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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH 2025

Councillors Present: Alan Macro (Chairman), Richard Somner (Vice-Chairman), Paul Kander, Ross Mackinnon, Geoff Mayes, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole and Clive Taylor

Also Present: Paul Bacchus (Principal Engineer - Flooding and Drainage), Bob Dray (Development Manager), Gareth Dowding (Principal Engineer (Traffic and Road Safety)), Rachael Lancaster (Principal Minerals and Waste Officer), Matthew Shepherd (Principal Planning Officer), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) and Thomas Radbourne (Zoom Host)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeremy Cottam

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Schedule of Planning Applications

(1) 23/00736/OUTMAJ Midgham

1. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 23/00736/OUTMAJ Midgham in respect of outline application for the erection of 16 dwellings, including 6 affordable units, with access from Bath Road. Matters to be considered: access land at junction with Bath Road, New Road Hill, Midgham, Reading.
2. Mr Matthew Shepherd introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion the report detailed that the proposal was acceptable in planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main and update reports.
3. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Mr Douglas Bond, agent, and Councillor Chris Read, Ward Member, addressed the Committee on this application.

Applicant/Agent Representation

4. Mr Bond addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Recording](#)

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Member Questions to the Agent

5. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- The outline application aimed to establish the principle of development and access, allowing for detailed design to be considered later through reserve matters. The approach was conventional, and would help to reduce costs at the early stages of the design process.
 - The indicative plan highlighted how the 16 dwellings could be accommodated, taking into account site characteristics and constraints.
 - The new Local Plan would amend the settlement boundary to include the site within it.
 - The client intended to secure the outline permission and then dispose of the site, potentially to a local housebuilder who would submit reserve matters.

Ward Member Representation

6. Councillor Read addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Recording](#)

Member Questions to the Ward Member

7. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- The Local Plan Review had not been confirmed at Council.

Member Questions to Officers

8. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:
- Officers stated that there was a refuge island, which would remain as an uncontrolled crossing point.
 - Recent speed survey data from the A4 indicated an average speed of 30.8 mph and a average maximum speed of 36.1 mph, which showed a reduction from the 2019 data, which recorded an average speed of 41 mph.
 - Officers stated that it was the Council's intention to adopt the road, and through the detailed design, it would be to adoptable standards.
 - Officers confirmed that there was a typographical error in the heads of terms for the S106 Agreement and that the affordable homes would consist of five two-bed homes and one three-bed home.
 - Officers clarified that the Committee was considering the principle of development and access, with detailed design to be addressed later through reserved matters. The outline application allowed for testing the site's capacity to accommodate the proposed number of houses while considering fundamental issues such as flooding and contaminated land.
 - It was explained that the Council had just published an updated five-year supply position, which reflected the figures used in the report.
 - Details were provided of the flooding and drainage matters that were needed at the outline and detailed planning application stages.
 - It was confirmed that the surface water drainage would connect to the chamber at the New Road Hill junction. The foul water connection would be to a manhole on the A4, around 20m to the east. Although there had previously been tanker

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operations in the area, Thames Water had confirmed that there was capacity in their network, so Officers were not able to formally object to the proposal.

- It was explained that affordable housing would be secured through a legal agreement rather than through conditions.

