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Date: 25th March 2010
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Glenfield Park - Planning Application reference 10/0118/1/OX.

At the last meeting of the Leicestershire Local Access Forum, the proposals for this development were discussed. The Forum is interested in these proposals and would wish to comment and has a number of concerns. We would commend the applicant on much of the material provided and do feel that the application goes a long way down the road of satisfying our ambitions for such a development but find it does not go far enough and as such we wish to object to the application in its present form.

Our objection is against the scale of this proposition and elements of the proposal which we feel fall short of the desired requirement but regardless of this we wish to make observations as to conditions we would seek to see imposed were you to consider approving the application. We do this without prejudice to our position in objecting to the application as it is before you.

Background

The Leicestershire Local Access Forum (LAF) is an independent statutory body, set up as a result of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000, and exists to represent the interests of everyone concerned with access to the countryside and the public rights of way network including footpaths, bridleways and byways, cycleways and areas of open access.

In 2007, following new regulations, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural affairs issued new guidance for forums. Section 94 of the CROW act makes it a statutory function of the forum to give advice to a range of bodies, including local authorities, on access issues in respect of land use planning matters.

The Secretary of State advises that the most effective use of these powers is focusing on the relevant policies in the emerging Local Development framework. In particular forums are asked to focus on the following:

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Roy Denney, Chairman of the Access Forum

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- The impact and options for minimising possible adverse effects, of planning policies and development proposals in respect of future public access to land:
- Identifying and expressing support for opportunities to improve public access, or associated infrastructure, which might be delivered through planning policies or new development.

As part of this responsibility the forum has been working with the County Council to establish a framework of requirements. The development of public access policies within the county has been greatly helped with the establishment of a Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Leicestershire which the County Council developed in conjunction with the forum and is a statutory document subject to guidance. It was published in conjunction with the Second Local Transport Plan in 2006 and was subject to public consultation and relevant policy areas are included in this submission.

The forum has also been closely monitoring the developing Regional Spatial Strategy and the debate around Green Infrastructure and recently hosted a seminar on 'Green Routes for New Urban Growth'. This considered how rights of way, open access areas and other 'Green Infrastructure' can ensure new urban developments encourage healthier lifestyles and sustainable communities. The seminar brought together representatives from various agencies to discuss how they could work towards these ends and included representatives from all levels of local government, regional organisations and local groups.

Access & Rights of Way

The network of Rights of Way is the single most important recreational resource to explore and enjoy any area. Quite apart from vehicular Rights of Way, footpaths, bridleways and cycleways provide local routes that join communities and provide routes to access shops, schools and workplaces for many and are of particular importance with this potential development.

In researching the ROWIP, the authority and considered national, regional and local research. This includes local surveys, exemplar projects set up by the Countryside Agency and a raft of national studies. All of these have underlined the importance of walking and riding in people's everyday lives. Some of the key findings include:

- most walking journeys, including for recreation begin on the doorstep
- 94% of the County population live in urban or built up areas
- The main motivation for walkers is that it is fun
- Physical activity, walking in particular could make the single most effective contribution to the nations health.
- Over the past 25 years the amount of miles travelled on foot and bicycle fell by more than 25%

The current revision of the Regional Spatial Strategy picks up on a number of these threads in Policy 1 of the regional core objectives, seeking:

- ***To protect and enhance the environmental quality of urban and rural settlements to make them safe and attractive places to live, work and invest in, through the promotion of 'green infrastructure (including walking and riding)'***
- ***To improve the health of the Region's residents through improvements in access to health, leisure and recreation facilities & services.***
- ***To improve accessibility to jobs, homes and Services through the promotion and integration of opportunities for walking and cycling;***

To move these issues forward, the Rights of Way Improvement Plan concluded that improved walking and riding facilities need to be available:

- close to where people live work and play
- accessible by a wide range of the local community
- lead to repeat activities and contribute to health

Access, including Green Infrastructure in most of its guises should be accessible and allow humans to enjoy, touch, smell and interact with their local environment. Much can and should be done with existing networks as well as considering new infrastructure.

