

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Strategic Planning Committee** held at Meeting Space - Block 1, Floor 2 - County Hall on Tuesday, 1 March 2022 at 4.00 pm.

#### PRESENT

T Thorne (Chair) (in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

C Ball	L Darwin
R Dodd	B Flux
G Hill	JI Hutchinson
J Lang	J Reid
M Robinson	G Stewart
M Swinbank	A Wallace

#### OTHER COUNCILLORS

N Morphet

#### OFFICERS

M Bulman	Solicitor
G Halliday	Consultant Planner
J Hitching	Senior Sustainable Drainage Officer
R Laughton	Planning Officer
L Little	Senior Democratic Services Officer
C Mead	Highways Development Manager
R Murfin	Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services
G Plaice	Senior Environmental Health Officer
Stephenson	Principal Environmental Health Officer

Around 7 members of the press and public were present.

#### 74      **PROCEDURE AT PLANNING COMMITTEES**

The Chair outlined the procedure to be followed at the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### 75      **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Foster, Renner-Thompson and A Watson.

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76 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 1 February 2022, as circulated, were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

77 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Ball advised that she was speaking as the local Ward Councillor on application 20/04423/OUT and would take no further part in the determination of the application.

78 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

79 **20/01107/CCM**

**Extraction of sandstone  
Prudham Quarry, Newbrough, Northumberland**

G Halliday provided a detailed introduction to the application with the aid of a power point presentation. An addendum report was tabled, along with a late representation and response from public protection, with time allowed for Members to read the information. It was confirmed that a copy of the addendum report would be filed with the signed minutes and a copy uploaded to the Council's website. Additional updates were also provided as follows:

- Following the site visit it was suggested that the monitoring report required by condition 21 could be more regular in the early stages of the site's operation and therefore the beginning of condition 21 should be amended to read:-

*A report shall be submitted to the MPA on a monthly basis for the first 12 months after the commencement of extraction and thereafter on an annual basis detailing the results of groundwater monitoring and an assessment as to whether the surface water management scheme has achieved the aims and been effective. The first such report shall be submitted not later than 2 months after the commencement of extraction.....*

- For clarity it was proposed that the beginning of condition 12 was amended as follows:-

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*The total number of heavy goods movements shall not exceed 3 movements into the site and 3 movements from the site on any day .....*

- At the site visit Members also expressed concern that the road between the site entrance and the public highway might be damaged by HGVs and following discussions with the applicant an additional condition is recommended as follows:-

*Prior to the commencement of extraction the access road between the site entrance and the public highway shall be repaired and shall be maintained to the satisfaction of the Mineral Planning Authority for the duration of the development.*

*Reason: In the interests of highway safety in accordance with Policies EP18 and EP19 of the Northumberland Minerals Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.*

R Murfin, Interim Executive Director of Planning and Local Services advised that the previous application had been refused, not as a point of principle, but due to the significant weight placed on the three key statutory consultees' technical objections to the application. Significant work had been undertaken to address these reasons for refusal and protracted dialogue had taken place with consultees. Officers were now satisfied that the application could be recommended for approval and highlighted that all three statutory consultees had now formally withdrawn objections subject to conditions being attached to any permission granted.

Mr D Curry addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. His comments included the following:-

- The last time he had explained his deep concerns about this application, related to a spring at their property 'Woodlands', which was connected to the 'Blue Lagoon'.
- The spring suddenly came to life in 2013, after Border Stone Quarries removed 'sandstone samples' from the site. Groundwater started to emerge from the base of the spoil heaps, and flooded their garage and workshop every subsequent winter. If removal of approximately 20 tonnes of samples caused flooding problems, what would happen if 5,000 tonnes were removed from the same location?
- They had deep concerns about instability in the spoil heaps above their house. Groundwater emerging from the spoil heaps seemed to be related to a large Victorian tunnel, about 15 yards from the spring, this was now buried within the spoil -and no one had any idea what condition this was in.
- The previous application was unanimously refused planning permission. Unusually, the Environment Agency had recommended that permission should be refused, based specifically on the adverse effects on the flow and quality of the spring at Woodlands.
- In respect of the current application, since 2019 new evidence had emerged. He was now even more convinced that this development was fundamentally dangerous. It was discovered that due to a 'survey error' the Blue Lagoon was actually 15m closer to the application area than

