

# HALSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 AUGUST 2014 in THE PAVILION, STATION ROAD, HALSTEAD AT 18.00

**PRESENT:** Cllr. Terry Brooker – Chairman of the Planning Committee  
Cllr. Sheila Bent  
Cllr. Barrie Blundell  
Cllr. Chris Ford  
Cllr. Karen Grosvenor  
Cllr. David Taylor, Chairman of Council

**IN ATTENDANCE:** The Clerk, 6 parishioners  
The meeting convened at 18.13

### 1 APOLOGIES.

All members were present

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Nil

### 3 PLANNING APPLICATION

#### SE/14/WATERCROFTS WOOD, OLD LONDON ROAD, HALSTEAD

Erection of Chapel/Crematorium, provision of ancillary car-park and erection of woodman's shed.

The application was considered and during the discussion the Chairman adjourned the meeting several times for parishioners to speak.

After much discussion the Chairman proposed that the Parish Council object to the application; carried unanimously. The content of the following response were **RESOLVED** unanimously by the Committee. This response will be approved and accepted at the next full Parish Council meeting.

SE/14/02003/FUL

WATERCROFTS WOOD, OLD LONDON ROAD, HALSTEAD

ERECTION OF CHAPEL/CREMATORIUM, PROVISION OF ANCILLARY CAR-PARK AND ERECTION OF WOODMAN'S SHED.

#### **OBJECTION Reasons:**

#### **HALSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL STRONGLY OBJECTS TO THIS PLANNING APPLICATION.**

1. The proposed development is within the Green Belt where strict policies of restraint exist. The proposal would be inappropriate development and harmful to the maintenance of the character of the Green Belt. Policies EN1 and GB1 relate. This application is in 4 distinct phases, which, if permitted, would mean the far greater destruction of trees in an ancient woodland. Also the proposed buildings, and the entire proposed development, would be located on a rise and as such would be clearly visible from both Old London Road and Watercroft Road. This would be exacerbated in the winter months as very many of the trees on the site are deciduous.
2. Policy L08 of the Core Strategy states: *'that the extent of the Green Belt should be maintained. The countryside should be conserved and the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity will be protected and enhanced where possible'*.

This application will contravene this policy in terms of :

- Destruction of large tracts of ancient woodland, where many of the trees already have TPO's;
- The loss of wildlife habitat in the area. There is a rich diversity of flora and fauna and rare moth species have been identified as breeding in the woods. Council believes this contravenes EN17B, para 118... *'Planning Authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles: if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), .... then planning permission should be refused'*.
- The location of the site, which will be on high ground, and immediately visible to any local residents.
- There is a track which runs through and around the woods. This has been walked for many years by parishioners. The Parish Council is currently looking into registering this track as a public right of way.

All these points mean that the development would have a detrimental impact on the Green Belt, contrary to Policy L08 and other policies. **24/14-15**

3. At the Appeal Hearing held in 1995 the Inspector granted permission for the chapel, woodman's shed and car park. Consent was refused for a crematorium. *The Inspector stated that there was no need demonstrated for a crematorium and no reason whatsoever for such a building to impinge on the Green Belt.* Sevenoaks District Council had already refused the application which resulted in the applicant going to Appeal. The decision made by SDC concurred with the Inspector's opinion; so, at that time, SDC obviously believed this was not a suitable site for a crematorium. The Parish Council believes that these circumstances have not changed.
4. It has been stated subsequently that there is a 'need' within the Sevenoaks District but Halstead Parish Council believes this is more a matter of 'convenience' rather than actual 'need'. The crematoria in Falconwood in Eltham and Kent and Sussex in Tunbridge Wells have stated they can cope with increased cremation requests and the Kent and Sussex Crematorium is to erect another chapel in the next 5 years which will effectively double their capacity to handle cremation services. The owner- operators of the crematorium at Beckenham have also advised Sevenoaks District Council that the construction of a new crematorium in the Sevenoaks area would materially affect their business.
5. The Inspector who dealt with the recent appeal hearing for the proposed Memoria crematorium said that, although **he** accepted that there was a need for a crematorium in the Sevenoaks area, he did not agree that a proof of need alone was sufficient to override the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The applicant still has to demonstrate very special circumstances to support any application. This applicant has provided no such special circumstances to support this application.
6. Council has many concerns about the increase in traffic on the A224. The road is extremely busy due to the close proximity of the M25; the exit from this motorway is literally just over the road from the proposed entrance to the crematorium. Its closeness to the M25 will encourage greatly increased traffic levels in and around the village. The road where the wood is located is used by commuters and there are double yellow lines and parking bays all along the road due to the close proximity of the railway station. This has resulted in a large car park being provided within the planning application for people using the crematorium, which has caused further encroachment into the Green Belt. At a time when the Government is attempting to encourage the use of public transport rather than motor vehicles, the Parish Council does not accept that this is appropriate. Outside the rush-hour periods Knockholt train station has a very limited timetable and the local bus service is also very restricted.
7. The increase in traffic on this busy road would in turn increase pollution levels, as would the emissions from the chimney of the crematorium. During the winter months the area is prone to pockets of mist in the surrounding low-lying land and the emissions from the chimney would be likely to exacerbate the problem. There would also be an increase in light pollution with the introduction of lighting within the development. Halstead Parish does not have street lighting so this would adversely affect the quality of life of nearby residents.
8. The foundations on the site are not newly created but were in place in 2010. The entrance roadway was created 20 years ago and no further work has been undertaken. In March 2010 a lawful development certificate was given for a chapel and maintenance shed; in April 2010 planning consent was granted for a new layout which prevented the removal of some trees. These applications have exceeded the time frame for work to have started and have not been renewed. Therefore the land does not carry consent for any development. The applicant infers that that work has been carried out recently but the driveway is overgrown and almost impassable. The Parish Council believes that no work whatsoever has been carried out on the land since prior to 2010.
9. The Parish Council believes that the properties in Watercroft Road are within 200 yards of the crematorium chimney which is the distance imposed by the Abatement Act of 1902 whereby occupiers consent is required for a crematorium. The applicant has not made any approach for consent to the residents of these properties. The properties in Badgers Mount located opposite to the proposed development site will also be overlooked by the crematorium and the chimney.
10. The applicant states 'cemetery' as the current use of the site. This is obviously not the case as no burials have taken place, and no building work to create a cemetery has taken place on the site for a considerable number of years. Additionally, the applicants (unlike Memoria and Mercia) have no track record in the business of crematoria/cemeteries and this would appear to be a classic case of a speculative development application.

