Planning application: 2020/92067

FORMER STILE COMMON INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL, PLANE STREET, NEWSOME, HUDDERSFIELD, HD4 6DF

ERECTION OF 30 DWELLINGS

Dated: August 12, 2020

Introduction

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While this site has a history of an outline plan of 2014, with multiple revisions in 2015, and ultimately left undecided, this is the first application from a new applicant and I comment on it here as such.

I have to note, however, that the key aspect of ground safety to support any housing development on this site, due to a previous colliery in the area, has still not been given the prescribed depth of investigation either hitherto or as part of this application.

There are also complexities with still unsolved feasibility in providing supporting infrastructure, especially effective gravitational land and road drainage and sewerage.

On the basis of the lack of ground investigations beyond the 3.2 metre dig done in support of this application to the recommended borehole depth of 30 metres to evaluate effects of mining activity, I feel it would be unsafe for Kirklees Council to pass any plan for any housing to be constructed on this site before such deep ground investigations are carried out and evaluated.

Furthermore, I feel it would be premature to pass a plan before an effective drainage plan is found that definitely is feasible and effective.

I, nevertheless, try to make in the following pages constructive comments with further detail about a plan which might on a flat earth, with undisturbed ground and adequate infrastructure, have the appearance of being broadly acceptable. I also try to use my knowledge of the area to point out further potential pitfalls.

1. Ignored late-Victorian colliery 330 metres away and lack of deep ground investigations to 30 metres

A very major concern here is that there has still not been done ground investigations to the depth necessary for a location near former mine workings.

This continues to be the case with this application.

To be clear from the outset, this is not just an area where there may have been a coal seam beneath the ground, it is a location where there are clearly evidenced historic colliery workings starting at a colliery less than 330 metres north-north-west of the proposed site.

The desk study supporting this application appears to ignore the existence of the 'Colliery' clearly shown on OS maps published in 1893 and 1907.

However, elsewhere it states:

It is highlighted that there are possible ancient shallow coal mining working within the likely zone of influence on the surface in the vicinity of the property, for which no accurate plans or records exist.

While not mentioning the Colliery, it does mention the air shaft, 220 metres away.

The air shaft position is in alignment between this site and the colliery.

As there was a nearby colliery, it would appear negligent to consider the site suitable for homes when there has still not been done ground investigations to an expected borehole depth of around 30 metres below ground.

The "Phase 2: Site Investigation" survey for the developer seems to have only quickly carried out investigations with a mechanical digger to a stated maximum borehole depth of 3.2 metres below ground.

That 3.2 metre depth appears to pay no regard to the recommendation in "Phase 1: Desk Study - 6.4 Mining Assessment":

"*Given the presence of possible ancient shallow coal mine workings it is recommended that a minimum of three open rotary boreholes are drilled to ca. 30.00mbgl as part of any site investigation for the new development. The boreholes are necessary to investigate potential voids, collapsed workings and possible weak/broken areas of rock due to mine workings underlying the proposed new development."*

This recommendation appears consistent with that of a Kirklees Council structural engineer to the council concerning this site in a published memorandum of 2014 which identified mined coal in the vicinity at depths between 4.6 metres and 21 metres and recommended investigation by rotary core drilling to between 20 metres and 30 metres. It clearly pointed out the risks of "subsidence, mines gas contamination and spontaneous combustion".

The location of the Victorian colliery, which the presence of an air shaft suggests was a drift or underground slope mine, can not be easily identified today. It was at Damside Road, across from the River Colne footbridge, near to the junction of Queens Mill Road and near to where steps lead up to Primrose Hill. The colliery area has since been backfilled and turned to woodland. The Air Shaft position can still be traced as an area with circular subsidence at a corner of the grassed playing field at Primrose Hill.

While records of workings are not easily found for collieries of this period, it is expected there would have been high demand for coal for the textile mills, iron and lead works of the industrial Huddersfield of the period just across the River Colne bridge.

Checking maps for other mineworkings in the Newsome area at the same period, there are two "Old coal shafts" in the same alignment beyond the school site.

In the documents supporting this application, the "Coal Mining Search Report" attached beyond the end of the "Phase 1: Desk Study" it is clearly shown that there have been coal mining subsidence claims within the sphere of influence of this development in Malvern Rise and Stile Common Road. I also have knowledge of cracked walls and local spots of subsidence in Plane Street which have not resulted in such claims.

