

**REPORT: 24.038(1) Planning Land East of Church Road
LAVERSTOCK AND FORD PARISH COUNCIL
SUBJECT: Response to Revised PA 20/11598/OUT (50 Houses at Church Road)
Report Author: Cllr. Ian McDonald
DATE: 15th March 2024**

1. Report Summary

A report to councillors to approve the Parish Council response to the above Revised Outline Planning Application.

2. Background

An Outline Planning Application was submitted in December 2020 to build 135 houses on a site at Church Road Laverstock, adjacent to Laverstock Down and Cocky Down. The Parish Council strongly opposed the application and submitted its response with reasons on 16th February 2021. A revised application for the same number of houses at the same location was submitted in April 2023. The Parish Council reiterated its opposition and its original arguments, together with additional arguments supported by evidence in the newly 'made' Neighbourhood Plan.

In November 2023, as a result of preparing its response to Wiltshire Council on a pre-submission draft Local Plan under a public consultation exercise under Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, it became clear that some of the arguments which applied to policy 30 in the draft Local Plan, also applied to the Outline PA and so further arguments, objecting to the PA, were submitted.

In February, 2024, the developers further revised the Outline PA, seeking now to build only 50 houses and claiming the revised application was compliant with the 'emerging' Local Plan, policy 30.

3. Summary

The revised Outline PA does not address the Parish Council's previous objections, and, because the process of making the Wiltshire Local Plan is incomplete, raises a number of additional and complicated Planning questions, which are addressed in the text of the proposed response below.

The Parish Council's previous objections have been collated, revised and augmented into a single response below.

4. Recommendation

- a) That the Parish Council approves the response of "Object with reasons" to the revised PA 20/11598/OUT
- b) That the Parish Council approves the text of the response as set out below.

LFPC Response to Revised (2024) Outline Planning Application 20/11598/OUT - Land to the East of Church Road

Laverstock and Ford Parish Council Objects to the Revised (2024) Outline Planning Application 20/11598/OUT for the following reasons:

- The application is premature in relation to the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan and would prejudice the plan making process.
- Contravention of existing and emerging spatial planning policies
- Lack of local needs for housing

- Development 'creep'
- Adverse impacts on landscape sensitivity
- Adverse impacts on vehicular and pedestrian traffic

Prematurity in Relation to the Emerging Local Plan

The application relies heavily in the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan (draft LP), Policy 30, and if the published local plan timeline is adhered to the plan is likely to be submitted to the Secretary of State for inspection before this application is resolved. policy 30 was not publicly consulted on in the previous regulation 18 consultation and so the regulation 19 consultation has been the first opportunity for the local population to be consulted and for the policy to be tested in any way. There has been a large number of objections to the policy and, if Wiltshire Council does not choose to withdraw it, it will undoubtedly be tested before the planning inspector. To accept this planning application at the current time would prejudice this aspect of the local plan making process, and thus the application is premature.

Contravention of Existing and Emerging Spatial Planning Policies

The covering letter of the Outline PA 20/11598/OUT (PA) seeks to promote the PA as in accord with the draft LP, policy 30 which allocates 50 houses to the Church Road site.

The National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 (NPPF) para 48 b states, the Local Planning Authority may give weight to policies in emerging plans according to the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies. In this case there is a large number of unresolved objections to policy 30 including one submitted by the Parish Council based in the advice of a planning barrister. Therefore, at this point in the process policy 30 should be given less weight than Policy 1 which is itself based upon the established and tested Core Policy 2 from the previous local plan.

If the draft LP conditions apply then the PA contravenes policy 1:

- a) Laverstock is identified as a Small Village (draft LP para 4.159)
- b) Small Villages are defined as having (draft LP para 3.14) "a low level of services and facilities" which "may accommodate some very modest development . . ." including "infill."
- c) "Development at Small Villages will be limited to respond to local needs and to contribute to their vitality." (draft LP Policy 1). As set out in the Laverstock and Ford Neighbourhood Plan (NP), local needs are being met from other developments within the Parish.
- d) "At Small Villages, the settlement strategy provides sufficient flexibility for neighbourhood planning groups to meet local housing needs, by a variety of means, at a scale that preserves the character and setting of a village. . . new housing development will be limited to infill within the built-up area of Small Villages or should be geared towards meeting local affordable needs through exception sites, or up to 20 homes, or 5% of the size of the settlement (whichever is the lower)." (draft LP para 4.213)

If the pre-existing planning conditions apply then the PA choice of site and scale of development contravene Core Policies 1 and 2 of the current Wiltshire Council Core Strategy, namely that Laverstock, which is defined as a Small Village, is limited to infill only (generally 1 or 2 new houses in plots between existing dwellings), unless there is a compelling need within the village for development.