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was shown in the original plans. These plans had exaggerated the width of the containment bund for the lagoon. The 1970 Ordnance Survey map attached to the new application showed that the bund did not exist at the time of the survey. This meant that the containment bund for the Blue Lagoon was not solid sandstone, as was claimed by the applicant. In December 2020 the Council commissioned a Stability Assessment from Wardell Armstrong on behalf of the applicant. This advised that removal of sandstone in Phase 1 of the development could cause sufficient groundwater to be released from the Blue Lagoon to have a significant negative impact on the stability of the spoil heaps behind their house, likely to result in “spoil material moving downslope, potentially directly towards and impacting with the Woodlands property”. As well as potential injury and loss of life, this would obviously cause catastrophic flooding. He could not understand how the LPA could receive a report like that and not be deeply concerned about the consequences of approving planning permission.

- On 22 December he wrote to Mr. Murfin asking that paragraph 9.72 of the revised Committee Report should contain Wardell Armstrong’s assessment of the consequences of instability, as well as Wardell Armstrong’s caveat regarding the huge uncertainties in the assessment. This request had been ignored.
- They had now measured the spring flows. On average, 44,000 litres of groundwater from the Blue Lagoon reached their spring every day. Their experience following the removal of samples in 2013 suggested that any increase in these flows would be irreversible.
- There were still huge questions to be answered such as how far west had groundwater from the Blue Lagoon penetrated the waste bund? What were the possible effects of ground vibrations from the use of black powder on groundwater flows? What would be the consequences of groundwater entering the proposed surface water drainage ditch, which would be 1m below the winter level of the Blue Lagoon? No one has addressed these questions.
- The applicant has repeatedly been asked to provide a Flood Risk Assessment for groundwater flooding but had declined to do so. It seemed that the Environment Agency and the LLFA had been focussed on surface water management issues. There had been absolutely no mention of the above issues in their responses.
- Only condition 21 could relate to groundwater flooding, which proposed to send an annual (now monthly) report to the Mineral Planning Authority with fluctuations of the levels in borehole 2. However, data over a 2 year period had shown that there was no correlation between the levels recorded in the borehole and the flows to the Woodlands spring.
- The application was originally in three phases with Phase 3 removed because of concerns about groundwater. Phase 1 had now been removed because of serious safety concerns related to groundwater flooding.
- Paragraph 9.79 stated that the economic and employment benefits were limited.
- The application should be refused permission because it was not in accordance with MIN1 of the Northumberland Local Plan, paragraph i).
- Councillor Gibson was quoted as saying at the last meeting “I’ve walked

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around the quarry a few times, and you come out shaking your head. Really it's just a massive spoil heap. You just have to make one mistake and you could be in real trouble”

Councillor N Morphet addressed the Committee speaking as the local Ward Member. His comments included the following information:-

