

**FORMER GORSTYHILL GOLF CLUB, WYCHWOOD, CHESHIRE**

**HADDON PROPERTY DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED**

**CHESHIRE EAST REF: 14/5671N**

The Borough Council has been consulted by Cheshire East Council on a planning application for outline planning permission for “proposed housing development (approximately 900 new dwellings), together with associated new employment development, a new primary school, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, supporting retail development and the layout of significant areas of new landscaped open space to complement both the new development and the existing Gorstyhill Country Park”

The site is located to the south east of Crewe and to the north of Betley. For development control purposes it is within the open countryside but not within the South Cheshire/ North Staffordshire Green Belt.

The Borough Council has until the 2<sup>nd</sup> April to submit its comments to Cheshire East

**The matter is brought to the Committee as an item of urgency because of the deadline by which the Borough Council must submit its comments**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**To notify Cheshire East Council that whilst the Borough Council does not object to the application it asks that**

- 1. Consideration be given to both the required improvement of the Newcastle Road / Four Lane Ends junction of the A531 with the B5500, and to the potential impact of the development on the wider highway network within the Borough (and that Staffordshire County Council be asked to take this wider impact into account when it responds to Cheshire East)**
- 2. That in the event of planning permission being granted use of the A531, to the south of the access point into the development, by construction-related traffic be prevented by use of either an appropriate condition or planning obligation, in order to protect both highway safety and residential amenity within the villages through which such traffic would otherwise pass**

**Reason for Recommendation**

For the Planning Committee the issue is the impact of the development upon the Borough itself, rather than the wider consideration of the application. Objection to the proposal on the grounds that it would adversely impact upon the regeneration of North Staffordshire is not recommended because your officers do not consider that evidence can be brought to substantiate such a claim. Whilst the highway impact of the proposal on the Newcastle Road/ Four Lane Ends junction appears to have been recognised and changes to the capacity of this junction are proposed, it is important that the impact of the development on the wider network also be considered

**Other Material Considerations include:**

**Emerging Local Plan – Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy**

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy has been submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration by an independent Planning Inspector at an Examination in Public. The Examination has been suspended to allow Cheshire East to consider the Interim findings of the Inspector.

**National Planning Policy**

- National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

**Newcastle-Under-Lyme Planning Policy**

- Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 (CSS):  
Policy SP1: Spatial Principles of Targeted Regeneration

**Applicant/agent's submission:**

The appeal and application material is available to view on the Cheshire East website, using the above reference number

**KEY ISSUES**

As indicated above, the Borough Council has been consulted by Cheshire East Council on an application for outline planning permission for a housing development (approximately 900 new dwellings), together with associated new employment development, a new primary school, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, supporting retail development and the layout of significant areas of new landscaped open space to complement both the new development and the existing Gorstyhill Country Park.

The site lies in very close proximity to, although not quite up to, the Borough's boundary - just to the north of Balterley Heath at the junction of the B5500 (Nantwich Road) with the A531 (Madeley Heath to Weston Road). This junction is known as the "4 Lanes" junction. For development control purposes the site, according to the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan adopted in 2005 lies within the open countryside (albeit in an subject to the previous housing consents, or commitments, that are understood to have now been implemented i.e built out in the form of Wychwood Village and Wychwood Park).

The site surrounds the Gorstyhill Country Park and the development known as Wychwood village. It comprises the former but now closed Gorstyhill Golf Club.

The site is not within the South Cheshire Green Belt although it does border the Green Belt on its south easterly and north easterly sides. Importantly it is not the subject of any other landscape or 'Green Gap or Green Wedge' policy – the existence of which has been of particular importance in the recent dismissal of housing proposals on appeal to the south of Crewe at Gresty and a recent Judicial Review of an Inspector's decision regarding housing development near Nantwich.

Cheshire East is preparing a Local Plan Strategy. Although the application site did feature in the Possible Additional Sites Consultation undertaken by Cheshire East in May 2013 inclusion in that consultation did not mean that Cheshire East supported the development of it. Following that consultation the site was expressly not taken forward by Cheshire East for inclusion in its Core Strategy which has subsequently been submitted for independent examination. As previously reported the examination of that Core Strategy has been suspended, pending further work by Cheshire East Council, which will almost certainly include an acceptance of an increased in the total required housing provision.

Notwithstanding its non-inclusion with the Cheshire East Strategy, a planning application for the development has now been submitted – the basis for the submission being the current inability of Cheshire East to demonstrate a 5 year supply of deliverable housing sites. Recent appeal decisions have established that Cheshire East Council is currently unable to demonstrate a five year supply of housing land, and consequently that policies in the development plan on the supply of housing must be considered to be out-of-date and applications must be decided on the basis of the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Cheshire East accordingly will need to come to a view on whether or not the development constitutes sustainable development, bearing in mind the site's location relative to Crewe and the North Staffordshire conurbation, the content of the proposal with its provision of educational retail and employment elements as well as housing, and the almost entirely residential nature of the existing developments at Wychwood Park and Wychwood Village. This is considered to be a matter for the judgement of that authority and not something upon which the Borough can or should provide an opinion as it is not aware of the facts of the matter. Cheshire East will also have to determine, if they are unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, whether any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the

National Planning Policy Framework as a whole. Again this is a matter for Cheshire East to determine as the Local Planning Authority, not the Borough Council.