Debate

9. Councillor Richard Somner opened the debate by recognising issues that had been raised in previous applications, but he noted that not all of the objections were related to planning. He noted that the highways issues highlighted were manageable not negligible and acknowledged the need to give weight to the emerging Local Plan. He also felt that the proposal was effectively infill development due to the development around it. He indicated that he was minded to support the Officer's recommendation for approval.
10. Councillor Vicky Poole noted that the Local Plan had not yet been adopted, and the site of the application was outside the settlement boundary. She highlighted that there was a one percent biodiversity net gain and expressed concern about the need for sewage to be tankered when the area flooded. She considered that the application had been submitted too soon, as the new Local Plan had not been adopted.
11. Officers explained why significant weight had been given to the new Local Plan. The previous proposal had been recommended for approval when the Local Plan had been at the Regulation 18 stage and there was some certainty that this site would be included within it. The Local Plan was now at a very advanced stage and there were no unresolved objections in relation to this site. Also, the proposal was considered to be consistent with the NPPF. The NPPF was clear that it was seldom justified to refuse applications on prematurity grounds unless it could be shown that approving the application would undermine the more strategic decisions that were being made by the Local Plan. Officers stated that they could not justify an argument on those grounds and advised that they would not be able to justify this at appeal and sustain it as a reason for refusal. Furthermore, officers noted that the recent increase in the housing requirement automatically engaged the tilted balance and tipped the scales in favour of planning permission unless there was a compelling reason in the NPPF to not apply this.
12. Councillor Clive Taylor noted that he was concerned that the site was outside of the settlement boundary and noted that the Local Plan was close to being decided. He questioned whether the application could be deferred until after the Local Plan was approved.
13. Officers noted that since the tilted balance came into effect, applications must be progressed as quickly as possible if they were acceptable. Officers stated that deferral was an option that could be considered but advised members that the application was capable of approval.
14. Councillor Ross Mackinnon praised the clarity of the report and noted the strong recommendation from Officers for approval and that if the application was refused it would likely be allowed on appeal. He indicated that he was minded to support the application.
15. Councillor Paul Kander noted that this was only an outline application. He also noted that the increase in housing, if completed sympathetically, could increase the local economy and use of the train station. He did not consider any of the issues raised to be significant enough to delay the decision.

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16. Councillor Poole put forward that should the application be approved, a condition be added that properties would be designed in sympathy with the Village Vision, so they would be more likely to be accepted by the village. She indicated that she did not support approval of the application.
17. Officers confirmed that when reserved matters were considered, all policies must be taken into account. Village Design Statements would be material considerations that the application would be assessed against. While there were no policies to allow conditions to be imposed requiring engagement of the local community on the design, officers were happy to work with the applicant and encourage them to do so.
18. Councillor Justin Pemberton questioned why a full application could not have been presented to the committee and expressed concern about a future application that may seek to amend the conditions. He also expressed concern regarding the SuDS, and the fact that Thames Water had no issues with connecting into the foul sewers. However, he highlighted the 5 year housing supply, and considered it a compelling argument, and noted that the application would likely be approved on appeal.
19. Councillor Mackinnon noted concerns about 'planning by stealth' through future applications to vary planning conditions, but noted that those matters would need to be robustly considered at that time.
20. Councillor Somner proposed to accept Officer's recommendation and grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report and update report. This was seconded by Councillor Mackinnon.
21. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Somner, seconded by Councillor Mackinnon to grant planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions in the main report and update report.

(2) 24/00247/MINMAJ Burghfield

22. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(2)) concerning Planning Application 24/00247/MINMAJ in respect of proposed development of an advanced conversion and recovery facility comprising of two main buildings including processing hall and office, access route, vehicle parking, cycle spaces, storage and landscaping. Fenton House, Deans Copse Road, Theale RG7 4GZ.
23. Ms Rachael Lancaster introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion, the report detailed that the proposal was acceptable planning terms and officers recommended that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions outlined in the main and update reports.
24. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Mr Mike Roberts, Mr Mark Collins, Mr Kevin Parr applicant/agent, addressed the Committee on this application.

