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Mr M. Melville
Development Control
Wokingham Borough Council

16th February 2015

Dear Matthew,

Application Number O/2014/2280
Arborfield Garrison & Adjoining Land – revised & additional details

Barkham Parish Council Position Statement

The following observations supplement our previous response dated 5 December 2014.

1. Transport Assessment.

AGLC dispute our figures on trip rates. For information, our estimate was based on a survey carried out at Penrose Park. The base traffic numbers are similar to the AGLC survey: it is the question of how the numbers are manipulated that is the problem (see appendix 1 of BPC response dated 5 Dec 2014).

There is little point in getting into a protracted argument at this stage. More to the point, BPC would like to highlight that several junctions in the area are already at capacity, including Arborfield Cross, Langley Common Road/Biggs lane, Barkham Bull and Barkham Road/Bearwood Road and also Barkham Bridge. This is endorsed by WBC in supporting information provided in the planning application for the new secondary school (see planning application F/2015/0001 Transport Statement figure 8).

This means that it is unrealistic to expect additional capacity to become available through Barkham. Consequently AGLC must work with WBC to develop a long term strategy to route traffic to and through the corridor that runs between M4 junctions 10 and 11: this corridor includes major employment areas at Winnersh Triangle and Green Park and is the access point for the M4 east and westbound, while the M4 is being presumably to increase capacity. This corridor is likely to be destination or transit stage for around 50% of employment traffic* and it is quite possible that this share as will increase as Winnersh Triangle and Green Park expand and as the M4 will be modified as a “smart motorway” – presumably to increase capacity.

* Figure based on Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan Survey, carried out in September 2012 and reflects residents with place of work in Reading, Windsor & Maidenhead, Slough, Oxfordshire, Winnersh, West Berkshire and a proportion in London and “Elsewhere”.

2. Biggs Lane junction.

The Langley Common Road / Baird Road junction proposals are discussed in the Transport Addendum AGLC/HPA/DOC/9/Addendum Section 4.2 and the proposed layout is shown in shown in Appendix I1 as drawing No. ITB9092-GA. A "Potential Mitigation Scheme along Langley Common Road" is shown in Drawing No. ITB9092-GA-009 in the same Appendix.

The proposals appear to take no account of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road, this was perhaps excusable for the original application since the proposals for the relief road were in an early stage of development when it was submitted. WBC's preferred location of the southern roundabout between the Langley Common roundabout and the Poppyfields roundabout was made public in November 2014. It was clearly known to AGLC as its route is shown on page 13 of the Executive Summary, but it does not appear in other key documents, such as the illustrative master plan (Design and Access Statement AGLC/HPA/DOC/2 Revision A – page 81). It seems odd that AGLC seem rather schizophrenic about whether or not to reflect the relief road in their plans.

The new proposals for the junction may represent some improvement on the earlier ones. However it still does nothing to discourage vehicles from the AGLC site choosing to travel via Langley Common Road and Bearwood Road towards Winnersh Triangle or M4 Eastbound, rather than taking a route via the Relief Road.

The design of the road layout in the area needs to be a solution that integrates the junctions at Biggs Lane, Eversley Road (the existing Bramshill Hunt roundabout) and the southern end of the relief road. The design needs to maximise the proportion of SDL traffic using the relief road and minimising the proportion using Langley Common Road and passing through Arborfield Cross. Whether or not sections of Baird Road should be closed, and possible design elements elsewhere in the SDL, for example traffic calming near the proposed primary school adjacent to Biggs Lane, may also be significant.

BPC is not yet convinced that a properly integrated scheme has been prepared. A layout that includes a succession of five roundabouts within a mile, (running from the Biggs Lane junction to the western gateway on the A327) does not seem entirely well thought out. It should be noted that development of the northern part of the SDL will be the final stage of the development to be constructed, which allows some leeway in finalising a more integrated plan. BPC accepts the proposition but forward by WBC that we should “not to rule anything out” when making long term improvements.

