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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 2 SEPTEMBER 2026

Councillors Present: Nick Carter, Jeremy Cottam, Paul Kander, Ross Mackinnon, Justin Pemberton, Chris Read (Substitute for Alan Macro), and Clive Taylor

Also Present: Simon Till (Development Management Team Leader), Anna Hart (Legal Advisor), Paul Goddard (Highways Development Control Team Leader – Attending Online), Michael Butler (Principal Planning Officer), Sian Cutts (Interim Principal Planning Officer), and Thomas Radbourne (Zoom Host)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Alan Macro (Substituted by Chris Read), Richard Somner, and Geoff Mayes

PART I

1. Election of Chairman

As the Chairman and Vice-Chairman had issued their apologies, the Committee proceeded to elect a Chairman for the meeting.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Jeremy Cottam be elected as Chairman for the meeting.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 August 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Pemberton declared that he had been lobbied on Agenda Item 4(1) by the agent. However, as he confirmed that he maintained an open mind and was not pre-determined, he determined that he would participate in the discussion, debate, and vote on the item.

4. Schedule of Planning Applications

(1) Application No. and Location: 25/02941/FULMAJ at Land at Redwoods Mortimer plus land to the south.

1. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 25/02941/FULMAJ in respect of the demolition of existing residential properties and the creation of new soft play areas, car parking for school staff, the erection of 32 retirement properties, dental surgery with associated landscaping and infrastructure at the land at Redwoods Mortimer, plus land to the south.
2. The Planning Officer, Michael Butler, 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, subject also to the first completion of a Section 106 obligation.

3. The Chairman asked the Highways Officer, Paul Goddard, if he had any observations on the application. He highlighted that:

    3.1 The original potential plans for the site, for an expanded school and GP surgery accessed from the street, would produce more traffic than what was currently proposed, a private dental practice and over 55's residential properties. Therefore, he had no objections on traffic grounds.

    3.2 The main access to the site was via Tower Gardens and there was also a smaller access proposed onto the street separately. He noted that some concerns had been raised about the potential narrowness of this access, however, as it would only be used for staff parking and would be widened in some places to allow for passing, the Highways Officer did not consider this to be a concern. In addition, the sightlines were assessed to be acceptable and in compliance with the required standards. For these reasons, he was content that the access was acceptable.

    3.3 The initial site access would likely be an adopted highway. However, as the over 55's properties would be in a gated community, these roads would remain private.

    3.4 Highways Officers were content with the car parking provision. Even though this would be lower than expected for non-age restricted dwellings, as car ownership for over 55s was typically lower than the general population, this was considered acceptable.

    3.5 For all these reasons, there were no objections on highways grounds.

4. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Councillors Graham Bridgman and Jayne Todd, Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council representatives, Peter Cadman, objectors, Martin Tinsley and Mark Lewis, supporters, Katherine Miles, agent, and Councillor Nick Carter, Ward Member, addressed the Committee on this application.

Parish Council Representation

5. Councillors Graham Bridgman and Jayne Todd addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Parish Council

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

    6.1 In response to a question about the development of the site and the five-year review deadline, the Parish Council believed that the time had elapsed.

    6.2 That Councillor Bridgman had been the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing when he was on West Berkshire Council and was the representative on the Integrated Care Board.

Objector Representation

7. Peter Cadman addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Objector

8. Members did not have any questions of clarification.

Supporter Representation

9. Martin Tinsley and Mark Lewis addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Supporter

10. Members did not have any questions of clarification.

Agent Representation

11. Katherine Miles addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Agent

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

    12.1 That the need for over 55s homes had been demonstrated by the Council's evidence base in the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Development Plan. In addition, elderly housing was the only category nationally regarded as being in critical need.

    12.2 That the valuation of the Redwoods property was below £2m, but the cost of demolition on top of that would make it approximately that figure.

Ward Member Representation

13. Councillor Nick Carter addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026

Member Questions to the Ward Member

14. Members asked questions of clarification of Councillor Carter and were given the following responses:

    14.1 That the Local Housing Authority had confirmed that there was no longer a need for a new school.

    14.2 On the consultation with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), the response from them indicated that they had not been directly consulted by the Parish Council, so they could not say if they wanted to put a doctor's surgery on the site. Once the land was used for other purposes, it could no longer then be used for this surgery even if the ICB indicated that one was needed.

Member Questions to Officers

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

    15.1 That the development of the 16 flats for age restricted properties was for three storeys but that the third storey was contained within the roof of the apartments. The minimum safe height per storey as defined in building regulations was considered to be around 2.5 metres.