Lack of Local Need for Housing

As indicated above, Laverstock is categorised as a Small Village in the draft LP which then describes the constraints on development appertaining to Small Villages. However the draft LP also includes policy 30 which allocates 50 houses to the land east of Church Road, Laverstock, not as an exception site and not in order to meet local needs (which would in any case be limited to 20 houses), but as

a 'reasonable alternative' site for the housing needs of Salisbury. The draft LP contains no policy or condition to enable such an option or resolve the contradiction and the Parish Council has robustly challenged the soundness of the draft LP as a result.

The PA makes no case or claim for meeting the housing needs of Salisbury, which would require at the least a Framework Travel Plan describing sustainable transport links between the site and Salisbury, and the Parish Council rejects totally any claim that this PA is aimed at meeting compelling local needs. The Laverstock and Ford Communities Neighbourhood Plan (NP), Appendix 6 (Assessment of Local Housing Needs) concludes (pp.2,3) "A review of available evidence strongly indicates that the local need for affordable housing in the parish is low in both absolute and relative terms. This need is being addressed by the recent (and continuing) extensive programme of house building within the Parish and the requirement of Wiltshire Council for 40% of units to be in the form of affordable housing." Even the draft LP policy 30 did not argue that the policy was intended to meet local needs.

Development 'Creep'

If the draft LP were to be declared sound notwithstanding its overtly contradictory policies 1 and 30, and the assessments contained within the NP are to be so quickly and easily discounted then the Parish Council is deeply sceptical about the capacity of this PA to limit the development to 50 houses on a 3.11ha site for the foreseeable future. The draft LP, Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Annex 2.11 relating to SA Objective 8 (Conserve and enhance the character and quality of rural and urban landscapes) shares this concern: "Potential for development to result in expansion of Laverstock to the east of Church Road that would alter the rural character and sense of separation from the hillside of Cockey Down."

The initial (2020) application envisaged 135 houses on a 3.6ha footprint within an overall site of 7.91ha and there is no indication in the amended PA that such a target is not the ultimate ambition of the developer. Once 50 houses are allocated and built, many of the arguments around landscape sensitivity, Small Village and 'semi-rural' are weakened while arguments around meeting housing density targets in line with local planning policy become stronger, thereby making applications for further development harder to resist and reject. In the absence of safeguards limiting further development on and adjacent to the site, the Parish Council concludes that this Outline PA is, in effect, a "Trojan Horse": development 'creep' becomes inevitable.

Adverse Impacts on Landscape Sensitivity

The NP includes a Landscape Sensitivity Assessment (LSA) which identifies the land at Church Road as of medium to high visual sensitivity, adjoining land of high sensitivity.

Regarding potential development on the Church Road site, the LSA comments:

"Large scale development in any of these areas is not recommended, but individual or small developments where there is local enclosure through topography or vegetation may be possible. Any development along Church Road should be in a series of clusters to allow the views of the Downs beyond to still be viewed between any houses, in a similar way to the closes on the other side of the road which allow views of the River Bourne. In this way, visual connections will be maintained across this landscape."

The closes referred to are of four houses: two facing pairs along a short drive so that the narrowest elevation of each house faces Church Road, thus minimizing the visual obstruction of the River Bourne and its water meadows. The PA is for 50 houses in two clusters of 25 with a central gap. The visual connection with the landscape is thus reduced from a panorama to a doorway flanked by urban development which is a far cry from the NP in terms of scale and layout, and effectively

invalidates any description of Laverstock as 'semi-rural'.

That Laverstock is a Small Village and 'semi-rural' is one of the reasons people are attracted to the area. It is not urban or suburban or even semi-urban but semi-rural, encouraging the natural surroundings to break into the built environment. As Gallent et al* observe, "The fringe is often viewed as periurban but as being strongly influenced by urban pressure and process. But there is an alternative view: that the fringe is perirural and within the rural rather than within the urban."

* Planning on the Edge: England's Rural-Urban Fringe and Spatial Planning Agenda: Gallent N, Bianconi M, Andersson J; May 2006 Environmental and Planning B Planning and Design; 33(3):457-476

The SAs relevant to the draft LP policy 30, proposing the allocation of 50 houses on this site, are equally relevant to this PA.

