

Transition Tavistock Comments on Planning Application 3652/20/FUL

(Baker Estates, Land off Plymouth Road)

OVERALL

We are a volunteer run community group working towards a sustainable future for the local area. We welcome the applicant's aim of "creating quality homes to be enjoyed by generations to come" in a "safe and walkable development which provides safe connections to the wider community". We are disappointed that these plans will not deliver that as they neglect key aspects of transport and energy planning.

While there may be merit in having an extra care home on this side of the town, the location within the site leaves it isolated, with the residents needing to cross a road and go uphill to connect with the rest of even this small estate. The applicant has presented no evidence on the merits of this particular site in enabling such residents to remain part of the community.

We therefore OBJECT to both parts of the hybrid application.

TRANSPORT

As the applicant points out, the location of the site is suitable for sustainable transport, which is a key aim of planning policy. However, the plans fail to identify and address the barriers to residents using this.

Cycling

While the site is close to NCN 27 it is unclear how cyclists are expected to reach it, and, on the current plans, no safe and convenient means to do so for those who are not fully fit and confident. Given national policy developments such as Gear Change and LTN 1/20, such ambiguity, which fails to distinguish between walking and cycling, is shocking to see in professional work.

Cycling on Plymouth Road at this point is regarded as too dangerous even by many experienced cyclists (and is resented by drivers). The exit from the estate to Plymouth Road contains no provision for cyclists and is unlikely to be compliant with LTN 1/20 guidance on cycling infrastructure at junctions.

The application is unclear as to whether the path to Plymouth Road is intended for use by cyclists as well as pedestrians. Some of the diagrams (eg p12 of the design and access statement) show a shared use symbol against it. The map on p32 of the DAS has a "pedestrian + cycle path" notation on all the paths - including those with multiple steps which are clearly unfit for cycling.

The link to Plymouth Road is described as a footpath in the narrative of the plans and transport statement, with no discussion of its suitability as a cycle path. It appears too narrow for shared use, which LTN 1/20 discourages anyhow. A width of at least 4m would be advisable given the likely presence of elderly pedestrians. However, even if cycling is permitted, this link leaves cyclists needing either to cycle on the main road or wheel on a pavement before they can join NCN 27 in either direction.

The short section of NCN 27 near Lidl, including the Toucan crossing, is already problematic, but the plans do not acknowledge this or propose this any improvement. The issues include clarity of

signing, the lack of any physical barrier between a shared use pavement and a busy main road, and sharp turns on a narrow path on the Bishopsmead side of the crossing. For residents of the new estate intending to take NCN 27 south, that crossing is in any case an inconvenient detour in the wrong direction.

The unnamed lane to the south of the site could provide a safe cycling link to NCN north, passing Tavistock College and the town centre. Two exits to it are shown, but one has steps and the other is accessed via a link close to the 5 bedroom houses which does not seem to be marked as shared use and will not be easy for visitors to find. Moreover, the lane is currently too potholed for safe cycling, and there is no proposal in the plans to improve or fund improvement of the surface.

It is frustrating that neither of the two developers, nor county or district council officers in preliminary discussions with them, have come up with an imaginative plan for making this sheltered lane a well surfaced and well lit link for pedestrians and cyclists with proper connections through to NCN27 in both directions and to a safe means of crossing Plymouth Road. As the plans stand, there is a risk that people will cycle down the lane looking for entrances to the estates on either side, miss them and arrive its very unsafe junction with Plymouth Road.

Walking

Connections within the site appear reasonable with 2m step-free footways beside much of the road and a short cut with steps across the end of the horseshoe. However the map on p32 of the DAS shows the far end of the access road as shared surface – ie no pavements needed as low traffic. This part incorporates the only turning bay on the road, so it is likely that delivery vehicles, under time pressure, will suddenly appear there.

It is good that the footpath link to Plymouth Road offers both a stepped and step free route. The step free route is close to the extra care home. However there is no discussion of whether it has a suitable gradient for frail pedestrians, and there is no protected crossing of the access road for residents or visitors (who may themselves be frail). The crossing point is close to the junction with Plymouth Road, where cars may turn in suddenly.

Residents of the estate unable to use steps (eg parents with pushchairs, people with mobility problems) will have to walk round the loop of the road to get onto the footpath, then back in the direction they have come from. The addition of a further surfaced footpath connecting to the loop across the open space would address this, and aid inclusive access to the open space. It is not very clear from the plans whether there is a pavement near that or not. The illustration on page 6 of the Design and Access Statement shows an off-road path which does not appear to be on the plans.

A huge opportunity has been missed in not making a direct pedestrian link through to the Morrisons site. This is only a few metres away from the boundary. Instead, a half kilometre walk is required. With a minor redesign of the layout of that corner of the Morrisons car park, such a link could provide not only a direct access to shops but an additional safe connection to walking and cycling routes to the town centre and schools.

There appears to be no mention of lighting in the plans, even in the crime and safety section. The footpath is shown as within trees, so not, as claimed, overlooked by housing. It is important that the estate has safe access on foot in hours of darkness, so good lighting is key here, and on the unnamed lane. Handrails on the steps are also important, but not discussed. It is not clear whether the estate management company or the highways authority will be responsible for maintenance of the section of these paths which lies outside the site boundary.

