

New Works Committee

Report to CCT Council 3rd June 2014

Since the last Council meeting the New Works Committee has met on the 17th April and 8th, 15th and 29th May.

We have commented on an outline application for 120 new dwellings at Saughton camp. (Ref. 14/01219/OUT) This proposal involves building houses on land previously designated in the master plan for a school and employment development.

We objected to this application for the following reasons:

- The site is allocated in the Saughton Camp master plan for a school and employment use. The school has got planning permission and is required to help make the site new settlement of Saughton camp sustainable by providing education and community facilities for the children and residents of the settlement. It is within safe walking distance of all the new housing.
- The employment area will help to provide the opportunity for some jobs for people living in the new settlement thereby reducing travel to other places of work by car. This will also make the area more sustainable.
- The additional housing will not only wipe out any future opportunity for school, community use or employment on the site but also will increase the need for additional journeys to school and work as well as generating additional vehicle journeys in its own right.
- The application to replace the school with housing is in any event premature, as no alternative school site has been granted planning permission. The only alternative proposed is off the B5130 in the Green Belt where there is a presumption against inappropriate development. If permission for housing is granted, then there is no certainty that an alternative school site within easy walking distance of the houses will be available. It will also require children to cross two busy roads to reach the alternative site.
- If a two-form entry school is necessary to serve the wider community then the obvious site is to locate it within the former Saughton Camp site on the land currently allocated for the school plus additional land taken from the employment allocation.

If the Saughton Camp development is ever to succeed as a sustainable extension to the urban area of Chester the site reserved for the school and opportunity for employment development must remain in the long term and not sacrificed to allow more housing in an otherwise unsustainable location.

We also continue to object to inappropriate development for student accommodation. Recently we have objected to the conversion of houses to HMOs at Cheney Road, Catherine Street and Lorne Street primarily on the grounds of loss of family housing, the affect on the residential character of the area and the lack of any policy to guide decision-making.

On the last point we have stated:

'Chester Civic Trust believes, and has stated on numerous occasions, that the lack of explicit policy for student accommodation is creating uncertainty for both the Chester community and for potential developers of student accommodation. Council responses are ad hoc and lack consistency and this leads to blight, controversy and potentially expensive appeals against apparently arbitrary refusals of permission. There are no planning policy criteria to define the appropriate location of both purpose-built and HMO student accommodation; applications are dealt with ad hoc. There has been a failure to implement policies HO16/17 of the 2006 Chester Local Plan concerning HMOs and conversions to student occupation.'

We have been informed that the application for student accommodation on the canal side at Tower Wharf has now gone to appeal, following the refusal by the Planning Committee on 24th January this year.

The committee has also been active in objecting to the loss of trees protected by preservation orders or conservation areas. For example we have been successful in objecting to the felling of an ash tree protected by a TPO at 4 Breton Close where the only problem was that the tree caused overshadowing on a roof where the owner wanted to install solar panels.

Andrew Pannell.