

Ellingham, Harbridge & Ibsley Parish Council

Comments/Observations on Possible Development on Land off Snails Lane, Blashford BH24 3PG

This site, identified as site 'R, North of Ringwood' in the NFDC Local Plan Review 2016-2036, was put forward as being a potentially sustainable location for 'about 130 homes'.

While noting the outline planning application subsequently submitted for 143 homes at this site prior to the Plan's examination in public, the Parish Council has focussed on establishing the suitability and/or appropriateness of the site for housing development.

The outline planning application submitted will be considered at a subsequent meeting of the Parish Council Planning Committee.

There is limited opinion locally that the Snails Lane site might be an appropriate site for development within the Parish – it is close to the existing development boundary of Headlands Industrial Park and also to the infrastructure and services provided by Ringwood; it is in close proximity to good road communications (the A338 and A31) and the land is currently of poor agricultural quality.

However, there are a number of key factors in regard to several of the Local Plan's supporting documents and evidence base (summarised in 1.10 of the Submission Document) that, in the opinion of the Parish Council (the Council), rule this site out as being appropriate for the proposed level of development.

> Density and Type of Housing.

The site currently provides an essential buffer between the higher density housing development and industrial land of North Poulner and Blashford and the more interspersed rural nature of homes and the Blashford Lakes complex to the north.

The density of development proposed for this site would overwhelm the existing local community, which has retained a remarkably tranquil rural nature despite its proximity to urban Ringwood and the A338 to Salisbury. The proposed development would create a new sub-urban settlement inappropriate for this area and lead to the loss of identity that has been established since the cessation of over 50 years of intensive mineral extraction.

The Council had identified the area around the west end of Snails Lane as having the potential to provide a site for a handful of homes of genuine affordability for people at lower income levels, with occupancies controlled to some degree by the Council, and that could become integrated into the local community. Even any 'affordable' homes on a commercial development on this site would be beyond the reach of our identified local need.

>Conservation/Environmental Issues.

Conservation and associated issues constitute some of the Council's more significant objections to the Local Plan proposal. The Council have to commend and thank local residents and others for the work and research they have carried out into these matters and which have helped inform the Council's opinion.

While the site was predominantly a former silt pond for a mineral processing works, and was subsequently relatively poorly restored to agricultural land, this has facilitated the influx and establishment of a significant number of native

flora and fauna species. It now provides an important and significant additional area of buffer biodiversity hinterland as well as species corridor between the River Avon, adjoining Blashford Lakes and the New Forest.

The Snails Lane site is less than 1km from the New Forest and River Avon's SSSIs, SACs, Ramsars and SPAs. It is less than 100m from the Blashford Lakes SSSI, Ramsar and SPA. The Council does not feel that the HRA has in any way either appropriately evaluated the value and potential of this site or addressed the necessary mitigation that would be required to offset development here.

In addition, being within such close proximity to the New Forest National Park, the Council does not believe that the requirements of Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 on NFDC to have due regard to the National Park purposes have in any way been adequately addressed.

There are significant pollution and habitat issues associated with the current levels of nitrates and phosphates within the catchment of the River Avon SAC. The Council believes that proposed significant additional development within the catchment, of which the Snails Lane site is part, will only exacerbate their already deleterious impact.

It seems to the Council that it would be far more appropriate if the Snails Lane site were to be offered as a Mitigation Site for other proposed local developments, providing the opportunity to enhance its potential and contribution to environmental and conservation benefit.

>Sewerage/Foul Drainage Issues.

The Council understands that the existing infrastructure is already at or near capacity, and that any major development at the Snails Lane site, such as proposed, would require a significant upgrade to the network north of Ringwood. This is not sustainable development.

Further, the Council believes that no developer contribution would be sufficient to finance such a scheme. Even if any proposed development at the site did not become subject to a viability assessment for other reasons, an assessment made due to the requirement to fund this extent of new infrastructure would almost certainly result in the reduction / loss of 'affordable' housing provision under any Section 106 agreement, if not the need to add additional 'market-priced' homes to the scheme.

>Transport/Access/Roads.

The Council believes that the impact of the increased traffic load on the A338, along with site access and suitable egress, caused by a large development at Snail Lane has not been adequately assessed by Hampshire Highways, particularly with regard to the current outline planning application, or with consideration of the increased traffic resulting from proposed developments north of this area at Fordingbridge and the East Dorset sites of Alderholt and Verwood. The Council anticipates there will be considerable detriment to the existing road network.

The provision of some type of 'closure' of either the west or east end of Snails Lane to prevent vehicle traffic from the development traffic accessing Gorley Road to the east is neither achievable nor desirable to residents, but some solution to this private road becoming a 'rat run' (without impeding existing residents' use), would have to be found.

In summary, the environmental and other costs associated with a high density development as proposed would seriously outweigh the benefits. In comparison, other potential sites put forward in the Local Plan have fewer environmental impacts than this one. If a very low density / considerably smaller housing scheme ever be put forward, this might find more support from the Council should all necessary mitigation measures be deliverable.