The walking and riding environment also helps to contribute to a number of areas other than general access. By its very nature, walking and riding, is a socially inclusive activity. The public repeatedly underlined the quality of life contribution that walking provided both within the local community and accessing the landscapes around them. It is also sustainable in the short and long term, providing opportunities for people now and hopefully in the future.

At the heart of the proposals set out in the Improvement Plan, was the desire to provide improved opportunities for walking and riding. Much needs to be done to arrest the current falls in walking and riding. Society is increasingly dependent on the car and we live ever more sedentary lifestyles. Often those groups in society that would benefit most from more active lifestyles, are those least likely to undertake exercise.

Despite this, both local and national studies show that walking and riding remain extremely popular. The challenge is to involve a wider section of society and make walking and riding part of our everyday lives. Access should be for all, and to be so it needs to compete with the car for utilitarian journeys and a host of other activities for recreational time. It needs to be available near to everyone's home, be fun, attractive and free from physical and mental barriers.

Any proposals for access, including in conjunction with Green Infrastructure should reflect the above. The RSS goes on to underline many of the above points, stressing the need for all parties, including the Regional Assembly, with Government, public and local bodies, and service providers, should work together to develop and implement measures for behavioural change to encourage a reduction in the need to travel and to change public attitudes toward car usage and public transport, walking and cycling.

Improving and Broadening Access

A series of proposed policies in the ROWIP seek to encourage developers to encourage walking and riding from the doorstep. This includes within new developments and links to surrounding areas and public services. It is encouraging to see the suggestions within this application which start to address these issues.

Any larger development proposals should place considerable importance on this substantial resource at a local level. It is inter urban and routes linking communities, settlements and the local countryside that offer the best opportunities to make a real difference and contribute towards the goals set out in the RSS. More emphasis should be given to this resource and the value of local regular journeys and how to encourage the public to use local access and enjoy green infrastructure and we will offer some suggestions as to how this application might be improved were it to be withdrawn and resubmitted.

The ROWIP does contain a series of proposals for consideration for new development and accordingly the role of green infrastructure and relevant elements are copied at the end of this submission.

Turning to the specifics of the application before you at present, we are concerned at the almost complete eradication of the 'green wedge'. This is aesthetically pleasing, provides separation between communities and provides a corridor for wildlife. We are also concerned that the sheer scale of this proposed development will create problems in accessing the area both in road use by private vehicles and by an adequate public transport provision. (see ROWIP policy P3).

The application and associated papers do address these issues but we would contend that the proposals do not go far enough in this regard.

We would like to see a much wider 'green' separation zone than is advocated and would further suggest that it should be between the proposed new housing and the commercial units. We would also advocate restriction of commercial development on the north side of Kirby Road to the western side of the entrance to the old sewage works. This would link the golf course to open country providing both a wildlife corridor and access to those areas for residents.

Notwithstanding this there are a number of rights of way issues we wish to raise regardless of whether any amended application is substituted for the one on the table at present.

- We are pleased to see the proposed foot and cycle route to be created running north from bridleway R115 to join Sacheverell Way. However to be effective as an access route to the new development some form of bridge across Rothley Brook will be required. R115 from Ratby and Kirby to Glenfield crosses under the A46 on the north side of Rothley Brook with all the proposed employment on the south side.
- There are a number of routes being advocated and we are concerned that the status of these routes be established. We would not favour any form of permissive usage which could be subsequently withdrawn but would wish to see them dedicated as public rights of way
- With this in mind and not wishing to see dead ends on such rights of way we would wish to see the proposed routes off Kirby Road towards Rothley Brook actually going as far as the crossing over the brook to link with the existing RofW network.
- One proposed route which we do feel is essential is a link from Kirby Road through the new housing to then go round the northern edge of the golf course to link with bridleway V96 which technically crosses the golf course. This route, where it skirts the golf course, is presently used on an informal basis as since the golf course was moved west the crossing by the formal route is dangerous. As previously mentioned this would need to be properly secured for public use and we would advocate that it be formalised for the entire length of this current usage and not just to where it would link up with the new provision. We would suggest it should formally run further south to actually join up with footpath V85. Page 40 of their Design & Access statement shows a new path between their commercial units linking with this path at a point where officially it does not exist.
- We are advocating a fairly extensive network of foot and cycle routes to and from work, school and shops etc. linking into the existing network of RofW. To this end we do feel that the developer should be required to contribute to the provision of adequate surfacing to routes which will now see considerable increase in usage. R115 should we would hope, now become a major access route and could justify a metalled surface. The existing right of way from Groby (R40) is a field path,