In terms of deciding what if any comments the Borough should make upon such a proposal it is suggested that the focus should be on what if any impact the development would have upon the Borough. If there are impacts and these are not capable of being addressed by appropriate conditions, then Cheshire East should be advised of them and asked to take them into account in the above balancing exercise.

The principle issue is whether the Borough has the evidence to substantiate the argument that development of this scale, in close proximity to the borough's boundary would undermine the regeneration of the North Staffordshire conurbation.

Given the strong economic links between this part of Cheshire and North Staffordshire, it has in the past been argued that major residential development in this part of South Cheshire could encourage further out-migration from the North Staffordshire conurbation. Such out-migration in turn could undermine the strategic aim and Policy SP1 of the adopted Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy, detracting from the regeneration of the North Staffordshire housing market and economic base.

Providing substantive evidence to demonstrate this is however very challenging and members need to be aware that whilst the Borough Council together with the City Council have put forward this argument in the past this has met with no success recently. In particular the Councils supported proposals (by Stafford BC) to phase development around Stone on these grounds, but the Councils were not able to convince the Inspector at the Stafford Local Plan Inquiry that there was the evidence to back up the claim (of harm to the regeneration strategy). The Councils' subsequently submitted joint comments in relation to Cheshire East focussed on supporting proposals which sought to limit the scale of development in close proximity to the Cheshire/Staffordshire boundary as opposed to the overall scale of housing, given Cheshire East's Objectively Assessed Needs.

Subsequently the Cheshire East Local Plan Inspector on his interim views on the legal compliance and soundness of the submitted Local Plan Strategy has concluded there is no specific or recent evidence to justify a restriction on housing development in the southern fringe of Cheshire East on the basis of its impact on the regeneration of North Staffordshire. Indeed he concludes that to artificially restrict the supply of new housing risks a mismatch with the economic strategy and the principles of sustainable development, and could undermine the national policy of significantly boosting housing supply.

Your officer's advice accordingly is not to raise an objection on the grounds that the development would undermine the regeneration of the North Staffordshire conurbation

There may however be other cross boundary implications

In particular given the proximity to the Borough it is likely that there will be implications in terms of traffic movements on roads within the Borough. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement, a section of which assesses the likely consequences for roads including ones within the Borough. These pass through villages on their way south eastwards towards Newcastle including Betley and Madeley Heath on the A531 (the Crewe-Newcastle road) and Audley and Bignall End on the B5500, with the B5367 which branches of the Nantwich Road at Shraleay Brook passing through the villages of Halmerend and Alsagers Bank.

The non-technical summary of the Environmental Statement indicates that :-

*"On the basis of the.... approach (agreed in advance with the local highway authority Cheshire East) the transport impacts of the proposed mixed-use development have been considered. The assessment has used robust traffic generation rates for development related traffic and the quantum of development proposed, and demonstrated that the traffic likely to be generated by the development proposals can be accommodated on the local highway network in a safe and satisfactory manner"..... "all hgv construction traffic will use the A531 Newcastle Road and arrive/exit via the A500 to the M6 to the east or via the A51 to the west. A construction management*

*plan setting out construction routes will be developed for the site and is likely to be conditioned should the planning application be granted.....The baseline analysis of the road network in the vicinity of the site has established that the majority of the existing highway network is operating within capacity, other than ... three junctions.....(including) the Newcastle Road/Four Lane Ends priority junction....In order to mitigate the impact of the development at (these) junctions highway improvement schemes are proposed which enable the junction to operate better in capacity terms and environmental terms than the existing arrangements.....Following the development, the analysis of the junctions in the vicinity of the site demonstrates that the proposed development traffic can be accommodated on the local highway network in a safe and satisfactory manner for the agreed assessment year...subject to the proposed mitigation measures”*

Staffordshire County Council as the highway authority for the Borough has now been consulted by Cheshire East Council, but they have not yet provided their comments upon the application although they have confirmed to your officers that they intend to do so within the next couple of weeks. The Borough Council is not the Highway Authority for this area. Your officers have no expertise in the consideration of a Transport Assessment, and accordingly are unable to confirm or dispute the conclusions of the traffic modelling that forms part of the Transport Assessment. However from a discussion with the relevant officer at Staffordshire County Council it is understood that they are unlikely to raise concerns about the conclusions of the traffic modelling that has been undertaken by the developer's highway consultant.

Whilst the identification of the Newcastle Road/ Four Lane Ends junction as one which will require improvement is recognised, it is considered that the Borough should encourage both Cheshire East and Staffordshire County Council to look at the wider highway network within the borough as well. Controls over the routing of the construction traffic that would be likely to be associated with a development of this scale should be sought for both highway and residential amenity reasons, given the potential construction traffic routes pass through various villages.

If the Committee wishes it could set out in its representation any other specific highway related concerns within the Borough that it considers might arise as a consequence of the development, both for Cheshire East to consider as the Local Planning Authority and for Staffordshire County Council to bear in mind when it responds to Cheshire East.

**Date report prepared**

31<sup>st</sup> March 2015