

**P/OUT/2023/01166**

**Land to the south of Ringwood Road, Alderholt**

With reference to the above planning application received on 29 March 2023.

### **Site Location, Accessibility, Carbon Reduction and Sustainable Travel**

Alderholt is a village located in a rural part of East Dorset close to the border with Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council, with the nearest small towns being Fordingbridge, Verwood and Ringwood and major towns and urban centres much further away. Residents travel to and from Alderholt almost exclusively by private car.

Alderholt is a significant distance from any sizable urban area and consequently the employment, services and facilities that such an urban area would provide. Because of this dispersed pattern of settlements, most car journeys are longer when compared to an edge of town or edge of settlement development.

Alderholt has few alternative travel modes to the private car. There is no rail service, no public bus service and a very limited community bus service and the village is not close enough to “nearby” centres of employment to walk or cycle. There are limited PRoWs and off-road cycle routes to nearby settlements.

The submitted Transport Assessment concentrates on the traditional peak hours in order to assess potential congestion and high trip flow issues but this does not provide the total, daily, car trip generation of a site of this site located in an unsustainable location.

The Climate Change Committee’s 2022 Report to Parliament notes that for the UK to achieve net zero carbon status by 2050, action is needed to support a modal shift away from car travel. The NPPF supports this position, with paragraphs 73 and 105 prescribing that significant development should offer a genuine choice of transport modes, while paragraphs 104 and 110 advise that appropriate opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport should be taken up.

The existing and emerging Local Transport Plans focus on carbon reduction, especially through the transport sector which is the largest carbon emitter Building a significant residential development in a ‘car dependent’ location will be contradictory to meeting these net zero targets.

The NPPF sets out policies on Local Plan Making and identifying suitable land for delivering a sufficient supply of homes. Paragraph 73 states that: *“the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns, provided they are well located and designed, and supported by the necessary infrastructure and facilities (including a genuine choice of transport modes)... In doing so, they should:*

*b) ensure that their size and location will support a sustainable community, with sufficient access to services and employment opportunities within the development itself (without expecting an unrealistic level of self-containment), or in larger towns to which there is good access.”*

Regardless of a reasonable level of internalisation being agreed for assessing this development within Alderholt, it is inevitable that a significant and majority proportion of trips to and from the development will be longer distance, car based, trips to dispersed urban centres.

The rate of build out and phasing of the development would need to be more fully understood before confidence can be given to embedding travel behaviour with new residents and consequently with the ability to deliver the generous level of internalisation predicted. Early delivery of employment, education and services would be needed to reasonably achieve the levels proposed.

The Council has previously expressed significant doubt on the feasibility of delivering 100% trips to secondary school by bus. The application contains no further information that would cause us to change this opinion. There are no details provided on the proposed service and it does not in any event provide for trips to potential alternative secondary schools within the wider area.

The NPPF sets out under paragraph 110 that in assessing sites for development it should be ensured that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users, and that any significant impacts from development on the transport network in terms of capacity and congestion, or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree. Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Policy KS11 states that development should be located so that it reduces the need to travel, provides improved access to key services and facilities and promotes alternative modes of travel. Development should be in accessible locations that are well linked to existing communities by walking, cycling and public transport routes.

The Transport Assessment (TA) and Travel Plan (TP) refer to a proposed new hourly bus service which will serve Cranborne, Alderholt, Fordingbridge, Ringwood on Mondays to Saturdays. We are concerned that this will provide a very limited service given that current residents commute to numerous destinations for employment in all directions from Alderholt. We need to ensure that what is proposed is consistent with Dorset's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Our approach to the BSIP is to develop a 'hub and spoke' network. In this case, the X3 service serving Salisbury, Fordingbridge, Ringwood, Bournemouth Hospital and Bournemouth Town Centre forms the core route operating half-hourly throughout the day. We want to avoid competing with this existing service and should therefore encourage any new bus service to be coordinated to provide regular connections to Fordingbridge. A Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) Service could be more suited to this situation. We would enter further discussions on this but remain concerned that the very dispersed trip destinations likely from a large development in Alderholt would be very difficult to cater for with an attractive alternative for frequent regular trips.

The report mentions that after five years the bus service will be "self-sufficient". We would like to see the evidence supporting this claim.

The traffic modelling undertaken by both the applicant and Dorset Council has shown that a development of 1700 homes is unlikely to have a significant impact on the local Dorset road network in terms of congestion. However, it is the rural characteristics of the local road network that are unsuitable and in some locations are also unsafe to carry increased levels of traffic. Increased traffic on unsuitable roads will be likely to lead to increased collisions impacting on highway safety for all road users and further deter active travel modes.