    15.2 This scheme would have some impact on the residents to the east. However, the 16-metre separation was considered sufficient in the urban context of the site. Therefore, this impact was not significant enough to justify recommending that the application be refused.

    15.3 The property value of existing dwellings was not a material planning consideration.

    15.4 That the Redwoods property value was assessed by the applicant as well as by the Council's own independent assessors and, although based on the

assumption of a good market, the suggested valuation was considered accurate.

15.5 That Officers could not say exactly what the actual height of the apartments would be in relation to the existing dwellings but acknowledged that they would be higher. There would be 12 metres to the ridgeline, but the actual levels in relation to the neighbouring properties were not known at this stage.

15.6 As the five years defined in the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) had elapsed, Planning Policy Officers had confirmed that the land should no longer be safeguarded. The Parish Council were responsible for reviewing the site as part of their NDP review, but it was noted that there was no suggested alternative proposal for the site in the emerging NDP document.

15.7 That the expected benefit of the private dentist was difficult to quantify due to it being subjective in the overall planning balance. However, Officers highlighted that there was a need for this provision.

15.8 That the applicant did claim that the greatest need for housing was for the over 50s, but that the lack of affordable housing provision on the site was regrettable as there was also substantial demand for these types of dwellings as well. In addition, it was noted that no one from Housing was present at the meeting to present their objection to the application. Overall, even though the lack of affordable housing was a substantial disbenefit, on balance the application was still considered to be acceptable.

15.9 That the details of the handover of land to the school would be done through a Section 106 agreement, although there was a requirement for it to be left in a tidy condition.

15.10 That the access track for school parking would not be adopted by the Local Highways Authority and would likely be controlled by the school.

Debate

16. Councillor Ross Mackinnon opened the debate by indicating that he was satisfied that the points around the five-year time period for site use had expired. In addition, he believed that the viability assessment also seemed to be appropriate and that, although the loss of affordable housing was lamentable, there was a demonstrable need for older person housing, which this application would provide. The point raised by the neighbours around the loss of amenity was noted and acknowledged, however, he did not believe that these were significant enough to warrant refusing the application. As the application was considered to be policy compliant, if dark sky conditions were also applied, he considered the proposal acceptable.

17. Councillor Nick Carter thanked all the speakers for their contribution. It was emphasised that the ICB had claimed to not have been consulted on the proposed land use and so could not say whether a doctor's surgery would be suggested. A potential option, therefore, would be to refuse the application in order to allow the ICB to be properly consulted. The second point he raised was around the height of the proposed flats believing them to be three storeys, not two and a half, and so in contravention of NDP policies. However, the benefit to the school was also noted.

18. Councillor Paul Kander discussed the height of the dwellings, noting that the NDP allowed for three storeys as long as the third was in the roof, which is what was being proposed. On the point made by the ICB that they had not been consulted, it

was noted that they had around ten years to work to put an application forward, but that this had not happened. On balance therefore, he could see no material planning reasons to refuse the application.

19. Councillor Chris Read highlighted that the plans provided did show a three-storey building by the amount of head room provided, and that new dwellings should respect the scale and surroundings of the local area. Despite this, there were undeniably massive public amenity benefits through the extension of the school grounds. A detailed lighting plan was also considered necessary as part of the conditions if the application was approved.

20. Councillor Justin Pemberton welcomed the debate on the application and noted the issues around the input from the ICB. However, he believed that if there had been demand for a health centre on the site, it would have been progressed before this point in time. On neighbouring amenity and overlooking, from attending the site visit those concerns were well understood. However, the update reports provided more details around these issues and that the 16-metre gap break between the proposed dwellings and the existing neighbouring properties was sufficient. For these reasons, with an amendment to the lighting condition to include dark sky policies, he was satisfied to agree with officer recommendations.

21. Councillor Nick Carter spoke again and highlighted that he was torn on the application. The main issues being the lack of response from the ICB and the height of the dwellings, on which the NDP was clear.

22. Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed to accept Officer's recommendation and grant planning permission subject to the conditions listed in the main report and update report, with an amendment to condition 12, Lighting, to comply with Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan point 9.3.4 and to ensure that it would take account of the dark night skies in this sensitive location. This was seconded by Councillor Paul Kander.