SA Objective 8 considers the site to be a "locally valued landscape," and the feedback we have received as a Parish Council since the draft LP was published shows the significance very many local residents attach to this landscape and the role this site plays in connecting the village into its rural setting. The road frontage at this point on Church Road is not only valued but is the only unobstructed window onto the Downs now available for people entering the village from the North (and for residents of Salisbury City living on elevated ground to the West). It is, in the words of the draft LP, Sites Landscape Appraisals, a "quintessential view" and the feedback would indicate that this vista has therapeutic, aesthetic, environmental and symbolic significance for residents, embodying the key features of the "semi-rural" village. The Parish Council considers the PA allocation of 50 houses to the space will obstruct and adversely restrict the window and render the experience of those travelling southwards along Church Road little different from any urban environment with parks, green spaces and mere glimpses of distant views. The PA would not therefore "conserve and enhance the character and quality of rural and urban landscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place." Nor would it, "maintain the character of the landscape when viewed from both inside and outside the Parish" in accordance with NP Policy 2. This adverse impact would be compounded by the further urbanization of the village from any physical expansion of the schools on Church Road required to accommodate the number of pupils generated by the development.

SA Annex 2.11 relating to SA Objective 1 (Preservation and enhancement of biodiversity etc.) includes the following statements:

- "Residential development at the site, in close proximity to the river would potentially lead to an increase in recreational / visitor pressure which could give rise to adverse effects on the river and its associated riparian habitat, as well as upon the species it supports. A mitigation strategy will be required to address impacts on the River Avon SAC."
- "Cockey Down SSSI and Cockey Down Chalk CWS lies to the immediate east of the proposed allocation site and could be subject to adverse effects during construction as well as during operation. A public right of way runs through both the SSSI and CWS meaning development at the proposed allocation site would be likely lead to an increase in visitor / recreational pressure and a deterioration of the sites over time."
- "Laverstock Down CWS lies 370m south-east of the site. This CWS is contiguous with Cockey Down Chalk CWS and would also likely be subject to additional visitor / recreational pressure as a result of development at this site. There are several other SSSIs and CWSs within a short distance of the proposed allocation site that are accessible either on foot or via a short car journey, and which could also suffer increased visitor / recreational pressure as a result of development at this site."

- "... It's unlikely to be possible to completely deter additional visits to the designated site by residents of a development at the proposed allocation site and therefore, that the potential for adverse effects could not be entirely offset."
- "Overall a moderate adverse effect is considered likely against this objective."

SA Objective 2 (Ensure efficient and effective use of land and the use of suitably located previously developed land and buildings), adds:

- "Development of this site would lead to a significant, permanent loss of Grade 3 agricultural land."

The SA concedes that the potential for adverse effects could not be entirely offset. The Parish Council takes the view that no mitigation strategies will be sufficiently robust to constrain the adverse effects to "moderate" regarding the objective of protecting and enhancing biodiversity on this site or compliance with the mitigation strategy for the New Forest protected sites.

SA Annex 2.11 relating to SA Objective 8 (Conserve and enhance the character and quality of rural and urban landscapes) includes the following statements:

- Potential for built form to be intrusive in the rural landscape setting and alter the character of the distinctive views of Salisbury on the approach from the northeast.
- Potential for built form to be conspicuous on the rising slopes that form the rural backdrop and context to the existing settlement of Laverstock and northeast of Salisbury.
- Potential for development to result in expansion of Laverstock to the east of Church Road that would alter the rural character and sense of separation from the hillside of Cockey Down.
- Potential for inappropriate screening planting that would be uncharacteristic in the landscape.
- Potential change from a rural to urban context for visitors to Cockey Down nature reserve.
- Potential loss of hedgerow boundaries, shrubs, trees and woodland that contribute to green links through the local landscape to link river valley vegetation and woodland in the wider context. "

The Parish Council considers the PA fails to provide sufficient and relevant evidence of the magnitude to which its proposed mitigating measures will realistically offset (and the extent to which they will not offset) the 'moderate adverse effect' identified in the draft LP. The fact that the supporting landscape assessment does not even refer to the made NP for the area indicates that the applicants have failed to have regard for the plan.

Adverse Impacts on Vehicular and Pedestrian Traffic

One of the most frequent concerns that local residents have raised to us about the site is the impact of development on the existing traffic problems that are experienced on the road at the start and end of the school day. These are identified in section 7.1.2 of the NP and photographic examples are provided in Appendix 1. Church Road is insufficiently wide to allow traffic to flow in both directions around parked cars and this is the cause of significant congestion, pollution and incidences of dangerous driving at the start and end of the school day. As there is not scope for discrete right turn lanes for East bound traffic into the two entrances to this development this site could potentially add significantly to these problems as traffic queues for an opportunity to turn right into any new development on the site. These issues do not appear to have been considered in the sustainability assessment or elsewhere.

