



BATH PRESERVATION TRUST

12/03/2020

20/00491/OUT

Field On Corner With Ferndale Road Deadmill Lane Lower Swainswick Bath

Erection of 18 dwellings

Object

The proposed plot for development is the field adjacent to Deadmill Lane, situated within the Green Belt and World Heritage site. It borders both the Cotswolds AONB and Bath conservation area, and consequently forms part of their contextual setting. The site remains an important green and open space within the Larkhall district that demarcates the rural boundary of Bath, and its steep sloping position to the south makes it a visually prominent feature within the Larkhall character area, and an important open space that frames and enhances views both into and out of the Bath conservation area and World Heritage site. The site is additionally associated with Dead Mill, a localised Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) of distinctive aesthetic, evidential, and historic character, the significance of which is accentuated by its retained rural setting and undeveloped, green space along Deadmill Lane.

BPT is generally supportive of schemes that include suitable percentages of genuinely affordable housing 'in perpetuity' within Bath. However, following the consideration of this outline application, we cannot support this proposal, on the basis of principle of inappropriate development, significant harm to the open character of the Green Belt, landscape setting of the World Heritage site, indicative setting of the Bath conservation area and Cotswolds AONB, harm to the setting of a NDHA, and the impact on local residential amenity.

We do not consider that the public benefit or special circumstances outweigh substantial harm to multiple heritage assets and the Green Belt.

Principle of Development in the Green Belt

The Trust strongly objects to the principle of development on land that is situated within the Green Belt. In accordance with Section 13 of the NPPF, "a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt", unless in very special circumstances in which the harm of development is significantly outweighed by other considerations. Whilst the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan notes that there is not enough land within the city to meet current developmental demands, it states that "the unmet need is not considered to represent exceptional circumstances for developing in the Green Belt".

Furthermore, the Deadmill Lane site is not listed as part of BANES' SHLAA as of 2016, and the Lam Brook Valley area, incorporating the rural boundary of Larkhall, was noted as unsuitable for development in BANES' SHLAA Report of Findings 2013 (Appendix 1b). Thereby, whilst we acknowledge that the Housing Trajectory 2011-2029 does not meet the predicted need of 3300 affordable houses raised in the Bath HMA 2018, the site has **not** been included as a viable windfall site for development (as of BANES' SHLAA 2016), and has instead been noted as a site unsuitable for development due to its established rural character and retained connection with landscape views such as Little Solsbury Hill.

Consequently, there is minimal justification for the selection of this site in order to deliver affordable housing, and no evidence is provided for the consideration of brownfield sites within or around Bath better suited to redevelopment. The Trust maintains that the development of the site will directly harm the existing openness of this portion of the Green Belt contrary to Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy and Planning Act. Moreover, there is inadequate evidence that the development will enhance the visual amenities of the Green Belt; whilst we appreciate this is an outline planning application, the lack of detailed plans and elevations does not enable the LPA to make a fully-informed decision regarding the suitability of the scheme. Regardless, the Trust maintains that the existing positive openness and green character of the site will be harmed, not enhanced, by the proposed boundary treatment and concentration of parking and associated hard standing, and is therefore contrary to Policy GB1 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan, and Objective 2 of Bath's Core Strategy.

The Trust notes that several small-scale residential planning applications on the Deadmill Lane site were refused in 1998 and 2002 (see applications 98/00238/FUL and 01/02429/FUL) on the grounds of adverse effects on the "important landscape setting of the city" (1998), and "inappropriate development" (2002) within the Green Belt with direct detriment to its rural character and openness. We therefore maintain that this application demonstrates the same detrimental impact to the openness and rural character of the site through the urban layout and density of residential development and associated curtilage treatment.

Therefore, the development proposed is inappropriate, as it will directly harm the openness and rural setting of the Green Belt without suitable evidence of special circumstances that will outweigh this proposed harm. Consequently, this application is contrary to Sections 13 and 16 of the NPPF, Policies DW1, B1, B4, HE1, CP8, and GB1 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan, and Objective 2 of the Core Strategy.