23. 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 subject to the following amendments to condition 12 and the completion of the required s106 planning obligation as set out in the agenda report and update report:

> Prior to the first occupation of any building within each phase, a "lighting design strategy for biodiversity" for that part of the site and associated infrastructure shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The strategy shall:
>
> a) identify those areas/features within that phase that are particularly sensitive for bats and that are likely to cause disturbance in or around their breeding sites and resting places or along important routes used to access key areas of their territory, for example, for foraging; and
>
> b) show how and where external lighting will be installed (through the provision of appropriate Isolux lighting contour plans and technical specifications) so that it can be clearly demonstrated that areas to be lit will not disturb or prevent the above species using their territory or having access to their breeding sites and resting places.
>
> c] take into account policy GD5 in the SMNDP ensuring dark skies are protected in full.

All external lighting shall be installed in accordance with the specifications and locations set out in the strategy, and these shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the strategy. Under no circumstances should any other external lighting be installed without prior consent from the local planning authority.

Reason: Bats and badgers are sensitive to light pollution. The introduction of artificial light might mean such species are disturbed and/or discouraged from using their breeding and resting places, established flyways or foraging areas. Such disturbance can constitute an offence under relevant wildlife legislation. This condition is applied in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, and Policy SP11 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041.

(2) Application No. and Location: 25/01915/FULMAJ at Padworth Saw Mills, Rag Hill, Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4NU

24. Before discussing this item, there was a brief adjournment at 8.15pm in order to facilitate a comfort break. The meeting reconvened at 8.25pm.

25. **Continuation of the meeting:** During consideration of this item, the time approach 10pm. In accordance with the Council's Constitution point 7.13.5, the Committee supported the Chairman's motion, seconded by Councillor Ross Mackinnon, that the remaining business could be concluded by 10.30pm, and therefore that the Committee would continue with Agenda Item 4(2).

26. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(2)) concerning Planning Application 25/01915/FULMAJ in respect of the proposed retention and marginal extension of boundary treatments at Padworth Saw Mills, Aldermaston.

27. The Planning Officer, Sian Cutts, 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 Head of Planning and Development be authorised to grant planning permission, subject to the conditions outlined in the main and update reports.

28. The Chairman asked the Highways Officer, Paul Goddard, if he had any observations on the application. He highlighted that:

    28.1 That the site had a complicated history but that it was in commercial use for decades and always enjoyed access onto Rag Hill – a single carriageway through much of its length in proximity to the site. There were signs displayed when leaving the site directing traffic to turn left only, going south. The intention was that these signs would remain if the application was approved.

    28.2 The applicant's traffic consultant's report used standard methodology to predict traffic movements for B2 and B8 uses, finding that B8 produced less traffic due to the nature of the activities permitted. The Council also produced their own assessment, which also indicated a reduction in traffic from the proposed change of use. Therefore, if the application was approved, it was predicted that there could be better traffic flows onto Rag Hill.

    28.3 Due to this prediction, and that Highways had no objections to the other changes on the site, they registered no objection overall to the proposal.

29. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Desmon Farndell, Aldermaston Parish Council representative, Rob Smith, objector, and Haydon Richardson, agent, addressed the Committee on this application.

Parish Council Representation

30. Desmon Farndell addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed on the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Parish Council

31. Members did not have any questions of clarification.

Objector Representation

32. Rob Smith addressed the Committee virtually. This representation can be viewed on the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Objector

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

    33.1 That the use of generators on the site was not considered a nuisance, but that it was not environmentally sustainable. However, he did believe that some complaints about the site had been submitted to the Council.

Agent Representation

34. Haydon Richardson addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026.

Member Questions to the Agent

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

    35.1 That all B2 use activities had been discontinued. These had been a car garage, recycle and waste centre, and scaffolding activities. Any HGV or other related traffic currently coming to and from the site would only relate to B8 activities.

    35.2 That additional tree planting beyond what was suggested would not be ideal given the applicants desire for the site to be used for B8 activities. However, the trees that had already been removed had been unprotected.

    35.3 That the current owner had taken control of the site in 2022.

Ward Member Representation

36. Councillor Dominic Boeck addressed the Committee. This representation can be viewed in the recording: Eastern Area Planning Committee – 2 September 2026

Member Questions to the Ward Member

37. Members asked questions of clarification of Councillor Boeck and were given the following responses:

    37.1 That the gable wall and fencing proposed would not be in keeping with the local area.

    37.2 That conditions on the potential approval of the application had not been considered, although they were mentioned by the Parish Council.