The plans show a couple of plain benches (without backs) on the open space. Given the slope of the site and likely age profile of residents, further seats, with backs, could be included from the start.

While there are pedestrian connections to the key facilities outside the estate, the quality of routes is variable. As with cycling, the unnamed lane, with traffic restricted, could be a good facility if resurfaced, lit, and with step free connections on both sides. There is currently no street lighting in Brook Lane, which will deter use of that in the evenings. Walking on pavements to the town centre is safe but unpleasant due to traffic. Connections to the Linden Homes estate to the south are not clearly specified here. Again, it is disappointing that the Councils have allowed the two developers to take separate and piecemeal approaches rather than creating a sustainable transport blueprint for the expansion of the town.

Connection to facilities in Whitchurch, including the school, require crossing of Plymouth Road. Walking, in the wrong direction, to the Toucan crossing involves crossing two vehicle entrances and sharing a narrow part of the cycle track before returning to opposite the starting point. As discussed under buses, the proposed alternative of refuge island is a totally inadequate response. There may be an alternative via the Linden Homes estate and a crossing further south, but this applicant has not described it.

Buses.

Assuming that post-Covid bus services survive, proximity to frequent (daytime on weekdays) bus services is a strength of this site. To reach the bus stop safe and convenient footpath access, discussed above, is vital, as is the ability to cross the road quickly to the southbound bus stop. The plans and transport statement refer to an existing refuge island as suitable for this, perhaps with an improvement to the beacon. This is not a safe or suitable option given that there could be parents with pushchairs, school children, disabled people and cyclists seeking to cross at this point and that it will be used both day and night, with several people crossing at once, eg to catch a bus that is already in sight. (The lack of past casualties here is irrelevant, as very few people currently have a reason to cross at this point rather than the Toucan. That will change significantly.)

We suggest that a full assessment of safe crossing for both pedestrians and cyclists should be made, covering both the need to cross directly at a bus stop and way NCN 27 crosses. Has the option of moving the Toucan crossing to a point slightly further south been evaluated? Or has the discussion with the highways authority focused on the convenience of drivers?

Vehicles

We welcome the inclusion of electric chargepoints in every property. Nothing is said about provision for the extra care site. We would expect to see generous provision there in any further application.

We sympathise with the concerns expressed by Brook Lane residents about vehicle access from part of the site adding to problems they already experience. The applicant's argument that this gives (privileged?) residents of the 5 bedroom houses a "better" way of getting to Plymouth Road reveals that the proposed exit from the access road to the smaller homes is problematic. There seems no reason not to rearrange the layout and access so that all homes are connected to the main access road and a straightforward step free link and entrance to the lane for pedestrians and cyclists lane is provided at that end of the site – perhaps with another small public space to take advantage of the views?

The suitability the junction to Plymouth road has to take account of the profile of vehicles and drivers using it. The trip analysis in the transport statement, combined with the likely demographic profile of the site, that cars with elderly drivers will make right turns out or into this junction dozens

of times a day. Yet the design requires complex visual assessment of a two way main road plus vehicles turning across in the opposite way the Hawthorn Road junction, before a quick decision to turn across a probably short gap in traffic. Given the known road safety hazard of drivers losing visual acuity and reaction speed with age, and the currently unknown ability of driverless vehicles to interact with them during the decades of overlap, this poses risks. No justification for using this type of junction rather than any alternative is given. Nor is the positioning of the exit road relative to Hawthorn Road – which within the applicant’s control – explained.

ENERGY

- 1) Whilst we welcome the energy efficiency measures proposed, they are based on standards set in 2013. Further measures to improve on the 22.09% energy reduction achieved to these standards, would make these homes more environmentally acceptable. Fully committing to installing solar PV should be mandatory to deliver further reductions.
- 2) Devon has declared a Climate Emergency, there is no acknowledgement of this or the existence of the interim Devon Carbon Plan.
- 3) No new build should be heated by gas.
- 4) No consideration is given to a community biomass heating scheme. This would also be able to supply the care home.
- 5) Air source heat pumps are a proven technology. Using the current carbon factor may be misleading as this will reduce in time as more renewable sources are commissioned. How do they compare when part of an integrated system including PV and battery storage?
- 6) Mechanical heat recovery has been mentioned but not been considered as part of the energy analysis. Considering the proximity to the main road this is also offers a filtered air source alternative to opening the windows, to achieve the “cross flow cooling”.
- 7) Rain water harvesting is not considered. This saves energy processing and pumping water as well as having environment advantages.
- 8) Solar panels are identified as the preferred renewable energy choice but are absent from the illustrations. To gain maximum benefit they should be installed as part of the initial build.

NATURE

- 1) See 7 above.
- 2) Measures easy to do at the building stage to encourage wild life should include swift bricks.
- 3) Boundaries should be hedge hog friendly, either hedging (also offering a habitat to others) or fencing with holes to allow passage from one garden to the other.