BPC agrees with idea of roundels to reduce speed on Langley Common Road (see Transport Assessment Addendum A Appendix II), but should not the speed limit be reduced to 30mph?

3. Barkham Bridge

Barkham Bridge is discussed in Transport Addendum AGLC/HPA/DOC/9/Addendum Section 7.1 and the proposed layout is shown in drawing number ITB9092-GA-012 contained at Appendix U1.

The acceptance that the bridge should be widened is welcome. Widening is definitely desirable on safety grounds, but nobody should run away with idea that it will solve the congestion problem in the area: the junction at the Barkham Bull will instead become main bottleneck.

The main plan shows the bridge being widened on the northern side of the road. Widening on the southern side might be preferable as it would ease the severity of the bends approaching the bridge and would reduce the potential for vehicles to stray into the path of oncoming traffic. It should be possible to do this within the existing highway boundary and it would also avoid interfering with a large pipe that crosses the Barkham Brook on the north side of the bridge.

It is noted that the passing traffic insets in the drawing appear to consider commercial vehicles in one direction passing cars in the other direction but not commercial vehicles passing each other in both directions.

4. Commonfield Lane.

The Barkham Street /Commonfield Lane corridor proposals are discussed in Transport Addendum AGLC/HPA/DOC/9/Addendum Section 7.2 and the proposed layout is shown in Drawing No. ITB9092-GA-025A which is attached as Appendix V1.

The proposals are for about seven passing places along Commonfield Lane. The indicative passing bay diagrams consider only cars passing cars, no account is taken of the possibility of commercial or farm vehicles along the lane. While this is an improvement on the existing arrangement where strips of mud masquerade as passing places, it is felt that passing places should only be considered as an interim solution.

BPC preference is to widen Commonfield lane for 2-way traffic, with an adjacent greenway also provided. A safe crossing point at bridleway BA14 is required – this can also provide a traffic calming opportunity. Consideration of improvements to the Barkham Ride/Commonfield Lane junction, incorporating a roundabout, need to be considered, as proposed in our original response of 5 December 2014.

The proposals for the Barkham Street/ Barkham Ride/ Commonfield Lane junction are a negligible improvement on the current arrangements. A roundabout would help to reduce speeds and improve the prospect of creating a safe crossing to BA11.

5. Greenways

The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan Greenways Group has devoted considerable effort to examining proper cycle routes. A copy of the draft report is attached. Some priorities which relate to the SDL in general and to provide safe routes to the new secondary school are shown in Section 10 of the report and are summarised below:

Cycleways required, primarily to provide safe routes to school.

- SDL-Arborfield Cross
- SDL-Shinfield via relief road
- SDL-Barkham via Commonfield Lane, BA11, BA10
- SDL- Barkham Ride via BA14
- SDL-Finchampstead via Nine Mile Ride

In addition a greenway including equestrian access from Poppyfields roundabout to BA14 through the SDL is required (see Section 9).

The maps shown Design and Access Statement AGLC/HPA/DOC/2 (Revision A) page 135 and also in Green Infrastructure Strategy Addendum AGLC/HPA/DOC/11 Addendum A do reflect these ideas in many respects. Unfortunately the key is difficult to decipher so it is not clear exactly what is proposed in some situations. BPC would like to highlight the following points:

- A direct route across the SANG linked to a safe crossing of Biggs Lane required.
- A safe crossing of Commonfield Lane is required, opposite bridleway BA14.
- BA14 should be upgraded to all weather cycling standard. This would provide a route to much of Finchampstead.
- The greenway following Commonfield Lane should be off road and also at all weather cycling standard.
- The link from Commonfield Lane to Barkham Church can be off road by providing a safe crossing of Barkham Ride, and thence via bridleway BA11.
- The route heading north east towards Barkham Hill should be upgraded to all weather cycling standard.

BPC would like to stress that a route must be off road to count as a greenway and that it should have a hard all weather surface. Safe crossings of main roads are essential.