Impact on Landscape Character, AONB, and landscape setting of Bath World Heritage Site and Conservation Area

Whilst the Deadmill Lane site is excluded from the boundary of the AONB, it forms a significant connection between the city boundary and its AONB setting, and marks the beginning of the Lam Brook Valley running north through the Cotswold Hills. It forms part of the valley landscape due to its steep, west-facing slope towards the Lam Brook, and utilises features indicative of the AONB's distinctive character including vernacular stonework, tall hedgerows, and minor roads and lanes used to connect small village settlements. Consequently, Deadmill Lane remains a positive rural contributor to the setting of the Cotswolds AONB, and associated open landscape setting of the World Heritage site, to which this development would be a jarring urban addition.

Furthermore, there is little indication that this application has considered the development's impact on wider, landscape views from significant sites such as Little Solsbury Hill, or views from significant roads into and out of Bath, including Gloucester Road and the A46. Due to the noted steepness of the site and the proposed density of construction, it can be assumed that the development will have a notable visible intrusion within Bath's existing landscape, although this cannot be fully assessed without provision of notable details such as building height, form, and materials. It is noted in BANES' SHLAA Report of Findings 2013 (Appendix 1b) that development within this area would "bring the urban edge out further into the countryside and into wider view", consequently signifying significant visual harm to the largely undeveloped and low-density village setting of the AONB, but the OUV landscape setting of Bath as a World Heritage site.

With regards to the setting of the World Heritage site, part of its defined OUV is in its green, undeveloped setting, the retention of "open agricultural landscape around the city edges," (Management Plan 2016-2022) and "fingers of green countryside which stretch right into the city". Consequently, the Deadmill Lane site is a critical remainder of agricultural land (still used for grazing) that visually integrates Bath's verdant countryside setting within the outer fringes of the city. Therefore, the development of this site and associated landscaping associated with more urban or suburban areas will directly cut off the Larkhall area of Bath from its external landscape setting, directly contravening a critical aspect of the World Heritage site's OUV associated with the city's designed assimilation with its "Green Setting".

Ultimately, this development will be of detriment to Larkhall's existing plan form and associated character. Whilst Larkhall is of a mid-density residential grain, it features generous green spaces within its more urbanised areas, including Larkhall Recreation Ground, Larkhall Allotments, and the plot off Fairfield Park Road, and retains a strong visual connection with its rural landscape and the AONB along its northern boundary. Therefore, the urbanising effect of the construction of 18 dwellings and their associated, suburban boundary treatment will cut off Larkhall from its AONB setting to the detriment of its retained rural character, verdant aesthetic, and complementary landscape setting.

We therefore maintain an objection in principle to the residential development of this site, which would have an urbanising effect on an important rural feature of Bath's periphery and the AONB, and consequently harm the OUV of the picturesque landscape setting of the World Heritage site.

Therefore, this development will harm the heritage and landscape significance of the Larkhall character area, and the indicative setting of the AONB, Bath conservation area, and the OUV and landscape character and setting of a World Heritage site contrary to Sections 15 and 16 of the NPPF, and Policies DW1, B1, B4, HE1, NE2, and NE2a of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan.

Heritage Impact, the NDHA, and its Setting

Notably, the Deadmill Lane site runs adjacent to Dead Mill, a mid-18th century mill building that was rebuilt around 1901 following a fire in 1890. It is noted as a "localised landmark" within the Larkhall Character Statement and Development Principles (1998), and is therefore recognised as a NDHA of local significance and character. Significantly, the Mill's relationship with its contextual setting is highlighted as an aspect of its architectural and aesthetic merit; its prominence in the streetscape is noted as being

“accentuated by the space surrounding it as the urban area ceases to the south.” Therefore, the distinctly rural and open character of the land adjacent to Deadmill Lane is paramount in the interpretation and appreciation of a NDHA and its setting. We remain disappointed that this application has not acknowledged or recognised the historic importance of this aspect of the Larkhall character area, and we do not feel that the proposal suitably respects, integrates itself into, or complements the adjacent NDHA or its ancillary setting.

