

Theydon Bois Parish Council

Parish Office, The Village Hall, Coppice Row, Theydon Bois, Essex CM16 7ER
Clerk to the Council – Mrs Jennifer Endean Planning Clerk – Mrs Jane Sounes

Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting held on Thursday 23rd March 2023 at 8.00 PM

Councillors Present: Cllrs Gooch, Amos, Blake, Burn, Hannibal, Morris, Morton and Wood.

Apologies for Absence: None

Officers Present: Jane Sounes, Planning Clerk

Members of the Public Present: 32

1. Apologies for Absence – As above.

2. Confirmation of the Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 16th March 2023 – Deferred to next meeting.

3. Disclosure of Interests (existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, Other Pecuniary Interest or Non-Pecuniary Interest as defined in the Essex Public Law Partnership Code of Conduct) with regard to items on the Agenda. Members of the Council are subject to & have adopted the Essex Public Law Partnership Code of Conduct –

Cllr Amos declared that if a planning application, or issue, is for discussion at both Parish and District level, he will reconsider the matter at District level, taking into account all relevant evidence and representations at the District level, and therefore cannot be bound in any way by any view expressed at the Parish level, or by the decisions of this Committee.

Cllr Burn declared a personal, but non-pecuniary, interest in any items commented on by the Theydon Bois and District Rural Preservation Society (the “TB&DRPS”), by virtue of being a Committee member. However, the interest was not deemed prejudicial, as she has made no contribution to their comments.

4. Public Participation session with regard to Items on the Agenda:

A written representation regarding EPF/0292/21 had been received from Theydon Bois Primary School
Three representations regarding EPF/0292/21 had been received from residents.

5. To Consider the following Full Planning Applications:

Application No: **EPF/0292/21**

Officer: Marie-Claire Tovey

RETURN: 7th April 2023

Planning History File Number: 000807

Location: **Land North of Forest Drive, Theydon Bois, Epping, CM16 7HH**

Proposal: Erection of 38 Residential dwellings with access from Forest Drive, and provision of associated open space, services and landscaping ** Amended Description and Plans **

Strong Objection: The Parish Council’s full comments on this application can be viewed at the EFDC online planning portal at [Planning Application: EPF/0292/21 \(force.com\)](https://force.com/PlanningApplication/EPF/0292/21)

Comments made by Planning Committee members, and by members of the public attending the meeting, focused on the following:

Design, Density and Layout: The Epping Forest District Local Plan 2011-2033 emphasises that developments within sensitive edge of settlement locations should be landscape-led and preserve both the character of the adjacent vicinity, and the visual amenity and biodiversity of the landscape setting. The increase in bulk, massing and density of this amended proposal has led to a fundamentally negative response to those elements of the design, whilst also increasing concern with respect to the longevity of the surrounding TPO'd trees and hedgerow, due to the cramped development.

The proposed density of 44 dwellings per hectare is felt to be too high for this site. The immediate built settlement reflects an average density of approximately 22 dwellings per hectare. The earlier proposal of 2021 was, through its addition of four and five-bedroom dwellings, unlikely to have been acceptable to the Local Authority, but the traditional facades illustrated at that time were generally considered to be amenable to local character. The inclusion of purpose-built accommodation for older residents could have gained support and facilitated the easier management of the site and its natural environs. The design of the dwellings as now proposed is felt to be urban and out of character and sympathy with the built environment of the village, and with the open countryside that surrounds it.

The design has a strong vertical feel and is more suited to an inner city development. The apartment buildings are of significant mass, with high gables that would be out of character with the surrounding built environment. It was noted that the flats are unsuitable for people with mobility challenges – there being no lifts. It is felt that a three-storey apartment block design is too obtrusive for this Green Belt location. The facades of the houses and of the apartment buildings have a utilitarian design and a roof height equivalent to that of an additional storey above the scale of either a two, or three, storey dwelling. The universal response from the meeting to the revised design was resoundingly negative.

Regarding the proposed communal open space, the drainage basin will quickly become a pond after rainfall and the proposed wildflower planting was thought to be impractical, being short lived and not suitable for recreational use. The basin would need to be fenced for safety. The shared access road(s) do not have pavements, and thus cannot provide safe spaces for pedestrians and children's play. The amenity value of this area is therefore felt to be inappropriate and inadequate.

There is concern about acoustic/noise for occupants of the apartments – these being closer to the railway line than the original proposal. Proposed lighting of the development is contrary to the Theydon Bois Dark Skies Policy and would negatively impact on neighbour amenity. There is also concern, due to inclusion of balconies in the design of the houses, regarding sight lines from the proposed new dwellings into properties in Dukes Avenue.

Car Parking: The proposal is felt to be unsustainable in terms of lack of adequate parking. 31 spaces for 38 dwellings is not considered sufficient and could result in conflict between neighbours, with the undesirable consequence of additional on-street overspill parking within Forest Drive and Dukes Avenue. Fourteen dwellings (all the 1-bedroom flats) have no parking provision. This is considered to be both unfair and unrealistic. Contrary to the 'Transport Statement' submitted with the application, the village is not well served by public transport.

Trees and Hedgerows: The potential for adverse impact on the long-term preservation of several of the mature TPO'd Oak trees that border the site is of particular concern to the Parish Council and to residents. It is considered that the footprint of several of the proposed dwellings are too close to the Root Protection Areas of these high-amenity value trees. There is also concern about the proposed removal of the native hedgerow on both the western and northern boundaries of the site – the removal of which would be detrimental to its ecological value and to the wider landscape setting.

Green Belt Boundary: The integrity of the new Green Belt boundary is of paramount importance, to preserve the openness of the landscape beyond. The new Green Belt boundary is shown on maps of the proposed site included in the Epping Forest District Local Plan (2011-2033) as being along the southern bank of the Crystal Brook, this brook being a clearly delineated permanent boundary. However, the apparent re-drawing of the northern boundary beyond the brook, together with an allusion to the upper field as the 'wider development area', raises serious questions about the possible future intention for development of that upper field. The Site Specific Requirements specify that the Green Belt boundary is to be strengthened.

Permissive Path: The permissive path through this field provides access to the wider landscape of the upper field and regularly absorbs the recreational pressure that would otherwise be placed on the Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation. The path should permanently remain as a footpath only, not as a vehicular access, into the second (upper) field. The wide gap in the boundary, marked on amended plans as being for 'agricultural access', is not required if this site is to be released from the Green Belt. The farmer accesses the upper field from the City of London Buffer Lands and other agricultural fields further to the north.