frequently very muddy and could be upgraded to a properly surfaced cycle way. This would also provide a good direct route to Groby Schools for children of the village. The new proposed routes also need to have surfacing standards laid out in the conditions attached to any permission.

This is a detailed submission and takes on board a lot of matters we would wish to see addressed. All in all it is a well thought out development with many good features. Much of the supporting material would presumably be reserved matters as far as the present submission is concerned. Provided that you as the planning authority include conditions to ensure that the developers comply with all the commitments within this documentation the community should end up with many new amenities and improved linkages to balance the detrimental effect of such a large commercial development. We do feel that as presented however there are still inadequacies and would like to see a commitment to the various issues we have raised before we would feel able to commend it.

Yours faithfully

Roy Denney
Chairman
Leicestershire Local Access Forum

NOTES

ROWIP Policy P3

Developers will be expected to maximise the potential for access within, to and from new development by walking and cycling. This should include links to travel plans and public transport.

Potential sites should be capable of leading to good design that takes account of the needs of all, including the disabled and less able, with the development of high quality walking and cycling networks. There is a need to not just provide the infrastructure but to provide an attractive environment that encourages people to move around on foot or bicycle. This includes enhancing the feeling of personal safety, linking green areas and providing an attractive environment to live in and enjoy recreational time. Existing facilities should be retained and enhanced where possible as well as considering new ones.

It is not just in new developments that non motorised travel should be considered. Developers are expected to maximise the potential access to and from new development by walking, cycling and public transport. This may extend beyond the developed site. Developers are asked to 'meet the requirements for, and costs of, relevant infrastructure and facilities and other resources required to support the development.

This can include existing local networks that are likely to be used by people living in the new development (see below). We also note Policy 4 in the RSS Promoting Better Design. All partners including local authorities, regional bodies, utility providers and developers should work together. We agree with the principle that this should be achieved by promoting access from new development to local facilities on foot, by cycle or by public transport.

ROWIP Policy P4

Infrastructure assessments to access new development sites, including for developer contributions, should include foot and cycle proposals.

Employment sites are likely to need specific routes to allow access to and within the development. Housing development needs a broader approach. The development would also need access into and within the site, including links to open or recreational areas in the development. However, new residents are going to want to access and enjoy the surrounding area for recreation. Existing paths may need to be upgraded to meet demand or new routes considered to link to the surrounding network or communities.

In most cases the developer will not control land beyond the application site, in others he will. The County Council has powers to carry out improvements on the path network and is experienced in doing so. A mapping and then where appropriate, a local survey should be carried out (mini master plans). This will then determine if existing routes are likely to be used by communities within the new development. Whilst routes that deliver utilitarian journeys will take priority, the local recreational network should not be overlooked.

Where local paths feed from or are near the development then a programme of suggested improvements, such as reducing barriers, new gates, and appropriate surfacing can be considered. New local destination fingerposts and improved signing and waymarking will encourage and allow those new to the area to become familiar with local walking and riding opportunities. There may be other specific works that could be considered. In each instance this is a judgement call that will need to relate to increasing local use of the paths with particular focus on those in any new estate. This should then lead to a suggested way forward that could be discussed as part of the contributions and green infrastructure package.

ROWIP Policy P5

Consideration should be given to linking new housing sites into the surrounding recreational networks or where there isn't one, creating routes that link to surrounding paths, communities or facilities.

Sometimes new developments have no formal links to existing paths. The development of new or linking footpaths, bridleways and cycleways can be considered anywhere. The provision of local recreational opportunities on the doorstep reduces pressure on areas with greater leisure and tourist demand, as well as encouraging more frequent exercise and non motorised journeys.