The draft LP, SA objective 11 (Reduce the need to travel and promote more sustainable transport choices) quotes Paragraph 73 of the NPPF (para 74 (b) of the revised 2023 NPPF), which states:

‘that when planning for larger scale development, authorities should “ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the development itself.” Similarly, paragraph 105 of the NPPF (109 2023 NPPF) provides that “Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.”’

There are clearly no services and employment opportunities included in the PA within the development itself, and NP, Appendix 6 (Assessment of Local Housing Needs) concludes (pp.2,3) “A review of available evidence strongly indicates that the local need for affordable housing in the parish is low in both absolute and relative terms.” It is therefore reasonable to expect new residents to travel for services and employment opportunities. The site is at a distance from retail and employment opportunities in Salisbury City Centre, the A36 Southampton Road Retail Park, The A30 London Road and scientific and military establishments to the North of Laverstock. The draft LP also indicates that school age residents may have to travel for education.

Transport Assessment

The Parish Council considers the PA Transport Assessment (TA) to be substantially flawed and fails to accurately assess the adverse impact of the development on significantly increased private car use. Furthermore, the Parish Council considers the TA to be misleading in its assessment of the impact of the development on local traffic.

The Manual Traffic Surveys (TA Part 3), include the period of school drop-off by covering the period 0730 to 0930 but exclude the school pick-up time, covering only 1630 to 1830. The omission results in conclusions skewed in favour of sustainability and is far from accurate.

The Highway Network considered in TA Part 2 (Fig 4.8) includes the junction of Church Road with the A30 to the north and with the A36 to the south but excludes the junction with the A36 Southampton Road at Petersfinger, accessed via Manor Farm Road and Milford Mill Road.

Milford Mill Road, compared with its alternatives, provides a shorter distance and faster travel time between Laverstock and the A36 Southampton Road and gives access to a substantial range of employment and retail opportunities as well as a faster route to the New Forest and Southampton. Because of traffic congestion in Salisbury, the road is a major ‘rat-run’ for Salisbury traffic in both directions. It is narrow; contains two ‘pinch points’ (the medieval bridge, and the railway arch at Petersfinger); suffers from irregular, potholed edges; is prone to regular flooding throughout the year from frequent run-off and occasional overflows of the River Bourne; and is subject to a 20mph speed limit. Use of the road as an access route to and from the Church Road site receives no mention, and certainly no impact assessment. The Parish Council consider this to be a substantial and major omission from the TA for the site and considers the road is most unsuitable for the increased weight of traffic generated by 50 additional houses on Church Road.

NPPF (2023) paragraph 115 states, “Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.”

The Parish Council considers Milford Mill Road most unsuitable to absorb the impact from 50 houses on the proposed site. Furthermore, it considers the cumulative impacts on Milford Mill Road and the historic medieval bridge will indeed be severe from the proposed site when combined with the following Planning Applications under consultation:

- PL/2023/10495 (Conversion of Elmfield House and outbuildings to 6 x dwellings and the erection of 15 dwellings);

- PL/01200/FUL (Erect 19 no. new houses to create a new retirement estate and community, incorporating existing scheme of 4no. dwellings), both at Petersfinger; and
- PL/2023/07368OUT, Old Sarum Airfield (allocating 155 houses at Ford).

Access between the A36 Southampton Road and the A30/A338 (including the village of Ford), and access between the A36 Southampton Road and the schools on Church Road, has historically strongly favoured the 'rat-run' along Milford Mill Road, Manor Farm Road, and Laverstock Road over the A36 Southampton Road - Churchill Way - A30 London Road (or Wain-a-long Road, Laverstock Road). A Transport Assessment for the addition of, potentially, 245 houses across four sites cannot be done piecemeal except on a 'first come, first served' basis which would place an unrealistic burden on individual developers to revise their TA in the light of each emerging, newly granted planning permission. The TA for the Church Road site contains no assessment of the site in the context of a wider set of site developments, which, in our opinion, renders its conclusions and mitigating factors valueless. The Parish Council considers a Transport Assessment for the Laverstock local road network must be considered in its entirety. Sadly, this is an omission in the draft LP.

The TA Part 1 Figure 4.2 illustrates walking isochrones for 800m and 2k, measured from the centre of the (initial) site. The Parish Council acknowledges that TAs tend to follow generic models, accepted by planning officers. Nonetheless in small villages, the impact from and on unique local conditions can have a critical effect on individual behaviours which is not reflected in the model.