I feel it would be dangerous to approve this plan or any other house building on this site prior to an adequately deep ground assessment of risks relating to coal mining. There is a clearly identified risk of "subsidence, mines gas contamination and spontaneous combustion". This could affect not only the homes created by the developer but also the homes of residents living nearby.

2. Land drainage uncertainty and gravitational unsuitabilty of 'alternative/fallback' strategy

Another very major issue relating to the suitability of this site for home building is the considerable **run-off water from the hillside.** While the site is deemed not to be a flood risk, this is possibly because very high quantities of water can sometimes run directly off the hillside in heavy rain with potential to then be flowing through and damaging someone else's property or via a footpath. This is particularly the case at the east end of Plane Street where it is proposed to extend the street and make a new surfaced access to the site up the hill. However, the end of Plane Street first slopes downwards some 2 metres from the main section of the street with the only existing drains.

Run-off water from the hillside has been mitigated in recent times by vegetation on site soaking this up, but most of this will be lost through development and the new access would form a course for much run-off.

Also reducing run-off has been the retaining wall of the former school which dams ground water within the site. If lost it is feared the impact on the ground water table could flood or dampen cellars of properties in Plane Street. More on this retaining wall later.

I would consider that a substantial new drainage scheme would be needed to stop run-off water flowing into other property and on to footpaths and roads after development.

If I have correctly read what appears as an inset on a drainage plan, there is put forward a plan to construct off-site pipework all the way to a culvert in Newsome Road "if considered feasible".

I feel that laying proper pipework along this footpathed area of Stile Common would be **the only way** that any adequate system of land drainage could be achieved for this site as planned. This would, of course, need adequate capacity at Newsome Road and reinstatement of the area of the footpath.

An existing small gutter and channel running alongside the footpath is not suitable for any more water. It is often inadequate even for its present purpose. It becomes overgrown and upon going underground near Newsome Road has been known in the past to overspill and flood on to the mini-roundabout junction.

Into new drainage pipework, but not shown on plan, there would also need to be drains to take surface water from the extended Plane Street and the foot of the south-eastern side of the new access.

It is disturbing to read, however, that there is an 'Alternative (Fallback) Surface Water Discharge Strategy', which I feel would not be a reasonable strategy to allow as it would appear that there would not be gravity feed of all run-off water to drains or attenuation tank. The surface of an extended Plane Street would be some 2 metres below the level of the existing end of Plane Street. It would appear that this 'alternative' also closely matches the original intended proposal as discussed with residents when the developer held a consultation meeting.

It would appear the developer plans to stem heavy flow down the upper parts of the access road with an attenuation tank, although ultimately water still has to flow away. I have no experience of the use of attenuation tanks, but would wish to be satisfied that it would not produce the smell of stagnant water, would be buried from view and landscaped and would not begin to leak in future years.

I note also that there is conflict on the plan between the position of the attenuation tank and the retention of the stone boundary wall of the former school.

3. Victorian sewerage needs further investigation

I can only ask the council to carefully verify the existence of the pipe shown on the developer's plan along the length of Plane Street as a sewer that is actually there.

There is notably a lack of any manhole cover markings on the plan and the only visible presence of covers in the street are for a Fire Hydrant.

The sewerage pipe for the existing propererties in Plane Street is across home-owners' rear gardens and not into a pipe in the street. This is wholly inadequate for any further connection from a new development.

I feel that while there is old street drainage along much, but not all, the length of Plane Street, the only current foul water pipe into the street would have been the old pipe of the Victorian school, which would be hardly sufficient to satisfy a development of 30 new houses. I am uncertain of the exact location of the school's pipe, but had been previously been led to believe that it ran to the western end of Plane Street rather than into the eastern end of the street then along its length.

4. Highways and access inadequate for additional traffic

A housing development such as this would generate too much extra traffic for the existing road network, creating also additional unconsidered hazards during the winter months.

It is reached via the existing steep hill entry to Plane Street, which has a blind turn corner and which also becomes impassable at times in winter. Snow and ice sometimes leads to the need for residents to abandon cars at the foot of the slope at Stile Common Road, where there is not space even for existing residents and which is a narrow bus route.

