussion around whether the Council should survey the tennis courts as well, and this would be decided upon at a later date, but there may be a need to seek legal advice.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9pm

Chairman's Signature