

11 December 2018

2/2018/1590/REM | Erect 211 No. dwellings with garages, parking and associated infrastructure. (Reserved matters application (Phase 1) to determine appearance, landscaping, layout and scale, following grant of Outline Planning Permission No. 2/2015/1935/OUT) | Land South West Of Blandford Forum Bypass Blandford St Mary Dorset

Dear Ms Farnan

I write on behalf of the North Dorset Trailway Network, a charity that campaigns to extend and improve the Trailway in North Dorset as a sustainable transport route and recreation space for local people and tourism, to provide comments in respect of the above application. We have severe concerns in respect of this application, and have to strongly object as set out below.

The Trailway makes such an important contribution to the Blandford area – reducing use of cars into the the town and to school, improving health and well-being, and bringing visitors into the area. The decisions on this site will have a permanent impact on the potential for sustainable transport and well-being and if sustainability is not given more emphasis a massive opportunity for the town will be lost, which could also have a detrimental effect upon the local economy.

The Trailway in its existing sections is in many sections legally a bridleway and is built to bridleway standards. It is therefore used by equestrians in addition to cyclists and pedestrians and mobility scooter users – the application ignores the needs of horse riders as we detail below.

Scheme layout

The North Dorset Trailway Network Trustees are highly disappointed to see the proposed layout of this housing development which makes no allowance to facilitate a 4m wide route to accommodate the Trailway.

The route of the former Somerset and Dorset Railway line runs directly through this site, and there is no reason the Trailway cannot be accommodated on this route. This site forms one of the last remaining missing links between Charlton Marshall and Blandford, and will be an enormous missed opportunity for conveniently linking the town with the surrounding villages. The former trackbed to the south of the site is owned by Dorset County Council, and therefore this site is the only obstacle to a convenient and attractive route between Blandford and the existing Trailway at Ward's Drove without having to travel on a narrow pavement alongside the busy A350.

The proposal for a trackway parallel to the A350 behind a hedge is not acceptable as an option where users will be subject to more traffic noise and pollution. Instead, a route approximately following the old railway would provide a traffic-free bridleway through the new development that would be more valuable to residents and visitors. Close proximity to the A350 will also make the route less attractive and more dangerous for equestrian use.

Furthermore North Dorset's adopted development plan requires this link to be provided:

Criterion R of Policy 16 Blandford of the North Dorset Local Plan Part 1, sets out that in respect of grey infrastructure to support growth at Blandford, this will include:

“the improvement and extension of the North Dorset Trailway along, or close to, the route of the former Somerset and Dorset Railway line for cycling and walking”

The layout as proposed does not facilitate this link and is therefore not in accordance with the development plan, and therefore should be amended to provide it.

Notwithstanding the direct requirement of the development plan, national policy is also clear that sustainable travel must be prioritised. Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018, requires that transport issues are considered from the earliest stages of development proposals, with criterion c) of this policy requiring that *“opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued”*. This proposal has neither identified the opportunity the Trailway presents nor pursued it to enable sustainable travel, and add a premium to the local economy.. Paragraph 108 goes on to state that:

“In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that

- a) **appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be – or have been – taken up**, given the type of development and its location;*
- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users; and*
- c) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree”*

Chapter 6, paragraph 84 of the NPPF states:

*Planning policies and decisions should recognise that **sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport**. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads **and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport)**.*

In respect of criterion a) appropriate opportunities have clearly not been taken up, as the layout does not allow for the Trailway, nor prioritise it through the site away from the busy A350, and therefore the proposed layout is not in accordance with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018.

The provision of this link doesn't necessarily mean the quantum of development has to be reduced, but the distribution of open space can be reconsidered to enable the link to be made. We urge the council and the applicant to ensure appropriate provision of this Trailway link – it can enhance the desirability of the development.

We would also highlight that the **Geotechnical Report** submitted with the outline planning permission (ref: 2/2015/1935/OUT) identified in paragraph 3.3.2 that in relation to the infilled railway cutting *“it may be necessary to design the development layout to avoid structures or settlement sensitive features over the route of the former railway cutting or straddling the*

edge of the infilled cutting. Alternatively deep foundations or ground improvement may be required". Accommodating the Trailway and open space along the former route of the railway would avoid this problem entirely and ultimately deliver a better more attractive development, and presumably save the developer the costs associated with building on infilled materials or removing and replacing them.

Crossing of the A354

Whilst accepting this is outside the remit of this reserved matters application, and largely instead an issue for S278 approval, the proposed crossing of the A354 is entirely inappropriate for users of the Trailway, who will include young children walking to school, including the primary school in Blandford St. Mary. It is regrettable that the option of a bridge or underpass is now out of consideration.

Whilst the applicant contends that the design of this crossing is fixed, it both needs S278 approval separate to the planning permission, and condition 13 of the outline planning permission states that *"A crossing will be provided on the A354, as shown on Drg No AIS61/01/01 Rev 01 (or similar scheme to be agreed with the County Highway Authority)"*. This gives sufficient flexibility for a better scheme to be agreed with the County Council.

It's considered that if the crossing is to be a traffic light controlled crossing, the current proposal for a two stage pelican crossing is entirely unacceptable. It must be a single stage crossing on the desired line to make it direct, convenient, and attractive to use, and consideration given for this to be a Pegasus crossing. All facilities and services for the future residents are the other side of this road and the crossing must be convenient for both future residents and Trailway users.

It's also of concern that the speed limit of the A354 will only be reduced to 50mph. If the traffic lights take a long time to change people take risks and cross before they turn green. It is well known that children have poor perception of speed, and therefore are more at risk. A speed limit of 30mph would both reduce the risk of collisions, and reduce the severity of any collision. The reduction of speed limit, would also introduce the potential for a 'tiger' zebra crossing to be provided closer to the roundabout. This would have the benefit of giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, and allow vehicles to proceed as soon as the crossing is clear instead of waiting for traffic lights to change. It would also replicate the zebra crossing which is to be provided on the Bournemouth Road through developer contributions, to provide a consistent experience for both drivers and pedestrians/cyclists in this area. Consideration could be given to these being on slightly raised tables to ensure traffic is slowed.

With both a two stage crossing and a 50mph limit as currently proposed this is the most hostile environment which is not that desired for the route of the Trailway - it is unacceptable that parents with young children will be stranded in the middle of a road with a 50mph speed limit waiting for the lights to change. It's also unlikely that the refuge area in the centre of the crossing will be large enough for the many cyclists, parents with buggies, walkers, equestrians and runners that use the Trailway every day, and this is a highly concerning safety issue – they should be able to cross in a single stage. This proposal is contrary to paragraph 108 of the NPPF which as set out above requires safe and suitable access to be achieved **for all users**. We support the view of the Dorset County Ranger Graham Stanley that the proposed two-stage crossing will result in large numbers of "people and bikes stacking on the central island" - particularly around the start and finish of the school day. A single Pegasus / equestrian crossing, although marginally more expensive, should be installed.

In conclusion we therefore strongly object on the basis of the proposals put forward, and consider as set out above that the proposed layout has clear conflicts with both local and national policy, and the crossing of the A354 is entirely unacceptable.

We expect NDDC Planning Committee to uphold its own Local Plan and Paragraph 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018, and to take into consideration the application's own Geotechnical Report, rather than approve this flawed application.

A more sensitive development along the lines we suggest could make this an award winning development that the council, the developers and the town can be proud of.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Gerry
Vice Chair