- He had followed this application for the past year and shared the concerns of many of the residents who were opposed to the application.
- The danger that quarry traffic would pose to pedestrians as it passed through Fourstones. The laden HGVs would descend through Northbank to the crossroads where they would turn left towards Warden. Many residents already felt that Northbank had a road safety problem due to vehicles descending the hill at speed. Although there would be a maximum of 6 HGVs per day he considered this was 6 HGVs that Fourstones and Northbank could do without. If permission was granted could the applicant be asked to make a contribution to road safety in the area?
- He had concerns related to cyclists both those using Hadrian's Cycleway and those on the Fourstones to Warden road. Hadrian's Cycleway was one of the country's most popular long distance cycleways and if this application was granted cyclists would follow the same route as the quarry traffic for one kilometre. Sustrans recently gave this cycleway a very low safety score and this was one of the most dangerous sections without having the extra HGVs on the road.
- The Fourstones to Warden road was even more dangerous for cyclists and the additional traffic would increase the risk. The provision of a cycleway along this route was being considered and if permission was granted then could the applicant be requested to provide a contribution to the feasibility study or even towards its creation?
- He had concerns regarding groundwater flooding and the possibility of this leading to instability of the spoil heaps. Policy WAT1 in the new local plan stated that development should not be supported if it could disrupt groundwater movement and he stated that Members needed to be confident this would not happen.
- That groundwater flooding had occurred at Woodlands Spring soon after the applicant had taken samples should ring alarm bells. They had been told that samples might have been taken below the water table and because condition 20 required excavations about 1m above the water table a repeat occurrence was likely. However there were other mechanisms which might affect the flow of groundwater such as the drainage ditches and pipework across the land which could increase the rate of rain water entering the south pond from where it could enter the groundwater. They had been told that the surface water drainage would mimic natural flow, but how could they be certain of that.
- Mr Curry was very concerned that quarry activity would lead to groundwater flooding and land instability around his property. Mr Curry used to design drainage systems and had a good understanding of drainage and flood risk. Mr Curry had spotted that the width of bund to the southwest of the blue lagoon was too wide on the original plans. Mr Curry had emailed yesterday and had drawn attention to errors he had recently spotted in the plans many with significant implications. He had

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fact checked these points and had found nothing to disagree with. The first point cast doubt that the first collection point would be on sandstone or quarry waste which had implications for land instability risks both at the collection point and in the spoil heaps and could mean that condition 19 became unenforceable. These points deserved to be answered.

- Another concern was that the officer's report stated that the chances of instability in the various areas studied was negligible but did not comment on the severity of the possible consequences of land instability. He had some experience of risk assessments and considered that a good one considered the severity of the consequences as well as the chances of them happening and asked that Members considered this when making their decision.
- Wardle Armstrong had made it very clear that there was uncertainty regarding the relationship between groundwater flow and spoil heap stability and that their conclusions were based on the limited information available and this should also be considered.
- Condition 23 required the operator to commission an independent hydrogeologist to investigate complaints that quarrying activities had affected a private water supply, but there seemed to be some doubt of whether the Woodland spring qualified as a private water supply. If Members decided to grant planning permission he suggested an amendment to condition 23 to make it clear that it covered the Woodland spring as well as other nearby water supplies.

K Wood, agent on behalf of the application addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- This proposal was for sandstone quarry just to the north of Fourstones. As some of you would have seen yesterday the site was within an old quarry void that had been created by previous quarrying in the area.
- This proposed development sought to win the remaining 'lump' of sandstone that projects into this void for use in restoration and construction projects.
- She appreciated that this application had resulted in strong objections from local residents, including Mr Curry who had spoken to you today, and Warden Parish Council. These objections were based on a number of issues and all of these were documented in the report.
- Throughout the planning process the applicant had sought to resolve any technical issues presented to them through the consultation process, and to discuss any identified matters and areas of concerns with the Planning Officer, the Lead Local Flood Area Officer and the Environment Agency. They were now in the position where all of these Officers were satisfied with the proposals subject to the conditions proposed and set out. Their view was that there were no technical grounds for refusing the application.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- This was a very small quarry which would be worked on a "campaign" basis when the applicant had won a contract to supply stone needed for the repair or restoration of a building. When the stone was required the

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quarry would be worked , however there would be corresponding periods where there would be limited or no activity. This was a different operating model to large bulk aggregate or opencast coal sites where frequent, high volume vehicle movements were associated with a rolling production basis.