Applicant/Agent Representation

25. Mr Roberts, Mr Collins, and Mr Parr addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: [Eastern Area Planning Committee - Recording](#)

Member Questions to the Applicant/Agent

26. Members asked questions of clarification and were given the following responses:

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- The carbon process operated at low pressure and was safe. The core technology operated at 50-60 millibar and had been developed for 26 years.
- The application was for a small-scale plant, with multiple modules, each with individual control and gas management.
- The hydrogen part of the process operated at 14 bar, which was a low pressure for the hydrogen industry. The hydrogen industry could store hydrogen at up to 200-300 bar.
- Hydrogen produced on the site would be converted into Bionaptha, minimising the volume of hydrogen stored on the site. The storage on site would act as a buffer to regulate the flow to the next stage of the process.
- Hydrogen was covered by the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) regulations. The site would be covered by the necessary safety regulations.
- The individual modules would run at full scale at one tonne per hour, and were independent of each other, and would operate 24 hours per day.
- The plant would require 40 seconds to cease gas production, and was controllable.
- In terms of contamination, the only identified contamination on the site was a small amount of asbestos. This would be capped on site. Further site investigations prior to commencement were required, and any further contamination would be dealt with accordingly.
- The Environment Agency required that pathways into the aquifer under the site were prevented. This required the use of certain groundworks and piling designs.
- A continuous flight auger would be used to ensure a seal. The applicants would discuss and agree this with the Environment Agency as part of the discharge of the condition.

Ward Member Representation

27. There were no representations made by the Ward Member.
28. It was noted that the Ward Member, Councillor Nick Carter had called in the application due to concerns regarding impact and access, due to the need for HGVs to access the site through Burghfield Road and Deans Cop Road.

Member Questions to Officers

29. Officers stated that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had been consulted at both stages of the consultation process and had not responded to either consultation. Officers noted that they would focus more on access for appliances. The safety of the site would ultimately be governed by separate legislation, and that they would not have commented on that side of the application.
30. It was confirmed that the existing planning application for the site was for a similar sized waste management facility. The main difference between the applications was the type of facility.
31. Officers clarified that the total number of movements for the site were estimated to be 126 movements a day, 54 HGVs, and 72 staff vehicle movements.
32. The facility would have a catchment area, which would depend on commercial operations. Where possible, waste would be local, but it could be from the wider

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Southeast England region. Officers stated that they did not have specific details on local waste.

- 33. Officers clarified that the 14,000 tonnes of waste received from the adjacent Hadley premises would not be considered as part of the vehicle movements.
- 34. It was noted that because there were established existing industrial uses in and around the area, the roads were almost deemed as haul routes and would be able to cope with the anticipated traffic movements.
- 35. The impact of flooding and soil on the road had been discussed, however, the Council was having problems identifying a remedy to the flooding. Officers noted that the operations and lorry movements were unlikely to be affected by the flooding. Members suggested that road-sweeping may help to keep drainage gullies from becoming blocked.
- 36. The Council had not been given any background information regarding the Secretary of State’s call-in. The call-in had no bearing on the Committee’s consideration of the application. The Planning Inspectorate would have 21 days to review the application following determination.
- 37. Officers confirmed that Condition 41 requested the details of any security measures and fencing be submitted in due course.
- 38. Officers noted that the Emergency Planning Team were the owners of the off-site emergency plan for AWE. They had considered the impact of the application on the plan and had consulted with all relevant parties and had come to a recommendation that they had no objection. It was noted that it was easier to impose site-specific emergency plans for commercial uses than residential uses.

Debate

- 39. Councillor Vicky Poole opened the debate. She was proud that there was a site being considered for development in West Berkshire which could help to remove carbon from the environment. She indicated that she was in favour of the application on merit, and because of the existing planning application in place on the site, and the reasonable number of HGV movements.
- 40. Councillor Richard Somner considered that the application would deliver significant benefits, and it was in a reasonable location, despite the issues of flooding at certain points of the year. He indicated that he was minded to support the application.
- 41. Councillor Poole proposed to accept the Officer’s recommendation and grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report and update report. This was seconded by Councillor Somner.
- 42. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Poole, seconded by Councillor Somner to grant planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to grant planning permission subject to the conditions in the main report and update report.

(The meeting commenced at 18:30 and closed at 20:23)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature