



# Knowsley Council

Mr John Beesley  
Chairman  
Beesley and Fildes Limited  
Wilson Road  
Huyton  
Knowsley  
L36 6AF

9 June 2017

Dear Mr Beesley

## **Whitakers Garden Centre - Planning Application**

I refer to your letter to the Council dated 12 May 2017 in connection with the above and I note that you appear also to have made your letter available to the public via the Prescott Online web site.

As you may be aware, the Council is restrained during the period in advance of a General Election from making public statements which may give the perception of promoting any political view. I have therefore been unable to respond to your letter before now. In doing so, I have also made the response available to the Prescott Online web site as I agree that the public should be kept aware of the Council's position on this matter.

I want to start my response by recognising that Beesley and Fildes has carried out significant work to date, and the company must also recognise that the Council has worked hard at the same time on the development of the new Local Plan.

I should also start by making it clear that Knowsley Council is supportive of the future comprehensive development of the wider allocated site (including the current site of Whitakers Garden Centre) for housing. The fact that the site was allocated for future housing development in the Local Plan which the Council adopted in January 2016 is clear evidence of that position, and the Council has never sought to move away from it.

The Council is also very well aware that the site is no longer a green belt site – indeed, it has not been a green belt site for over 12 months now. To be clear then, the Council's current opposition to your proposals is not based on any misunderstanding as to the site's status in planning terms.

Having said this, the fact that the site has been released from the green belt does not automatically mean that the Council therefore has to accept any planning application. Our intention was always and continues to be to secure a comprehensive high-quality development of the site.

In summary, this is where our positions differ. You state that you have “addressed comprehensively all concerns expressed by the Council”, but we disagree.

In fact, the plans presented by your team failed to demonstrate to us that a high-quality development would be achieved. They were also unacceptable on several other important grounds. These grounds are detailed in the Planning Officer’s report on your application, which is publicly available and can be read via our website. Given the extent to which you do not agree with our views, I think it is important for me to explain them again:-

## **Design Issues**

Your proposed development would present a poorly conceived frontage onto Liverpool Road given that your plan is to face development into the site rather than outwards. In the context that Liverpool Road is a major road route within Knowsley and provides a strategic gateway to the regional and national transport network, this approach is unacceptable to us.

Furthermore, in terms of design, your parameters plans identify “development zones” incorporating development of a high density. As the site is at the edge of the existing built-up area, we feel that it should be more loosely developed and incorporate a landscaped buffer. The edges of the developable area should have a much lower density character in order to enable a better transition to the green spaces and Green Belt edge.

The proposed development also fails to integrate into the neighbourhood and opportunities have not been taken to improve connections between the site and its surroundings.

In summary, our view is that the proposal would result in a very high-density scheme which would be likely to result in a poor layout with buildings spaced too closely together. Furthermore, building frontages would be likely to be car dominated and connections with the wider area would be unacceptably limited. Conflicts would also be likely between the new dwellings and the retained trees.

## **Highway and Accessibility Issues**

The proposed development’s potential highway safety impact resulted in considerable local objection when we advertised the application. Primarily, these concerns related to worries about increased traffic and congestion, the suitability of the proposed access arrangements, road safety, and the potential increased risk of accidents.

As I have said previously, we are supportive of the site’s comprehensive development and we recognise and accept that development will increase the number of vehicle movements on local roads, particularly during the morning and evening peaks.

The problem in this regard with your plan is that the position and design of the proposed access would not cater adequately for the needs of the development. The

evidence which you submitted with your application demonstrates that queuing on the westbound carriageway (between the existing and proposed junction) would be likely to be in excess of the available roadspace. This would in turn be very likely to lead to an unacceptable safety issue.

In addition, your evidence did not take into account the pedestrian crossing facility across Liverpool Road which would have a further negative effect on the proposed junction. Quite clearly, the increased pedestrian footfall arising from the development would increase the frequency of use of that crossing.

Given that your application only related to part of the overall site, it was evident that the proposed site access was insufficient to serve the development.

I think it also worth pointing out that we did suggest a suitable solution to you via your agent, but you chose to disregard that suggested approach.

### **Noise Issues**

To protect the amenity of future residents (when using their gardens) from unacceptable levels of road noise, your application outlined a 3m high acoustic barrier. This was shown on your plans as located partly along the northern boundary of the site, along the western boundary adjacent to the A58, and along the southern boundary along the site frontage onto Liverpool Road (A57), returning partly into the application site.

A 3m high acoustic fence would be visually unacceptable in those locations. Even if the visual aspect was not a concern, the land levels and the presence of a high pressure water main crossing the site and trees in the vicinity make such a proposal significantly problematic.

### **Other Issues**

Your application did not provide sufficient evidence so that we could assess the development's impact on trees.

The ecology surveys submitted with your application were out of date and could not be relied upon.

I hope you will now see that, as the position stands, your application was refused on clear and fully justified planning grounds. It is also the case that these concerns were held by many members of the local community who wrote to us to express their objections to the planning application.

It is clear that you do not agree with the Council's decision to refuse your planning application. In that regard, you are entitled to submit an appeal to the Government via the Planning Inspectorate.

The planning application was dealt with correctly and in full accordance with the law.

If you decide to submit a planning appeal, we will defend our decision rigorously on the basis that our refusal of planning permission was well-founded. We would of course much prefer for you to reconsider your plans and work alongside the Council to bring forward a fresh proposal which fully addresses our earlier concerns.

Yours Sincerely

Mike Harden  
Chief Executive