- The signage in place indicated that there was a blind summit and a minor junction inside a bend and therefore there was currently a junction with the possibility of vehicles coming out. This was acceptable as warning signage to motorists. It effectively raised awareness and to approach it in a manner which was appropriate.
- The reason why a condition was attached in relation to the access road being maintained to a suitable standard was to ensure that vehicles exiting the site and travelling onto the highway network did not bring anything out which would be detrimental to the network or for the vehicles themselves to have driven through potholes which could make them less roadworthy. It was considered there was sufficient protection at that location.
- There was no routing strategy condition however if it was felt that this was necessary due to satellite systems advising of inappropriate routes then this could be discussed with the applicant. It was considered that the route through Fourstones was the safer route.
- The concerns regarding the local roads were acknowledged, however there were no restrictions on these and therefore they could be used by any vehicle at any time. There would a restriction of 3 HGV movements each way per day and therefore it was not expected that any vehicles using the roads would encounter any more than 1 HGV related to the site. It was considered that whilst the additional movements could make the road slightly less safe it was not at a level to be harmful.
- It was not known why the water in the lagoon was blue, however it was different colours at different times of the year and was not always blue, however this was not a unique occurrence and occurred in other parts of the UK on sites associated with former mineral activity.
- It was considered that there was now enough triangulation evidence and that this had been considered in great detail by the consultees. Just because there was still not 100% certainty that there would be no impacts, this was not sufficient or a reasonable reason to refuse an application. In contrast, in 2019 it was not considered that there was sufficient information to make a decision and this view was reflected in the positions of the LLFA, Public Protection and the Environment Agency.
- The Council was being consistent in its approach. During the 2019 Planning Committee meeting it had been made clear that, just as significant weight was placed on the positions of Consultees. The potential absence of consultee objection would need to be afforded significant weight if a new application was to be subsequently made. What gave confidence to the current recommendation was that the application had been subject to an unusually extensive series of technical investigations and dialogue. Additional information had also specifically been requested in response to the objections and comments of local residents.
- The key question now was, any remaining uncertainty now sufficient that a decision could not be made to support the application? The view of

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the statutory consultees was that sufficient information had now been provided, however Members were advised directly that they still could come to the conclusion that, despite the Environment Agency being now satisfied, they wished to refuse the application as they did not consider the site could be worked safely, although this reason for refusal might be difficult to sustain.

- There would be an agreement with the landowner/applicant that the access road would be inspected before Highways before any extraction of the stone from the site was commenced. The access road and track needed to be suitable for use by HG.
- There was no evidence of any issues with HGVs turning west at the junction of the A69. As the junction onto the A69 was designed to a suitable standard it would not be appropriate to ask for all HGVs to turn left and travel to the roundabout to go west. The operation of the junction was suitable to turn right and a restriction could not be made on one operator to prevent this. If it was considered necessary for all HGVs then a Traffic Regulation Order and consultation would be required.
- Whilst wheel washes were required on some larger minerals sites where there were large outputs and high vehicles numbers entering work areas, in this instance vehicles would not be entering the quarry area and any issue could be picked up as part of the site management plan.
- Officers could liaise with the applicant in respect of a contribution to the proposed cycleway if required, however this was a very modest mineral scheme.
- The general principle when looking at bulk mineral sites was to look for the highest reasonable output in the shortest time to reduce impacts on residents. This site would be worked on a campaign basis with the stone being of a very specific type and would be produced for a specific heritage market, therefore it was not possible to state how long it would be required to be operational as this would depend on the contracts won. If the site was fully extracted for example, in 18 months, then the site would need to be completed and restored.
- If there were no operations being undertaken at the site then machinery would be removed. The land was in private ownership and anyone accessing without permission was trespassing. A condition would be attached related to any fencing required and the site would also be subject to legislation from both Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency to ensure that the site was run safely.
- There were maximum weight limits for HGV and mechanisms were in place should vehicles need to attend a weighbridge. The access was a private road and conditions would ensure sufficient maintenance. Concerns were understood regarding the wider road network, but these were publicly maintained and did not have any restrictions on their use by HGVs. A log would be kept of vehicles accessing the site which would be available for inspection.
- All types of vehicles travelled through Fourstones already and the impact of the 3 extra vehicles per day would not have an unacceptable impact even if vehicles travelling in the opposite direction had to stop. Pedestrians and Cyclists now had priority over other road users and if the HGVs had to wait to pass then they would need to do so.
- Officers had taken a balanced view in coming to their decision to

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recommend approval of the application with the technical concerns having been addressed.