Even at a generic level of modelling, the impacts could be more accurately estimated. The Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation has published guidance (*Planning for Walking 2015*) which states that about 80 per cent of journeys shorter than 1 mile are made wholly on foot. For journeys that are 1 to 2 miles long, 26 per cent are made on foot. Applying such multipliers to the 800m (0.5mile) and 2k (1.24 miles) isochrones offers a more accurate model of the number of potential journeys on foot, which would correspondingly increase the potential vehicular traffic impact.

The Site Accessibility Audit references in support of its modelling the IHT document (*'Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot 2000'*) but omits the factors impacting acceptable walking distances contained in the Guidelines. The IHT Guidelines note that walking distances are impacted by factors such as age, ability, encumbrances (shopping, pushchairs), journey purpose, time savings, convenience, personal motivation. The TA omits any demographic modelling / assumptions of potential residents and potential impact on walking journeys.

The village of Laverstock is unique for its size in having four schools (Primary and Secondary) on Church Road within some 800m of the proposed development and so are within accessible walking distance. The TA paragraph 4.3.7 states that the 800m and 2km walking isochrones from the site, "roughly equate to a 10-minute and 25-minute walk respectively." However, the presence of the schools and the impact of pedestrian numbers and vehicles at school drop-off and pick-up times present a significant hindrance and disincentive to walking (see Appendix 1 below): lengthening walking times and increasing the hazards to pedestrian safety, especially for those with pushchairs and those with mobility or sight/hearing restrictions. The Audit fails to model or acknowledge the impact of school drop-off and pick-up times on the walking speed and/or motivation of site residents to walk and thus on the level of car use at such times.

The TA also attempts no assessment of demand for school places and the capacity of local schools to meet demand. The draft LP, SA objective 10, acknowledges that the local primary school is most likely not capable of meeting the need for the estimated number of early years and primary school places generated by a development of 50 houses. Such pupils will therefore be travelling further, "This would most likely be Salisbury primary schools." The draft LP, "Planning for Salisbury" (PfS)

p.33 states that meeting the demand for secondary school places generated by the site is dependent on increased capacity on the opposite side of the city, "Sufficiency of secondary school places is dependent upon the timely extension of Sarum Academy (developer contributions)." Based on the draft LP SA data, the site is therefore not sustainable in terms of reducing the need to travel and reducing the need to travel by car in order to access local education.

Primary healthcare is of concern nationally and is reflected locally, particularly, access to GPs and access to NHS dental provision. The draft LP, SA Objective 10, states: "The site is situated approx. 1.1km from Bishopdown Surgery. GP provision in Salisbury was forecast as being subject to a positive capacity gap by 2026, however the closure of one branch surgery in 2020 to relocate services has led to issues. Negative premises capacity gaps are therefore apparent within the primary care network. There is a planned extension to the hospital. Expanded services are to be offered by Porton and Winterslow branch surgeries following this the closure of the Wilton branch. As a result, . . . there may be some negative effects on the capacity of individual surgeries. The location and constrained capacity of local surgeries inevitably requires journeys by car or by long and unreliable public transport."

The history of the Old Sarum and Bishopdown Farm developments gives clear evidence that health provision cannot be attracted out to the edges. While the NHS nationally is seeking to invest in expanded provision, it will take time to realise any benefits and the BMA points out that the supply side of the equation will be a limiting factor for the foreseeable future. The site is therefore not sustainable in terms of access to primary healthcare provision reducing the need to travel and reducing the need to travel by car, whatever the theoretical modelling may suggest.

On the accessibility to other amenities by walking or cycling, the draft LP, SA objective 11 states: "Other than education facilities, Laverstock does not adequately serve its community, leaving long distance walking trips to non-education amenities and employment. "Cycling is simply accommodated by on carriageway non-compulsory cycle lane facilities and whilst this does represent informal cycle infrastructure provision, such interventions are no longer supported by technical guidance. Furthermore, the on-carriageway cycle lanes only extend along Church Road and terminate at the railway bridge on Laverstock Road to the south and prior to the A30 roundabout in the north. The cycle facilities may therefore only serve cycle accessibility for Laverstock residents and their trips to local schools within Laverstock."

The local bus services within 1k of the site provide no direct routes to Salisbury station and connections with most locations in and around the city are via the centre of Salisbury. The service has been experienced as problematic, with cancellations, delays and staff shortages in the past, serving to lengthen journey times and discouraging those with access to private transport from opting for public transport. Public transport is also more challenging for those accompanying young children, those with mobility issues, or those wishing to undertake family shopping. The lack of convenient access to local amenities and employment serves to emphasise social inequalities.



