Caversham And District
Residents Association

CADRA Comments on Planning Application 200713 Reading Golf Club - September 2020

Relationship to Reading Local Plan

This application is contrary to the Reading Local Plan in many respects. The plan explains the limitations on development in Caversham and Emmer Green as follows:

> *8.2.4 As a result of the limited development capacity, the overall strategy in this area is largely based around ensuring that, where development is to be accommodated, it is done in a way that prevents adverse effects on the existing areas. Of particular importance in Caversham and Emmer Green are potential effects on landscape, heritage and* ***infrastructure****. The relationship of the* ***landscape*** *with the Chiltern Hills and River Thames, described in paragraph 8.1.6, and of the townscape with the former separate settlements of Caversham and surrounding hamlets, will be preserved.*
>
> *8.2.5 The adequacy of infrastructure to support additional development remains one of the most significant concerns in the area. In particular,* ***transport****,* ***education*** *and* ***healthcare*** *are issues that would need to be addressed in any development.*

This planning application does not take account of these limitations and will adversely affect the landscape, infrastructure, transport and education in the existing areas. The offer to build a healthcare centre is only part of improving healthcare in the area.

More specific issues where the application is contrary to the plan include the following:

CAIb

After lengthy discussion and several consultations, the Reading Local Plan provides for 90 -130 homes on:

> *CA1b PART OF READING GOLF COURSE, KIDMORE END ROAD …. subject to the future provision of golf on the remainder of the Golf Club site, which fulfils an important sports and leisure function for Reading, being secured.*

This application is for 260 homes, without provision of sports facilities in Reading.

Transport

The plan indicates at 4.5.1,

> the *aim to reduce carbon emissions from transport, improve air quality and create a transport network which supports a mobile, affordable low-carbon future.*
>
> *4.5.4 All developments will be assessed for their impact upon the transport network, including the local and trunk road and motorway networks …. Development should provide mitigation measures in line with their impacts on these networks, taking account of levels of development that have already been accepted, ….*

TR3: ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND HIGHWAY-RELATED MATTERS ……. ii) The development would not have a material detrimental impact on the functioning of the transport network; iii) The proposals would not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists;

In the Appendix attached, we demonstrate that the cumulative effects of piecemeal developments north of the Thames within Reading and South Oxfordshire have placed unacceptable transport pressures on, Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading. And that the developer has **failed to demonstrate** that the development of Reading Golf Club would not place further pressures on transport within Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading. **The implications for air quality, congestion, severance and economic viability within both Caversham centre and Reading are profound and troubling**.

Congestion through Caversham Centre results in very poor air quality which has serious effects on health, made even more serious by the Covid Pandemic. The delays from congestion cause economic disadvantage for the town and impede a satisfactory public transport service. **This is contrary to several of the objectives set out in 4.5.1:**

- *To ensure that the transport network operates safely and efficiently to meet the needs of all users.*
- *To improve journey times, journey time reliability and the availability of information*
- *To reduce carbon emissions from transport, improve air quality and create a transport network which supports a mobile, affordable low-carbon future..*

The constrained roads through Caversham Centre do not lend themselves to mitigation measures and the cumulative impact of traffic pressures is clearly contrary to the stated objectives.

Internal road network

In line with policies RTS2, 4.3 and 13 of the Draft Transport Strategy, we urge that the internal roads be designed to minimise domination by cars, by using shared and varied surfaces, traffic calming and width variations, following current best practice in that regard.

Landscape

The area proposed for development has significant scenic value, both for those using the land and when viewed by those close by. It is not a brownfield site. It is part of a large area of well-tended fine parkland that extends into South Oxfordshire, which has rural views towards and from the Chilterns AONB, less than half a mile away, to which it is linked by a series of footpaths and country lanes with established hedgerows.

The Reading part of the golf course provides a green peninsula pushing into urban Reading, which forms a pleasant and irregular border. As such it is a valued landscape for Reading. Bugs Bottom park further west, provides a similar green feature, which is a significant asset for the town.

Regardless of whether golf continues, the land does not stop having significant landscape value, for both Reading and South Oxfordshire residents, and visitors to the area. As such, **decisions on what should be allowed to happen to it should be considered for the whole of the golf course and not separately**.

EN8: UNDESIGNATED OPEN SPACE
There will be a presumption in favour of retention of undesignated open space, which will include allotments. Development should not result in the loss of or jeopardise use and

enjoyment of undesignated open space. Development may be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that replacement open space, of a similar standard and function, can be provided at an accessible location close by, or that improvements to recreational facilities on remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space. The quality of existing open space should not be eroded by insensitive development on adjoining land.

Density and Mix

H2: Residential proposals for ten houses or more (excluding houses that are to be provided as affordable homes) will consider making appropriate provision for plots as self– or custom- build wherever viable and achievable …

The application appears to make no provision for self or custom build.

CADRA considers that this application is contrary to the provisions of the recently adopted Reading Local Plan and urges rejection.

Cross Boundary Issues

This application is heavily influenced by issues which span Reading Borough and South Oxfordshire District. Reading Golf Club and Fairfax are seeking to make plans for the entire course. Throughout the engagement with the community, presentations have always included both sections. **This clearly presents a complex problem for the planning authority, but it is too important to ignore.**

The proposal presented includes:

- Enhanced golf facilities at Caversham Heath
- A new country park
- Allotments
- Community Orchard
- New walking and cycle links

These are clearly presented as outweighing the negative impact of a much larger development on the Reading land than was envisaged in the Local Plan. And a legal agreement has been offered.

If this offer influences the decision in favour of approval, it is essential that a binding agreement is secured across the whole course regarding the proposed facilities.