BPC would expect that as part of any planning approval, there should be a commitment to make available adequate funding to support the creation of a high quality greenway system to link the SDL to local communities.

6. Landscaping along Langley Common Road

BPC highlighted this as an issue in original response. It is welcomed that AGLC acknowledges this need. Describing the Northern Perimeter Character Area, it is stated that the boundary to Langley Common Road should be enhanced with new planting to create a country lane character. The need for a “softer feel approaching the countryside from the north east “and that “the edge facing Langley Common Road should present a positive frontage incorporating tree planting” are also identified (DAS Addendum AGLC/HPA/DOC/2 Rev A Addendum pages 53-56 refer.)

However this is not reflected in Plans Document AGLC/HPA/DOC/3 (Version 5) - PL11 Open Space Parameter Plan, where a dark green strip should be shown along Langley Common Road, as is indicated for other areas.

7. Housing height at village edge

In the interests of achieving the “softer feel approaching the countryside” mentioned above, housing height should be lower along the edges of the Northern Perimeter Character Area. Consequently cells W, Y and Z require similar treatment as is proposed in cell T, where housing height is limited to 2 storeys on the periphery of the development. (See Plans Document AGLC/HPA/DOC/3 (Version 5) - PL09 Building Storey Heights Parameter Plan)

8. Heritage – Infirmary Stables

BPC welcomes the submission of the document entitled “The Infirmary stables at Arborfield Garrison – Towards a Sustainable Future”.

The idea of creating a “War Horse” museum to communicate the equine role in World War I and the military association of the site would be very exciting indeed. The parish council would be happy to cooperate in any way that it can and would welcome a dialogue with AGLC as plans progress. BPC hopes that English Heritage will be able to provide some support and guidance in taking this project forward.

9. Langley House

BPC cannot understand why this building is not mentioned and is proposed for demolition.

Langley House may not have any significant historical importance but it does represent the local red brick architectural style characteristic of the Walter Estate. It could be retained as a landmark building on the corner of the development. This would also provide additional housing units, as conversion would entail subdivision into a number of dwellings.

It would also be helpful if AGLC and WBC could indicate what is proposed for the adjacent pond which lies between the SDL boundary and Langley Common Road.

10. Retail

BPC questioned in our earlier response whether it would be better to have two smaller supermarkets rather than one large one that might become a destination.

The reply from AGLC (Retail Response – reference AGLC/HPA/DOC/11/Addendum A) has to be disputed

In para 1.17 it says that “the foodstore is not intended to become a destination in its own right; rather it is expected to be able to offer a comprehensive range of convenience goods to allow future residents to be able to undertake weekly (e.g. ‘main food’) shops.” Para 1.18 it goes on to refer to the need to achieve a store which is viable to a supermarket operator.

The proposal is for a store of up to 4,000 m². However several of the leading stores in Wokingham are about half this size. Based on the Wokingham Borough Retail Study of 2007, Waitrose in Wokingham was 2248 m², Waitrose at Twyford is 1939 m², Sainsburys at Winnersh 2025 m², Morrisons at Woosehill is 1925 m² while the more recent Lidl store in Molly Millars Lane is understood to be that of only 1600 m². A visit to any of these stores will reveal many people doing their weekly shop – there can be no question that a 4000 m² would be a destination store and that stores of around 1600 to 2000 m² are viable.

11. Name of Community

The name of the community now needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Describing the development as “Arborfield Garrison” is becoming inappropriate and confusing. The Executive Summary refers to the AGLC development as “Arborfield Garden Village”. This is not acceptable as over 80% of the AGLC site is in Barkham.

It is clear that a new name must be sought and it would be desirable if one is chosen for the whole of the SDL (including the MFT area) and that it should have a local association. AGLC have indicated that they would carry out a public consultation on this: BPC would encourage this to be done sooner rather than later. As the SDL involves two separate development consortia, it may be appropriate for WBC to take the lead.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Neuhofer
Clerk to Barkham Parish Council