

Good evening councillors. My name is Tom Marianczak and I've been asked to read a statement on behalf of the 2100 members of The Elms Petition Group.

The signatories of The Elms petition oppose any and all development of The Elms. The reasons for our opposition are wide and varied but include environmental, sustainability, conservation and traffic issues.

In the context of today's discussion regarding the revised application for 37 houses on The Elms, we are somewhat dismayed to see that the council has had a report on the application created by authors unknown which appears to be poor in its content and detail.

Firstly, we would like to know who created this report? There is certainly no author on the report itself and the content of it appears to be somewhat draft-like including incorrect images. Furthermore it appears to be created in January when the final revised documents weren't submitted by the developer until mid-march.

Secondly, throughout the report but summarised in section 5, the report raises several pertinent issues which indicate that the revised application does not conform to local and national planning policy frameworks. This includes the much lauded Thame Neighbourhood Plan, yet the report goes on to recommend that no objection is raised to the application. How can this be a valid recommendation when so many issues with the application are raised?

Thirdly, the report has several glaring omissions which should most definitely be included in such a document. The most obvious is that the report does not discuss traffic generation during the building works and after the works have been completed. This is a massive issue for the roads in this area and must be considered as part of this application.

We can only hope that the Councillors have undertaken their own due diligence on this application and we urge you all to make your own informed decision on this matter. We would like to remind councillors that the application documents are commissioned by the developer and as such should be treated with a fair amount of cynicism.

When analysing the revised application we noted that it regularly promotes the fact that the developer has reduced the number of units and uses this as response to objections that were raised when the application stood for 45 houses.

We trust that the Councillors won't be sucked in by this weak justification but it does appear that the report created to guide Councillors all too readily agrees with the assumptions and opinions set out in the application which, I remind you once again, are created by the developers and their agents in order to persuade you to allow the development of an ancient greenfield site solely for financial gain.

With regards to the content of the revised application itself, we continued to be horrified at the blatant flouting of the Thame Neighbourhood Plan. 3 storey houses, development to the south of The Elms house, removal of mature specimen trees and detrimental effects on Thame Conservation Area.

In fact, what we encourage the Councillors to do is look at what the experts have to say about the application, these are taken directly from the SODC planning portal and we assume that all councillors will have read these already.

Richard Peats, of English Heritage says:

"English Heritages view is that development on the land to the south of The Elms would seriously harm the significance of this grade II listed building... The revised proposals still involve development of the land to the south of The Elms and the addendum to the Heritage Statement does not include any new information which would persuade us to change our view on the harm entailed. Therefore [English Heritage] continues to recommend that this application is refused."

It should be noted that your appointed Thame Conservation Area Advisory Committee have agreed wholeheartedly with the statements made by English Heritage.

Even more critical is the lengthy response from the SODC Conservation Officer, Samantha Allen, who states that "this proposal, as revised, over develops the site constituting harm to the setting of the listed buildings and the character and appearance of this unique open space within the Thame Conservation Area."

It is refreshing to see the conservation officer, disagrees with the Heritage Statement created by the developer in that it under-estimates the harm to the The Elms and the open space as a whole and over-estimates the public benefit created by this development.

In conclusion she, like us, recommends refusal of the application based on the direct contravention of no less than 8 national and local planning policies and frameworks including, once again, the Thame Neighbourhood Plan.

We would also like to remind Councillors that Elms Park was donated to the town of Thame by the previous owners of The Elms and at the time of donation a legally binding conveyance was signed by the council which sought to protect The Elms from development. Allowing development to go ahead, including the creation of new access points to The Elms, the Council would be leaving itself open to having legal action brought against it for breach of this contract

In conclusion, we urge Councillors to recommend refusal of this application. You should also note that this revised application requires the reallocation of at least 8 houses to other sites around Thame. We urge this council to end this potentially protracted fight right now and reallocate all 45 houses to other, more appropriate sites around Thame as detailed in the Neighbourhood Plan.