The only access to the site from Plane Street at present is the pedestrian ramp and step access. Plane Street is a quiet and peaceful cul-de-sac with no passing traffic. The access to the original school grounds was from Malvern Rise and is narrow and was only ever likely to suitable for the small number of vehicles needed to service such a use as a school or a similar alternative development with limited vehicle use.

The proposal here is to extend the roadway of Plane Street beyond the school boundary on to a currently unsurfaced area, previously used by residents when garages were available to them. The new access from there would be up a further steep slope, also outside the former school boundary.

The inadequacy of the street drainage proposal for this extended area of Plane Street has already been discussed under Drainage.

The impact of up to 55 cars for which there is space repeatedly passing along Plane Street will have a **severely disturbing impact on peace and sleep** of residents in Plane Street who are used to there being no such passing traffic at all.

The new access hill is likely to be a further trouble spot for ice, particularly if there is not adequate drainage to take away water from all road surfaces.

Ice on the hill could easily cause a sliding collision between vehicles leaving and entering the development and there is also the danger of a slide into a residential property unless an adequate barrier is put in place.

The facility for vehicles to be able to turn without having to enter the development up the hill is a positive step, but for reasons already explained I do not support there being such a new access to the site.

5. Lack of information on boundary wall and elevations

The plans do not appear to provide elevations showing the boundaries of the site including proposals for the existing stone boundary walls with metal railing tops, nor how the existing school gateways, ramps and steps would be treated as part of the development, nor how the proposed attenuation tank would fit into it.

This information is key to the aspect of the development for the residents of Plane Street.

It is also an important consideration in terms of access to properties of the development.

As indicated earlier, it is felt that the school boundary wall has an important part to play in damming ground water. The worry in Plane Street is that any adjustment of the ground water table has the potential to create dampness or flooding of cellars of homes in Plane Street.

A preference here, if developed, would be for the wall and railings to be kept with a screening manageable hedge within its length.

6. Boundary with urban greenspace and

Urban Greenspace adjoining the site is an important hill crest forming part of the view towards Castle Hill from Huddersfield town centre. The adjoining Urban Greenspace is part of the Green Corridor which allows wildlife transit and creates a narrow ring of breathing space between the town centre and districts.

There are mature trees on the southern edge of the site currently shown as dense woodland, which complements the boundary with Urban Greenspace. Together with other trees and vegetation these also absorb run-off water from the hillside. Existing trees are shown as part of the plan for the site and it is felt essential that these existing trees are kept in place.

The proposed three-storey houses at the upper side of the new access may be more visible in the view than if they were two-storey, but are noted from the plan not to reach the highest part of the site with its mature trees.

7. Design and density of houses

The proposed houses have the appearance of adequate standard design if completed in artificial stone consistent with the usual stone colours of the area. However, the plans do not provide any guidance as to whether they will have lasting foundations.

The density of houses appears consistent with town planning standards based solely on size of site, however, in this case there are the additional issues (previously discussed) relating to former mining, the hillside, drainage, sewerage and traffic access.

8. Value of sunlight

The issue of being shaded and denied sunlight to the only sunny aspect of my home obviously presents itself in any development which exceeds the footprint of the original school building. This had playgrounds with no obstructing buildings to both sides,

It also had a playground area in the central frontage towards Plane Street, where the building fell back in a U shape.

As can be seen from the position of the shadow of the school wall and railings on Plane Street on a day in February there is good sunlight across all homes. This could be blocked by buildings created above it.

The current plan improves a little on some plans which have previously been produced for this site in terms of house positioning.

However there remains beyond the upper row of three-storey houses 28 to 30.

While I feel the developer has taken some steps to reduce the perceived impact of overshadowing,

the new houses as a result of the development.

Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction and spelled out in more detail I feel it is unsafe to approve the building of houses on a site not adequately assessed for mining safety, a site for which the feasibility of a difficult drainage scheme remains in the balance, a plan where there are other gaps in information relating to the suitability of the site and where there is potential for damage not just for the houses being developed but also neighbouring properties. While there is clearly attempt here to produce more aesthetically pleasing house design than previously drawn by others for the site, it is disturbing that there are still underlying site issues and that these remain unchecked.

August 12, 2020