Regardless of the level of self-containment that can be reasonably agreed for this development, a large proportion of trips will be external, car-based and of medium to long distance. With a better located development, the level of self-containment within a settlement would be higher and a greater proportion of external car trips would be shorter due to proximity of major services and employment. Within Dorset medium length car-based trips are already responsible for the largest proportion of vehicle-based carbon and further, large scale, isolated development such as this will worsen this still further.

It is noted that the main point of access to the development site is the only element where detailed approval is being sought with all other aspects of the proposal submitted in outline.

The site is located immediately to the south of the village of Alderholt, 4km from Fordingbridge and 4km from Verwood. The site is rural in nature and whilst there are facilities for pedestrians within the existing village, options for journeys outside of the village by sustainable or active modes are severely limited.

Reference is made to existing PROWs, but the majority of these are unsuitable for use during inclement weather and the Avon Valley Path is usually under water for the majority of the winter months, so these are not realistic options for sustainable travel. They could be considered suitable for fair weather leisure trips, but these are generally not a concern on the wider highway network as they do not usually occur during peak hours.

The Transport Assessment states carriageway cycling “may” be suitable on B, C and D class roads, but this is likely to only be for keen and competent cyclists. Equally, likely destinations are still outside of recommended cycling distances.

Public Transport is limited to one bus every two hours off peak on three weekdays a week and is not a realistic modal choice for commuters. The applicant acknowledges that, due to the lack of frequent public transport services and the limited local facilities available within the settlement, the majority of everyday needs are met by car travel to neighbouring settlements.

### **Site Accesses**

Details of the access to the site are to be considered as part of the current planning application. A four-arm roundabout junction is proposed to access the site from Hillbury Road, shown on Dwg No 132.0001.005 Rev C (contained within the TA). Whilst this is considered to be acceptable in principle, the Road Safety Audit (RSA) for the junction design identified a number of issues relating to surfacing, lighting, advanced warning signage and drainage. It also raised the matter of ensuring that forward visibility is maintained. These matters need to be addressed now, rather than at a later design stage, to ensure that a suitable and safe junction can be delivered.

It is proposed that the existing 30mph limit along Hillbury Road will be extended south to include the new junction. A TRO will be required for this, at the developer’s expense.

A priority junction is proposed from Ringwood Road (shown on Dwg No 132.0001.004 (contained within the TA). Due to the size of the proposal and the proposed spine road through the site, the priority movements are designed as into and out of the site with the southern section of the existing Ringwood Road becoming the minor arm of the junction. An additional feature has been proposed to assist vehicles right turning out of the site.

However, both the Swept Path Analysis and the Road Safety Audit highlight deficiencies with the layout proposed. The Swept Path does not demonstrate that all vehicles can safely undertake all manoeuvres. It is still unclear whether safe and suitable access can be proposed for the layout proposed. It should also be mentioned that intervisibility is a matter that needs to be resolved now, not at detailed design. The spine road is proposed at 4.8m wide. This is too narrow for the entrance to a development of this scale, reinforced by the details illustrated in the pertinent swept path analysis. It is unclear why the junction has been proposed in the way it has, diverting the southern part of Ringwood Road to form a standard priority junction with the Spine Road would be a simpler, safer and legible layout.

The southern section of Ringwood Road within the development area is proposed to be a no-through road to reduce traffic volumes along this section and improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Turning heads will be included. Options for this are included in the appendices, however, the suggested options for traffic calming need further investigation and consideration. The submission of a suitable scheme could be condition should permission be granted.

Whilst it is appreciated that the internal road layout is illustrative, it should be noted that if the spine road is to act as a bus route it will need to be provided at a minimum width of 6.70m.

The application proposes footway improvements on both Ringwood Road and Hillbury Road to connect the development to existing pedestrian infrastructure. Additional pedestrian links to Birchwood Drive and the recreation ground are also proposed.

The application suggests that advisory cycle lanes be provided along both sides of Station Road (the B3078) and along Ringwood Road (up to the new spine road) with the centre line removed to improve cycling facilities for the settlement as a whole. The Highway Authority can confirm that this would be acceptable subject to the details being agreed and secured through the appropriate agreement

### **Development Impact and Mitigation**

The Transport Assessment suggests that due to trip internalisation the predicted trips generated by the proposed development will be 510 in the AM peak, rather than a total 1209 trips in the AM (a 58% reduction). For the PM the proposed development could generate 884 vehicular trips, compared to a total of 1126 (a 22% reduction).

Prior to the submission of the planning application, the applicant discussed their trip internalisation report (which is referred to in the TA) in order to confirm that the methodology that they were employing was appropriate. Whilst it was agreed that it was, the Authority had no further input into the formulation of the submitted TA nor provided any commentary on the predicted trips now presented in support of the application.

