**Wiltshire Councillor Objection – Ruth Hopkinson**

This application was called in by my predecessor, Alan Macrae, and I have confirmed my support for that action.

I will give a brief history of the site:

For those who don’t know Corsham, this development is situated along the A4 between Chippenham & Bath, on what is currently an attractive green field site, forming part of the gateway to Corsham.

The original application was an aggressive, speculative one made by a company called Gladman. A company which prides itself on managing to get planning applications approved, against all odds. A boast it has lived up to. This development does not meet a housing need in Corsham and is opposed by everyone. Little to no consultation was undertaken with anyone affected including the Town Council, which was considered an irrelevance.

It was subsequently objected to by the Town Council and rejected by Wiltshire Council. It was taken to appeal to the inspectorate. The appeal was upheld in a perverse decision made in the face of overwhelming evidence that it should not be supported. I believe that Wiltshire Council was minded to appeal to the Secretary of State, but due to the undoubted financial burden this process would involve, stepped away, to the dismay of the residents of Corsham.

The objections to these plans were not based on aesthetic or NIMBY grounds, but on sound planning considerations.

It will probably come as no surprise to Councillors to learn that Corsham is proud of its bio-diversity, being on the edge of the Cotswolds and SAC Of special interest on this site is a colony of newts and nearby bat roosts, who’s flight path is over this area. It is this sort of consideration Core Policy 50 is designed to address. This subject will be expanded upon by Tony Clarke.

What may come as more of a surprise is that there is active mineworking under the town and under this site in particular. The workings at this point are very close to the surface and ventilation shafts are visible from the road! The implications of this have not only been ignored by this application, the developer has failed to undertake the necessary research and surveys as required as a condition of approval. This will be addressed by David Taylor.

Unfortunately, I have to accept that “these matters cannot be revisited at this time”, as per the officer’s report, but without context it is difficult for Councillors to make an informed decision today.

Before I move on I would however, comment on the report. It states that the site is “enclosed by a combination of fencing, mature hedgerows and stone walling” – much of this has already been removed! It also states that there are “A number of mature trees …. dispersed through the site”. This proposal identifies at least one for removal that was specifically mentioned to the Inspector as to be retained. I would reference Core Policy 50, biodiversity & geodiversity.

So, to this application to address reserved matters:

The officer notes: “the built envelope … is to be contained within the restrictions imposed by the original Ecological Parameter Plan barring the slight incursion … into the indicative mine shaft buffer”. This is not a minor consideration. No proper inspection of the mines has been carried out and no effective geological survey undertaken. Until this has been done, we cannot assume the best. Local knowledge says different!!

Concerns were raised at the initial application that this development would exacerbate flooding concerns. In 2015 Corsham was subject to considerable flooding to housing, businesses and the railway line (you may remember that a train & its passengers were stranded in water for a number of hours). The problem stemmed from this part of town, where rainwater overwhelmed the drainage syste, flooded the nearby MOD establishment which in order to protect their premises wa pumped out the water, leading to a tsunami further “downstream”. As the officer says “The (now considerably overdue) Atkins report into the capacity and condition of the Corsham system, into which the development would feed, remains outstanding”. It is therefore premature for the Council’s Engineer to proffer a *SUGGESTION* that the planned attenuation basin will “with any reasonable assumption of current runoff arrangements … represent a level that will not exacerbate existing, unrestrictive flows”. Such an assertion must wait until after the publication of the report. Once allowed, if (or more likely, when) the report shows something different, it will be too late! The Drainage Engineer has lodged an objection until after the publication of Atkins. His letter available on the Council website actually states “Recent update from consultant indicates report will be available by end of July 2016. This site is located on the west side of the town and the main foul and storm systems generally run west to east thus any flows from this site will have a major impact of the downstream systems and flooding. Until the results of the investigations/modelling have been completed the LLFA will object to any development which will have an impact on the existing systems.”

The report also states that “There is now a permanent pond of sealed construction to prevent water ingress into the mines below”. Again, since there has been no proper investigation of the mines or the local geology, this statement is unjustifiable.

I would recommend to the council that the submission of this application at this time is premature. It is based on wishful thinking, guess work and the hope that final permission will be granted as opposition disappears through death by a thousand cuts.

Please reject it! Rejection does not amount to “unreasonable behaviour”, it is entirely reasonable in the circumstances when the council is being asked to make a decision at a time when all the information necessary to make an informed decision is not available.