

Woodchurch Parish Council objects to the Reserved Matters application by CALA Homes for 42 dwellings with associated landscaping, roads layout and other facilities and infrastructure off Front Road, Woodchurch (ref NOT/2023/2160)

The objections are as follows

Scale and Layout

i) Scale

The Parish Council considers that the height, width and length of buildings proposed within the development, principally those immediately facing Front Road, is not relative to its surroundings. At the northern end of the site (adjacent to 82, Front Road) the field is already 2m above Front Road such that the proposal to build tall and substantial market homes not only results in an unsightly block that is out of keeping with the street scene in that part of Front Road, but also blocks the vistas from Front Road to the rear of the site which, for the Parish Council and Woodchurch residents, helps to maintain the rural sense of place in the gateway to the Woodchurch Conservation Area

ii) Layout

The Parish Council considers that whilst the proposed buildings, routes and open spaces within the development are generally in relation to each other, they fail to adequately reflect the space outside the development. We understand that Planning Orders require developers to consider the external impact as much as the internal layout. The proposed buildings are of bland design and atypical of the individuality of the buildings, both old and modern, situated closest to the site. It would appear the developer has concentrated on the internal layout but given little thought to its external impact.

b) Housing Need in Woodchurch

With an elderly population double that of the three other parishes in the Weald South Ward and a relatively low 30-40 year old demographic, the demand in Woodchurch is primarily for 2-3 bed homes and, as pointed out to the developers by visitors to the pre application consultation, demand also exists for single storey accommodation**

** A recent village survey conducted by the Parish Council in December 2023 has confirmed the demand for smaller accommodation whilst 9% of Woodchurch's elderly population have said they would want to downsize in to smaller and/or single storey accommodation if dwellings were available.

The Parish Council is disappointed that the developer did not listen and has not only produced a plan that does not reflect the need in the village, but has argued that single storey car ports satisfy the requirements for a mix of two and single storey buildings on this site.

The Parish Council is not questioning the housing mix per se, but would argue that a more appropriate mix could have been achieved if a higher number of smaller/single storey dwellings which reflect the true need in the village from both younger and elderly residents had been incorporated in the plans. More 4/5 bedroom homes which can only add to the existing tenure imbalance in the village are not a priority for Woodchurch according to our residents.

c) Ongoing Issues with Flooding in the village

Also a key feature of the pre application consultation, the developer was made aware of the strength of feeling about the constant flooding which affects Appledore Road, Lower Road and parts of Front Road and the fact that Southern Water has not acted on plans it proposed over 10 years ago to replace 560 metres of the sewer in Front Road with one double its circumference. Residents in Appledore Road now regularly need to pump waste away at their own expense in to the nearby freshwater stream to prevent flooding in their homes and gardens.

The Parish Council notes that CALA Homes has discussed this issue with Southern Water but no firm commitment has been made to improve the flooding situation by either party. Consequently, the Parish Council supports the view proposed by some residents that since a deadlock exists, a Grampian Clause is introduced in any conditions requiring that the sewer is replaced as promised and improvements made to the sewerage infrastructure if necessary, before any building works are commenced.

d) Loss of Residential Amenity

It is noted that several of the proposed properties on the northernmost border overlook the garden and property at 82, Front Road. This is simply unacceptable. The design should be reviewed to ensure the privacy of the residents of 82, Front Road and to avoid the loss of the residential amenity which they have enjoyed since moving to the village.

e) Other matters

i) The entrance to the development

The Parish Council is aware that the positioning of the access to the development has been described as the "least worst" option on what is a difficult bend in the road. With potential for an additional three hundred traffic movements a day from that point it is not ideal, especially given the speed that some vehicles travel.

In the recent Village survey residents cited speeding as a key highways issue for the village which is at odds with the speeding survey undertaken by consultants for the developer. The Parish Council is averse to any form of urbanisation but feels that in the interests of safety, especially for parents negotiating Front Road en route to and from school with their children, it would suggest that the developer is required to introduce a form of traffic calming that is acceptable to residents of the Parish.

ii) The Path and Cycle Access Point adjacent to 82 Front Road

The call for traffic calming is made greater by the proposed location of the path/cycle entry point to Front Road close to the boundary of 82 Front Road. As already explained the land there sits well above the level of Front Road. Unless that is amended, it would form a potentially dangerous 2 metre slope down from the development onto Front Road for children on cycles or for those walking in slippery conditions. It is unclear if Planning Officers have visited the site and are aware of the difference in levels and the potential dangers that creates.

iii) The potential loss of the ancient Hedge

It is unclear how much of the ancient hedge that sits alongside Front Road, will be removed by the developer to achieve their plan. The hedge is as much a feature of the street scene as it is a natural habitat for wildlife.

Its part removal will not only impact on the natural environment but also open up views of up to six, imposing, 4/5 bedroom homes which the Parish Council considers are superfluous, out of keeping with the symmetry and rhythm of the current street scene and the layout of the space outside the development. It would also constitute an erosion of the rural sense of place.