

Good evening. This statement is on behalf of the applicant, the Englefield Estate. The Estate's planning consultant, Mr Brown of Savills, is available to answer any questions that the Committee may have in relation to the application proposals.

Englefield village is at the heart of the Englefield Estate. Together with the community, the Estate is committed to ensuring that the village, under its long-term stewardship, maintains its social, economic and environmental vitality by supporting local people, services and facilities. In this context, the proposal for a car park is one of a number of small scale projects which are key to supporting the long-term vitality of the village. These were discussed with the community at a consultation event in 2019 and the suggestion for a car park was overwhelmingly supported.

As a result, this application has the support of the local primary school, Parish Council and local residents - some 45 letters of support have been noted in the Officer's report tonight.

We accept that the location of the car park is sensitive, being in the countryside, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and a Conservation Area. Through sensitive use of materials and landscaping we have sought to minimise the impacts, and indeed the Officer's report acknowledges that the harm to these assets is not substantial. Any harm is, in our view, clearly outweighed by the benefits of the car park which include:

- The improvement in highway safety for school children that have consistently been supported by the primary school;
- The provision of a safe, off-road footpath for children which would be provided from the car park to the school;
- The removal of a proliferation of parked cars around the village, including that which blocks the entrance to the garden centre (opposite the school) and which damages the grass verges and tree roots further along The Street and which detract from the Conservation Area.

This is a case of applying the planning balance: weighing the significant public benefits of the scheme against the less than substantial harm. We recognise your Officers have recommended that the application be refused, but this is a matter of planning judgement, and so it is open to you to come to a different view.

We are aware of other cases in the District where car parks for schools (including within the AONB) have been granted, for example close by at Pangbourne School, at Bradfield College and at Ufton Nervet. In all these cases, the harm to the landscape and heritage aspects was judged to be outweighed by the benefits to the schools. This car park is therefore not a new precedent, and we respectfully request that Members move to approve the application.