- The Director of Planning added finally that, having listened to questions and issues raised, Members could reflect their concerns in a refusal based upon technical uncertainty of stability/hydrogeological issues and HGV impact on local roads. He added that while this was clearly a locally controversial scheme that officers had carried out extensive work on the application and were now satisfied that it was suitable for a decision to approve, subject to the amended conditions.

Councillor Robinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report subject to the referral to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the satisfactory conclusion of a Section 59 agreement and conditions outlined and as amended above and with the additional condition regarding repair and maintenance of the road from the public highway to the site entrance with the exact wording to be delegated to the Director of Planning in conjunction with Chair. This was seconded by Councillor Stewart.

Members considered that the application was for the re-opening of a very small portion of a former stone quarry for a small amount of stone to be made available for the maintenance and restoration of large buildings some of which would be in conservation areas where the Local Planning Authority insisted this type of material be used. A lot of work had been undertaken to ensure the safety and protection of neighbours. A vote was taken on the motion to approve as follows:- FOR 11; AGAINST 2; ABSTENSIONS 0.

**RESOLVED** that the application be **GRANTED** permission subject to:

(a) the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, following referral of the application, confirming that he does not wish to call in the application for determination;

(b) the satisfactory conclusion of a Section 59 agreement for the repair of any damage to the highway resulting from the quarry operation; and

(d) the conditions as outlined in the report as amended as follows:

*Condition 12 – The total number of heavy goods movements shall not exceed 3 movements into the site and 3 movements from the site on any day .....*

*Condition 21 – A report shall be submitted to the Mineral Planning Authority on a monthly basis for the first 12 months after the commencement of extraction and thereafter on an annual basis detailing the results of groundwater monitoring and an assessment as to whether the surface water management scheme has achieved the aims and been effective. The first such report shall be submitted not later than 2 months after the commencement of extraction .....*

(e) An additional condition to be added regarding repair and maintenance of the road from the public highway to the site entrance with the exact wording to be delegated to the Director of Planning in conjunction with Chair.

**Construction of a two-platform railway station including: pedestrian lifts, stepped pedestrian access, new highway accesses; construction of overbridge to carry diverted A1061 with shared footway and cycleway. Modifications to existing highways including new roundabouts and realignment of local roads and construction of new access roads from the highway; provision of parking for buses, cars, electric vehicles, motorcycles, cycles, and taxis; works to of public rights of way. Construction of facilities ancillary to the station including, lighting, soft and hard landscaping, surface and subsurface drainage, utilities and other services, boundary treatment and other associated works  
Land South of The A1061, South Newsham Road, Blyth, Northumberland**

G Halliday, Consultant Planner provided a comprehensive introduction to the application with the aid of a power point presentation, including visualisations of the proposed station.

A Healey, Planning Consultant, addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- This application was one of six new stations proposed as part of plans to reintroduce passenger services between Newcastle and Ashington and the final station to be heard by this Committee.
- The application had been the subject of extensive consultations with officers and other stakeholders both before and after the planning submission.
- The proposals had also been the subject of a significant public consultation exercise, whereupon several hundred people wrote to support the overall Northumberland Line scheme with 206 representations specifically supporting the proposals at Newsham. Such support confirmed there was a significant public interest in the development of a new railway station at Newsham.
- The applicant recognised concerns raised by residents in relation to the impact of the proposals on the existing on-street parking arrangement and to address these the submitted proposals sought to safeguard and formalise the existing arrangement. The area proposed to be formalised had been maximised within the constraints of the site and the report confirmed that the Highways Authority supported this provision in order to improve road safety for road users accessing the station.
- The introduction of passenger trains onto the railway line would increase the frequency of closures and risk of accidents at level crossings. At Newsham a risk assessment undertaken by Network Rail concluded that the closure of the level crossing was the safest intervention. The proposed bridge provided a diversion which would remove the delays associated with queuing at a level crossing, whilst improving safety for road users and meeting the relevant industry safety requirements. The proposals had been thoroughly assessed by Highways Officers who had confirmed the proposals were appropriate, subject to the imposition of conditions.
- The submitted documents provided a robust case demonstrating the application was in accordance with relevant planning policies. Policies

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both within the adopted Blyth Valley Local Plan and emerging Northumberland Local Plan identified Newsham as a safeguarded location for a future railway station.

- The proposed development was considered appropriate development within the Green Belt in accordance with relevant local and national planning policies.
- The station and wider scheme would deliver the transport infrastructure which was required to attract inward investment into Blyth and South East Northumberland. The proposed railway station would support Blyth's role as a key employment site and aspirations for economic growth Blyth and the South East of the County.
- The station was sustainable development which both national and local planning policies confirmed should be supported. When balancing the objections made to the applications against the significant economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme, it was believed that the application should be approved.
- The application had been thoroughly assessed by planning, highways and other local authority officers with no material planning considerations to indicate permission should not be granted. Members were asked to approve the application.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- There would be a 3m wide shared cycleway/footpath provided.
- It would be up to Network Rail to protect the line and provide and manage any fencing solution.
- The existing road would terminate and there would no longer be a railway crossing once the new road was completed and brought into use, but no phasing plan had been seen yet.
- There would be a variety of tree planting and other types of landscaping provided around the car parks and whilst not all areas would be fenced there would be safety fencing in places. The possibility of linking existing Public Right of Ways into new footpaths being provided around the ponds was also to be explored. Condition 9 advised that details of a scheme for biodiversity net gain was to be submitted and agreed by the Local Planning Authority before the development commenced.
- The implications for utility connections would be considered as part of the development proposals and if the existing telecoms mast was required to be moved or replaced this would be covered by the scheme.
- Enabling work would start immediately if the application was granted with the whole scheme expected to take approximately 19 months for completion. This was the largest part of the overall scheme due to the need for the realignment of the road.
- Consultation would be undertaken with the Town Council in relation to the existing signage on the roundabout and their views taken into account.
- It was expected that the catchment area for the station would be the South Beach/Newsham and southern areas of Blyth along with villages to the South. The northern part of Blyth would be served by the Bebside station. Car park modelling had been based on these assumptions.

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Councillor Flux proposed acceptance of the recommendation to approve the application as outlined in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson. Whilst Councillor Reid advised that he would not be supporting the application, Councillor Flux in summing up stated that this would be transformative for residents. A vote was taken on the proposal to approve the application as follows:- FOR 12; AGAINST 0; ABSTENSIONS 1.

**RESOLVED** that the application be **GRANTED** for the reasons and subject to the conditions as outlined in the report.

## 81 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

During consideration of the next application, it was proposed by Councillor Hutchinson and seconded by Councillor Stewart and agreed that, as the time was approaching 6 pm that Standing Orders should be suspended to allow the meeting to continue.

**RESOLVED** that Standing Orders be suspended.

## 82 **20/04423/OUT**

**Outline application seeking approval for access for construction of two storey 58 bed care home and associated but physically separate single storey 12 bedroom specialist unit with associated parking and hard and soft landscaping  
Essendene, Kenilworth Road, Ashington, Northumberland  
NE63 8AR**

R Laughton, Senior Planning Officer introduced the application to the Committee with the aid of a power point presentation. Updates were provided as follows:-

- A late representation had been submitted by Northumberland County Council Adult Services who objected to the scheme and had raised issues with the report where it claimed there was an identified need in the area and in particular highlighted paragraph 7.2. They stated “Although there was a need for independent supported living in the area for young adults with learning disabilities and potentially, although not yet identified need, for accommodation for older adults, there was no demonstrated need for residential care homes in the area. The vacancy levels for the sector in the area were still high and data showed that the demand for institutional accommodation has remained flat over the preceding 5 years, while demand for care home and independent supported living had increased, suggesting substitution in the market. This data was supported by a report produced on the residential care home market. There was land that could potentially be utilised for this type of accommodation, however there was no current demand and it was anticipated that choice in the future would remain for independent living. Any new facility could potentially de-stabilise the current market and prevent users going to existing facilities and leading to their closures. At this time we would not support any application for residential or nursing care home in the area.

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- A further objection received from a local resident raised concerns regarding the possibility of a care home being built on the site which had been earmarked for the extension to the car park for the station as the current levels of car parking were insufficient to sustain any increase in traffic and growth of Ashington. The car park was essential to the smooth running of the station and was the only viable option for the public to continue to use Ashington's facilities.
- The reference to Policy TRA5 should be removed from refusal reason 1 as the policy had not been fully adopted and the plan can only be afforded limited weight.

R Murfin, Interim Executive Director advised that whilst multiple applications for a site was not a material consideration, these circumstances were different. Whilst the Local Planning Authority was not there to stifle competition, there was an issue as this site was protected by policy and this had been a deliberate step taken to safeguard the land for the opening of the Northumberland Line, therefore the normal general approach did not come into play.

Councillor C Ball addressed the Committee speaking as the local Ward Member. Her comments included the following:--

- She had been shocked, surprised and disappointed to see this application on the agenda.
- She was 100% against anything that would stop the development or stood in the way of the reopening of the Northumberland Line, but asked if this application be anything but approved if it was not ear marked for car parking for the new station.
- This application was for a state of the art care home on a site of a former care home which would create jobs and specialist care. The County had an aging population and a need for this kind of facility and this would not have been recommended for refusal in any other circumstances.
- She believed it was a failure that this application was before the Committee when spades in the ground were expected within a matter of weeks and everyone who sat on the Committee had been put in a difficult position to decide the fate of the project and an application that they would normally be asked to support.
- She was saddened that this situation had not been settled before today as she could not see how anyone could refuse this application and hope that any decision made did not have a knock on effect to the future opening of the trainline or any delay due to any appeal process.

Councillor Ball took no further part in the determination of this application.

In response to questions from Members of the Committee, the following information was provided:-

- Any person could submit a planning application for any land at any time and a would require a decision to be made. All decisions made were on policy grounds.
- In respect of the chronology of the two applications being submitted, the context was that the consultation and discussions about the location for

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the station were taking place when this application was made, but Members were asked to not put any weight on this chronology. The application had not been straightforward and in this instance the site had not been allocated for any particular use in the existing development plans. There had been delays in agreeing technical issues on this application and there was now a clear intention of the use of the site and more weight could now be given to the safeguarding policy as the Northumberland Local Plan became nearer to adoption.

- The safeguarding in this instance was an unusual policy and different to more generic policies such as development in the green belt where compliance would be weighed up against other considerations. This site was the subject of specific safeguarding policy both in the Wansbeck Local Plan and the Northumberland Local Plan in respect of this piece of land. As the application would fail at the first reason for refusal, it was not reasonable to push the applicant to incur costs in providing the information which was required in the second reason for refusal.
- Further clarification was provided on the timeline for the submission of adequate information related to highways. This application was validated on the 15.2.21 and Highways issued their response on the 15.3.21 requesting further details and no further submissions in respect of this application were received until October 2021 which followed this Committee's decision on the station application in September 2021. There had been no work done specifically in relation to this site with information submitted being carried out for a different site.
- Whilst the Adult Services response had advised that there was no requirement for this type of provision, this would not have been a reason for refusal and the information had been provided for transparency reasons.
- All applications had the right of appeal.

Councillor Hutchinson proposed acceptance of the recommendation to refuse the application for the reasons as outlined in the report which was seconded by Councillor Flux. A vote was on the proposal to refuse as follows:- FOR 10: AGAINST 0; ABSTENSIONS 2.

Councillor Ball re-joined the meeting.

83 **APPEALS UPDATE**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

84 **S106 AGREEMENTS UPDATE REPORT**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**CHAIR.....**

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