Member Questions to Officers

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

38.1 The site itself had lawful use of B2 activities and associated storage, due to the approved sawmill, as well as B8 activities in several areas. The application would remove these and grant a general B8 use across the whole of the site.

38.2 That limits on the hours of use and over lighting could be added via conditions. However, overly prescriptive conditions, such as over the type of material stored, was not appropriate. If there was concern about the types of material stored due to the site falling within a rural area, then the Committee could refuse the application on those grounds.

38.3 Environmental Health issued no objections to the application.

38.4 That B8 storage tends to allow the storage of materials, not vehicles, and that lorry storage was typically sui generis.

38.5 That there had been no traffic incident report in the period 2015-24.

38.6 Although unauthorised uses did not turn countryside into developed land, it was suggested that the site was physically related to its existing uses.

38.7 That there was nothing to prevent the applicant intensifying the B8 activities on the site following permission.

38.8 That the traffic movement prediction was based on B8 uses per 100 square metres, not a situation where the whole of the site was in B8 use.

38.9 That the left turn (south) of exiting traffic onto Rag Hill was put in place as turning right (north) was even more unsuitable for HGVs.

38.10 That a recent change to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has somewhat superseded Local Plan Policy SP17, the strategic approach to employment land.

38.11 That, due to the approved sawmill and ancillary storage yard, Officers believed that the site constituted B2 usage.

38.12 That Officers could not confirm what percentage of the site was being used for B2 and ancillary activities and what was being used for B8.

38.13 That the ground levels would not be altered as they are not part of the application and likely were changed beyond the scope of potential planning enforcement interventions – over ten years without challenge.

Debate

39. Councillor Paul Kander opened the debate by indicating that he did not believe that the Committee had enough information to make an informed decision on the application. As the site could see B8 intensification across the entire site, traffic predictions should cover the whole area. In addition, Members would benefit from a map overlaying the area of existing B2 and B8 uses, and then the proposed B8 area.

40. Councillor Ross Mackinnon also indicated that he did not feel like there was enough information in the documentation about how much of the current site was used for B2 and B8 uses. Therefore, he did not believe the traffic assessment could be accurate.

41. In response to the points made about a lack of information, the Development Management Team Leader indicated that it would be difficult to get more clarity. If the Committee considered that there was not sufficient information to demonstrate

that the entire site had lawful B2 use or the approval could lead to an increase in vehicle movements, then they could refuse it on those grounds.

42. Councillor Nick Carter indicated that some of the issues raised with the application could be controlled via condition, such as on hours of delivery of materials.

43. Councillor Ross Mackinnon did not want to move past the previous issues with the site, specifically highlighting that there was more scope for increased landscaping. It was also emphasised that the Council could regularise the use of activities on the site through enforcement. Overall, as the application could lead to the intensification of activity on the site, the damage could outweigh the benefits of a blanket B8 use.

44. Councillor Justin Pemberton indicated that he did not believe there was enough time in the debate to cover every aspect of the application. He specifically raised the economic implications, noting the importance of sustaining the rural economy in the NPPF, that were not previously mentioned in detail.

45. Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed to reject Officer's recommendation and refuse the change of use application for the reasons listed below. This was seconded by Councillor Chris Read.

46. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Development Manager be authorised to refuse the change of use application for the following reasons:

That the Committee were not satisfied that it had been sufficiently demonstrated that the entire site had been in previous B2 use when used in association with the sawmill, and that therefore a B8 use across the entire application site would result in an intensification of use from the previously authorised use of the site for sawmill and ancillary storage. This would lead to a potential significant increase in associated vehicle movements beyond the previous authorised uses on the site. The associated unauthorised works on site, resulting in loss of trees and an increase in vehicle movements has resulted in harm to the character and appearance of Raghill, and the erosion of its rural character, that outweighs the economic benefits of the proposed B8 use. This is compounded by the minimal landscaping proposals that would not sufficiently mitigate the associated visual harm from the intensification of use of the site, particularly in views from the adjacent highway.

This is contrary to Policy SP17, DM35 and DM25 of the West Berkshire Local Plan 2023-2041 and Policy E4 (2), and TR6(4) of the NPPF which says development proposals should be of a high quality design and in keeping with the surrounding environment, that requires that the use is suitable for the rural location and will not generate traffic of a type or amount inappropriate for the rural roads, and for development to be appropriate it terms of character and appearance of the rural area and setting in the landscape, and fails to provide sufficient compensation for the loss of trees in this rural lane.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 10.27pm)

CHAIRMAN …….

Date of Signature …….