

14th Jan 2020

Attention: Mark Brands
Planning officer Babergh and Mid Suffolk

Planning Application DC/19/05630 Land adjacent to Suffolk Food Hall

Having consulted with the residents, Wherstead Parish Council are objecting to this planning application.

AONB:

The proposed development is situated on Rolling Estate Farmland designated as part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty adjacent to the river Orwell.

The core of the Waterpark development is the creation of a 65 metre by 32 metre lake supporting the installation of an inflatable assault course, including three major obstacles which are five metres in height and will be permanently inflated for six months of each year.

Whilst the assault course obstacles are white and light blue, the customers using them will be required to wear bright orange safety vests, significantly increasing the visual impact of the site when it is in use.

The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, LVIA, acknowledges that the site will have a negative impact on the AONB, and attempts to mitigate this by highlighting the visual influence the A14 and Orwell bridge has on the site, stating the impact from this development is 'dwarfed' by the dominant feature of the Orwell Bridge.

Wherstead PC acknowledge this aspect, but the residents have clearly expressed they believe that the Orwell bridge soars above the landscape in this area and actually 'frames' this part of the AONB, and does not detract from it. Whereas this site with 5 metre high obstacles and close boarded wooden fence interrupts the natural flow of the rolling estate farmland within the AONB.

The National Policy and Planning Framework states in S.172 *Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in ... Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*

The scale and extent of development within these areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused (for major development) other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.

It is the view of Wherstead Parish Council that this proposal, rather than conserve and enhance the beauty of the AONB landscape will have a significant negative impact on it and whilst the creation of this business has some economic benefit, it is neither an 'exceptional circumstance' or in the public interest.

Landscape Visibility and Impact Assessment:

The applicants Zone of Theoretical Visibility assessment has been undertaken using a structure height of 2.5 metres, which Wherstead Parish Council have assumed has been taken from the height of the fixed building. However, for 6 months of the year the site will include multiple 5 metre high structures, which will make a significant difference to the visual impact the installation will have on the site and the AONB.

It is therefore believed that the current Zone of Theoretical Visibility used by the applicant is incorrect and therefore the conclusions drawn by the LVIA, being the visual impact is 'slight/moderate' to 'moderate/slight' with no cumulative landscape visual effect is also incorrect.

Landscape character:

The farmland around Wherstead and the Orwell valley is designated Rolling Estate Farmland and although this application attempts to mitigate its impact on the landscape, by creation of enhanced hedgerows, it never the less interrupts the existing rolling fields; with assault course equipment, buildings, close boarding fencing and car parking for 56 cars.

Sustainability:

The proposed site will remove 4,816 sq metres of Grade 3 'good to moderate' agricultural land from production and as such Wherstead Parish Council believe this application should not be considered sustainable.

Designation in Local Plan:

The site being proposed in this application is within the Food Enterprise Zone, but is not specifically designated for development in the emerging 2019 Joint Local Plan.

Traffic:

Traffic approaching the site from an Ipswich direction on the B1456 has to turn right onto the unadopted road to drive up to the site. This frequently requires vehicles waiting to turn right to wait until a gap appears in the traffic flow from the Shotley direction, meaning the vehicles are stationary on a single carriageway, 60 mph road.

Visibility on this stretch of road is limited as it follows the edge of the river bank and Wherstead Parish Council believe this access has the potential to become an accident site and further traffic should not be permitted until this junction is improved.

Should Babergh Planning decide to consent this application, Wherstead Parish Council request that all of the following concerns and issues be given full consideration:

1) Car Parking:

The car parking associated with the Aqua park is restricted to the six month, summer opening times of the Aqua park.

However, car parking for the adjacent business to the applicant's site; Foodhall, Cook house, Gymnasium and Pilates studio, is obviously insufficient, with a significant amount of parking on the surrounding fields and verges taking place this year.

If this application is consented it would seem logical to allow the car parking associated with the Aqua park to be available for the other businesses when the Aqua park is closed, reducing the growing inappropriate parking and directing it to a dedicated facility.

2) Traffic and site access:

Access of the public highway is from the B1456 onto the unadopted road servicing the current businesses.

Vehicles heading from the Ipswich direction to this area, turning right onto the 'unadopted road' often wait on the carriageway (single lane in each direction), until an opportunity to cross the carriageway becomes available.

To reduce the hazard that stationary, right turning traffic at this junction represents it is requested that consideration be given to:

- extending the 30mph zone from the end of the housing settlement on the Strand, out past the turn onto the unadopted road. This should be applied to both directions of the B1456.
- changing the central road intermittent white line (hazard) to solid white line to prevent overtaking vehicles from the Shotley direction being on the opposite carriageway, overtaking.
- to modifying the B1456 junction with the unadopted road, increasing the width to allow for the creation of a central right hand turn protected lane.

3) Security:

The possibility of this site becoming a 'magnet' for anti-social behaviour is of significant concern for Wherstead Parish Council, particularly as the equipment will be inflated and on site 24/7, even during the hours the site is closed during the summer season.

Wherstead PC understand at the other site run by this company, St Osyth, a system of motion activated cameras combined with an audio feedback channel is employed to provide security which allows the site to be remotely monitored over the internet. This system was initially supplemented with a local manager who could attend to deal with any out of hours incidents.

It is understood that the Wherstead site will just employ a camera and audio system. It would seem sensible that the application confirm that should it become necessary a local manager will be available to assist in managing any out of hours incidents.

Wherstead PC also recommend that The Design Out Crime Police team are fully consulted on all aspects of the site to ensure that the possibility of anti-social behaviour is minimised.

4) Coffee Booth:

The application includes a 'Coffee booth' on site. If this booth provides drinks in disposable cups Wherstead PC would like to ensure that:

- A suitable re-cycling scheme is employed
- The applicant is responsible for ensuring any littering from the booth that is deposited in the close locality (not just within the site) is managed and that they are required to publish and adhere to an agreed plan for this activity.

5) Restoring the site:

In the unforeseen event that the business should cease, Wherstead PC would request that a condition is included that requires the site to be restored to its current state.

Yours faithfully

On behalf of Wherstead Parish Council

Robin Coates
Councillor, Wherstead Parish Council