The Highway Authority disagrees with the assertion that the provision of multiple facilities (stated as being shops, cafes and medical facilities) within the new development will reduce the need for both existing and future residents of Alderholt to travel away from the settlement, certainly not to the level suggested by the applicant within the TA.

The TA has utilised their reduced trip generation forecasts to inform their further modelling work, as outlined below.

These trips will impact upon a number of junctions which are considered within the TA, comparing their operation in 2021 (the base year) through a number of forecast years up to 2033 with the proposed development built.

The junction of Station Road with Ringwood Road would operate well within capacity in all scenarios.

The junction of Hillbury Road with Station Road was shown to operate well within capacity during all scenarios.

The Provost Street/Shafesbury Street/High Street junction in Fordingbridge would be likely to operate above capacity. The applicant has suggested that a financial contribution be made so that

the highway authority can either provide junction improvements or implement a one-way system to mitigate the impact of the development. Hampshire County Council as highway authority for Fordingbridge will provide comments on this particular aspect of the proposals.

Further to the south of the settlement, the junction of Verwood Road with the A31 Eastbound junction was considered. It was found that this junction is already above capacity and that the development traffic will add to the problem. The applicant has suggested a mitigation scheme that involves the signalisation of the junction, with two lanes at the A31 off slip to accommodate any right turners (or straight over movements as requested by National Highways during a round of preapplication engagement). A right turn refuge could be provided on Verwood Road for those turning right onto the A31, to separate these from any westbound movements. National Highways will be considering this aspect of the proposals.

The applicant acknowledges that the proposed development will result in increased vehicle numbers on the highway links between Alderholt and the surrounding area.

To the south of the settlement, it has been identified that some widening work will be required along Harbridge Drove and also to the west along the B3078 to Cranborne.

Whilst this has been shown indicatively on a drawing within the TA, the applicant has confirmed that discrepancies between the OS mapping and the situation on the ground would suggest that the necessity for the proposed widening is reviewed at a later stage, through a topographical survey, and that this will be secured through the imposition of an appropriate planning condition.

The road from Batterley Drove south to Verwood identified some issues at the s-bends located centrally along this route relating to collision history. The applicant is proposing that an improved signage scheme be provided here, funded by a suitable contribution secured through a s106 agreement.

For the section of the B3078 between Alderholt and Fordingbridge to the east, the analysis identified a number of points that needed widening or improved signing along the route. Again, the applicant indicates that should permission be granted, it will be necessary to determine whether widening and appropriate mitigation is necessary in each location and suggests that this requirement can be secured through a condition.

It must be remembered that, as previously mentioned, the suggested mitigation is reliant on the acceptance of the applicant's suggested reduced trip generation forecasts and that the reality could be that the junction and link impacts could be substantially greater and require more substantive mitigation. It is also important to note that the low level of submitted detail for the identified highway link improvements fails to provide a categorical promise that the necessary mitigation works can be delivered.

### **Construction Vehicles**

It should be noted that the submitted TA fails to consider the likely impacts of construction traffic upon the local highway network. It will, therefore, be necessary to condition the submission of a CTMP at any subsequent reserved matters stages.

### **Framework Travel Plan**

A Framework Travel Plan has been submitted in support of the proposal which proposes a number of indicative targets and measures for the intended residential and employment uses. It suggests a number of targets and measures that will need to be reviewed, revised and agreed with the

authority through the provision of full travel plans for each reserved matters application. Whilst it is appreciated that the proposed development could provide some facilities for both the existing and future residents to of Alderholt that could reduce the need for residents to travel outside of the settlement to meet their daily needs, they are of a scale and type that would be unlikely to reduce the reliance on the private car. The likely impact of the Travel Plan should be considered accordingly.

### **Conclusion**

The main issues with the proposed development are that the location is considered to be unsustainable, being significantly distant from major service centres containing the majority of jobs and other service functions and beyond reasonable walking and cycling distance of “nearby” small towns.

In addition, the dispersed peak hour trip patterns from this location, resulting from its isolated situation, mean that peak hour journeys would be very difficult to adequately cater for with public transport. The proposed bus service provision is of inadequate frequency to be attractive for the majority of movements and only caters for some of the dispersed destinations of peak hour trips. Therefore, the development will be mostly car-dependent and will not accord with local and national policy to meet carbon reduction targets. An unnecessarily high level of car trips will adversely impact on carbon emission levels and could cause unnecessary impact on environmentally sensitive areas.

It must also be noted that the submitted Transport Assessment provides insufficient detail to consider the impact of development traffic fully and appropriately on the highway links to the settlement, instead seeking to resolve such matters at a later date should permission be granted.

As a consequence of the above, the Highway Authority is unable to support the development proposal.