Furthermore, the Trust is concerned regarding the unspecified treatment of unprotected, historic features of merit on the site, including the Bakehouse that is at least 19th century in origin, and the natural rubble stone boundary wall that is a characteristic rural feature of the area. From the proposed plans, it seems apparent that these structures will be demolished with resulting harm to Larkhall’s material and architectural heritage, and the setting of Dead Mill. We would therefore request that further information is supplied to clarify how the proposal will impact the existing on-site structures, and consequently the surrounding streetscape.

This application therefore does not demonstrate suitable understanding of the development’s impact on the setting of a NDHA, nor the potential demolition of built features that contribute to the area’s rural vernacular appearance. We maintain that the development of the Deadmill Lane site will close off Dead Mill from its rural setting, and therefore constitutes harm to a recognised NDHA contrary to Section 16 of the NPPF, and Policies DW1, B1, BD1, CP6, D1, D2, D3, and HE1 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan.

Local Amenity

We do not feel that suitable evidence has been provided that the proposed development “meets a demonstrated local need for affordable housing” as stated in Policy RA4 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan. We are additionally disappointed by the apparent lack of public consultation before this scheme was submitted; we would encourage any documentation associated with pre-application consultations to be submitted to the planning portal to clarify whether this development has been previously communicated to local residents within the immediate area of the site.

We are additionally concerned regarding the proposed inclusion of 39 parking spaces on the site, with sole access via Deadmill Lane. The Larkhall Character Statement (1998) notes the use of Deadmill Lane as a “rat-run”, and the lane has remained a negative area of congestion which this development will only exacerbate, at the detriment of residential amenity, pedestrian safety, and the rural qualities and atmosphere of the character area contrary to Policies D4 and D6 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan. We therefore maintain that the current singular access to the site via Deadmill Lane is highly unsuitable, and the additional increase in traffic volume will have an unwelcome, urbanising effect on the setting of the Bath conservation area and World Heritage site.

This application will therefore directly harm residential amenity contrary Section 12 of the NPPF, and Policies D4 and D6 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan. Furthermore, it has not been suitably proven that the development will meet a demonstrated local need for affordable housing, and therefore does not comply with Policy RA4 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan.

Ecology

The Trust acknowledges that we do not usually make comments on ecological grounds. However, in relation to this application, we have been made aware that the site is ecologically valuable as a habitat to species including otters and white-tailed crayfish. We would therefore expect that all necessary up-to-date documents including ecological reports and bat surveys are submitted to the planning portal for full assessment by the LPA, not only with regards to the Deadmill Lane site, but any impacts that construction will have on the Lam Brook and the adjacent Site of Natural Conservation Interest (SNCI).

Conclusion

BPT objects in principle to the development of this site. We feel that the construction of dwellings and their associated boundary treatment will have an urbanising effect on the rural boundary of Larkhall, and will be of detriment to the green and open character of the Green Belt, and cause substantial harm to the picturesque landscape setting of the Bath conservation area and World Heritage site, and the setting of the AONB. There is additionally no recognition of the historic significance of the site in relation to Dead Mill, a recognised NDHA within the Larkhall character area, and there is little information provided regarding the treatment of typical vernacular features on the site such as the rubble stone boundary wall and the bakehouse building. We additionally object on the grounds of harm to residential amenity due to increased vehicular pressure on Deadmill Lane. This application is therefore contrary to Sections 12, 13, 15, and 16 of the NPPF, Policies DW1, B1, B4, BD1, CP6, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, HE1, NE2, NE2a, CP8, GB1, and RA4 of the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan, and Objective 2 of the Core Strategy, and should be refused. On the basis of previous refusals to the principle of development on the site (see applications 98/00238/FUL and 01/02429/FUL), the Trust stresses the unsuitability of the site for future residential use, either through the impact of dwelling construction, or the creation of a domestic curtilage, that will result in harm to the openness of the Green Belt.