



RADLEY

16 October 2017

Mrs J Dymock
Radley Parish Clerk
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Dear Jane

Radley College - Consultation Response in respect of Second Consultation Draft Neighbourhood Plan

We are writing on behalf of Radley College following the publication of the second consultation draft of the Radley Neighbourhood Plan.

This response accompanies a more technical response being issued by Barton Willmore, on the College's behalf, and follows our response of 8 February 2017 (and Barton Willmore's) in respect of the first draft of the Neighbourhood Plan. We note that some of the points we raised then have not been addressed, and our position on these remains a matter of record. However, we recognise the plan has evolved as a result of consultation and will be the stronger for it, so it is not our intention to repeat feedback made earlier. The focus in this response is therefore to provide input and clarification on particular aspects of the second draft plan where we feel it necessary.

While there are areas of the plan we do not agree with, the College is committed to working with the broader neighbourhood, and residents and communities within it, to ensure good outcomes in the development of Radley Village. As such, we recognise the role the College plays both as a significant landowner and employer. It is important to place on record that we feel our objectives are fully aligned - namely to ensure Radley Village is a thriving and successful village which the community can be proud of, and with the infrastructure to support - and surpass - its needs. At the heart of this, we view the Church, Village Hall and playing fields, station (and other transport links) as well as the Village pub, the Village shop and the College Sports Centre, as component parts of a successful Radley Village. We also support the goals of good design and connectivity, albeit have a different interpretation on the latter, after considering distances and connections in detail, which we comment on below.

Turning to specific areas of the plan where we would wish to make comment...

Village Hall / Gooseacre

We note the plan makes a positioning statement that the Village Hall and playing fields should remain at Gooseacre. This is despite earlier surveys (conducted separately by the College and by the Neighbourhood Planning Group) showing a majority of those expressing a view, supporting the proposal for a relocation adjacent to an enlarged Primary School, with funding freed up to pay for a new Village Hall.

Accordingly, while we are pleased the plan is now open to a possible change of circumstances ("RPC would review this position if there were changed circumstances..."), we are disappointed that it does not show as much flexibility towards this proposal coming forward again at a later date as it could (the requirement for "overwhelming support" being an implausible expectation for change, and not as quantifiable as "majority support"). We note specifically the comment that the Plan considers there would be "little prospect of obtaining planning permission" for the alternate proposal - but query whether advice has been received on this, or whether the point has been tested - given the real possibility we believe of strong support in favour (which addresses the possibility of creating a heart for the village), and the potentially greater funding certainty this would offer.

Notwithstanding the above, if the Village Hall remains at Gooseacre, the College would be happy to work with the Parish Council on future plans. It is our view, however, that any increase in Village Hall footprint and parking area (the need for which is recognised) should not be to the detriment of having full sized playing fields for the community.

Radley Primary School

The plan comments on page 29 that "Radley College have expressed willingness in principle to contribute towards achieving this, including through use of nearby land in their ownership".

For the avoidance of doubt, we would wish to clarify that the College is committed to supporting the growth of the primary school but, as an independent charity with its own charitable objects, the College's ability to support this financially is limited and would be a matter for its trustees. However, as an education provider, and with experience of building design and delivery, we would look to play a role together with other relevant stakeholders, including OCC and the Diocese. We would also note that, in the absence of the College's proposal for the development of Gooseacre being supported, the College has less room for manoeuvre financially beyond meeting its S106 and CIL obligations when the development of Radley North West comes forward.

Radley North West strategic site and Connectivity

The plan refers to concerns around Village connectivity. Specifically on page 17, this is referenced with respect to current development plans and also in the separate section on connectivity on page 44.

As a general comment, the nature of the Village and the way it has evolved is for it not to have a traditional straight spine road (or high street). Thus, Church Road and Foxborough Road effectively form a crescent or arc trajectory, and are also connected by St James Road. Lower Radley meanwhile is not connected save for via the railway bridge. Furthermore, the separate locations of the Village Hall (as it is at present), the Church and adjacent Primary School, and the Station/Bowyers Arms, effectively form three focal points - with the Village shop differently sited again!

If options to relocate any of these key components of a cohesive village are excluded, then the starting point for creating good connectivity is a challenging one. But for residents in much of Radley the distances involved are already far greater than will be delivered in the Radley North West development, given its centrality - indeed having the Church and primary school at one end of this site ensures integration with the Village. While it is reasonable for the Neighbourhood Plan to comment generically on these issues, it is a concern if it goes too far into adopting a position on the planning documents for the Radley North West strategic site. At the date of writing, these are going through the planning process (and the proposed site has followed the set planning parameters). It is reasonable to assume (albeit not certain) that the application will be determined by the Vale before the Neighbourhood Plan is adopted. It would therefore seem unfortunate if the Neighbourhood Plan, as written, then creates contradictions with plans subsequently approved.

While suggestions have been made of creating connections between the North West site and other parts of the Village, it is not clear that residents surrounding these possible connections - possibly in cul de sacs - would embrace them, nor that they would be useful, attractive and well-lit passageways. Also, the distance concerned were there to be a connection to Foxborough Road would be quite significant, and therefore potentially unattractive.

We therefore feel that specific assertions regarding connectivity between the Radley North West strategic site and the Village should be the preserve of the planning process for this site.

Contributions

For the avoidance of doubt, the College will make contributions in line with the requirements of the relevant planning policies. It would not be appropriate for the College to commit to additional contributions, but exceptions would of course be considered on their own merits and should not be assumed.

Cycle Paths

We have previously commented on cycle path strategy, and acknowledge that this is a difficult area to build a reasonable fact base on - the Neighbourhood Plan acknowledges in a number of places that "commuter" cyclists tend to favour roads over paths in a number of instances. Specifically, we would comment, in relation to the diagram on page 42 of the plan that, as a result of the approved application for the Abingdon North strategic site, that there will be investment in delivering Paths F and improving Path D, and, as such, we feel that it would be wrong to promote the possibility of Path E. We are pleased the plan acknowledges our previously raised concerns in any event at the deliverability (on a working farm) of path E, but feel now that this should not be included in the plan.

Other

The plan proposes, on page 17, the development of the Old Coal Yard. This site is in Green Belt and it would seem that this is at odds with the plan's statement and general policy to protect Green Belt around Radley Village. It also seems at odds with statements on connectivity.

We also note the importance, for planning purposes, of being clear on the future location of key sites. Specifically, we understand the possibility of a change in location of the station, and the plan must be flexible to anticipate this in respect of access to the station.

Stakeholder Engagement

We have previously commented on our disappointment at there not being collaborative focus groups with other Village stakeholders. We, however, acknowledge that every effort has been made to ensure that each stakeholder, including the College, has itself had an opportunity to participate bilaterally in the process, and we thank the Neighbourhood Planning Committee for this. We do feel an opportunity may have been missed for this to be more inclusive although are aware of some attempts to address this on specific projects. The College remains ready to engage as appropriate with other stakeholders - bilaterally or multilaterally - on matters raised in the plan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have raised a number of points for the Parish Council to consider - and we hope reflect on - to inform an updated (final?) version of the plan. Beyond that, we look forward to continuing to work with the Parish Council to play our role in supporting the Plan that is ultimately adopted.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Ashton
Bursar



David Anderson
Estates Bursar

Cc John Moule, Warden