Appendix - CADRA Detailed Transport Report

Planning Application No. 200713 - Reading Golf Club, 7 Kidmore End Road, Emmer Green, Reading

Introduction

Fairfax (Reading) Limited and Reading Golf Club Limited (C/O Agent Pegasus Group Station Road Bracknell RG12 1LP) have made and outline planning application to Reading Borough Council (RBC), with matters reserved in respect of Appearance, for demolition of the existing clubhouse and the erection of a new residential-led scheme (C3 use to include affordable housing) and the provision of community infrastructure at Reading Golf Club.

This document contains the comments of Caversham And District Residents Association on transport aspects of the proposed development.

Background

When considering the traffic impacts of their proposals, developers are frequently required to provide funding for highway improvements where development traffic would increase baseline flows by 5% or more. Calculation of opening year traffic flows includes growth in existing traffic, traffic generation from approved developments and from planning approvals. A highway authority might not require improvements if future demand flow does not exceed 85% of a junction's capacity.

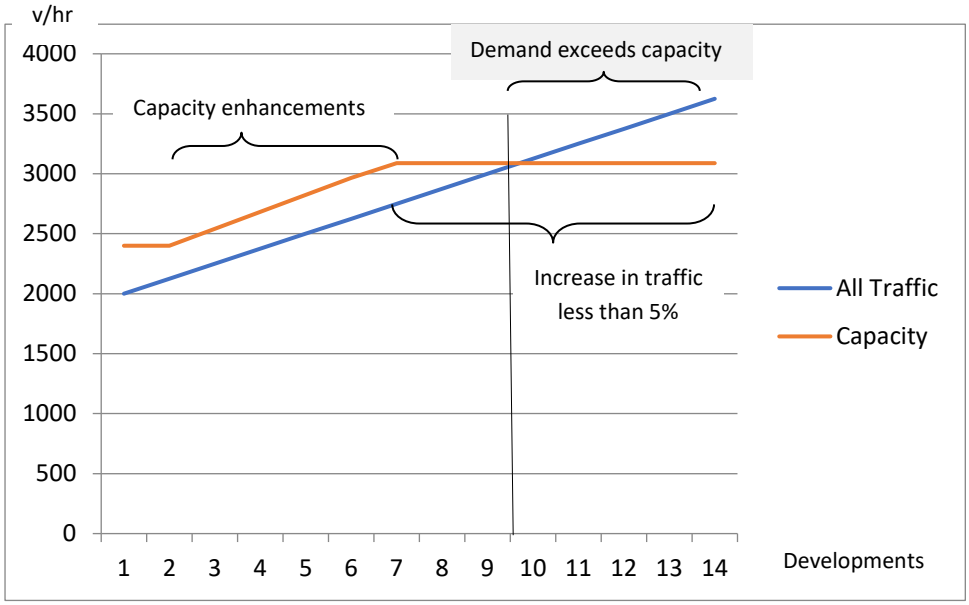
Reading Borough Council and South Oxfordshire District Council have harmonised their opposition to further extensions to Reading north of the Thames and into open countryside. The main reason for this is the realisation that the lack of co-ordinated transport planning has resulted in a saturated and congested highway network on the approaches to and within Reading.

Caversham and Emmer Green have grown organically with piecemeal developments and without properly planned transport and other infrastructure. The driver for these changes was the economic success and employment opportunities in Reading, the fast rail links to London, Southampton, Wales, the West Country and the Midlands and the M4 Motorway.

Cumulative impacts

The cumulative impacts of developments in SODC and Reading have contributed to a significant worsening of traffic conditions in Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading. The effects of recently approved developments and those under construction in South Oxfordshire have yet to be experienced but, as Reading centre and station is the primary attractor in the area, there is no doubt that they will exacerbate existing traffic problems.

The simplified graph, below, demonstrates how cumulative effects of successive developments produce steadily worsening traffic conditions. In this example the first seven equal sized developments produced greater than a 5% increase in traffic flow and capacity enhancements were secured by the highway authority. The eighth and subsequent equal sized developments produced less than a 5% increase in traffic flow and the highway authority may be unable to secure further capacity enhancements. When the tenth development opened traffic demand exceeded capacity and queue lengths continued to increase with each successive development. The highway authority was then powerless to control its own network.



Of course, some traffic queuing occurs before capacity is reached but, typically at traffic signals, queues are dispersed at or before the end of each 'green' stage. When demand exceeds capacity queues extend and queues cannot be fully dispersed during 'green' stages. Most drivers are quick to see when their journeys are becoming extended by congestion and tend to leave earlier or later than before. This produces a phenomenon called 'peak spreading' where peak periods are extended from, perhaps 30 minutes to two hours and more.

Peak spreading started to occur in Reading and Caversham many years ago and continues to worsen with natural growth and new developments. The implications for air quality, congestion, severance and economic viability within both Caversham centre and Reading are profound and troubling.

Traffic Data and Junction Modelling

Manual and automatic traffic counts were undertaken, for the application, on highways that would be affected by generated traffic from the Reading Golf Club development. It seems that no other information was collected to enable the estimation of current **demand** traffic flows and for validation of traffic models. This additional data collection should have been carried out simultaneously with traffic counts and should have included recording of queue lengths and 'blocking back' from downstream junctions, pedestrian crossings and other constraints.

Of course, the Peppard Road/Henley Road/Westfield Road/Prospect Street intersection has been equipped, by the Highway Authority, with a yellow box junction in recognition of the fact that during peak periods vehicles can block back and interfere with other traffic movements. Exit blocking at junctions severely reduces junction throughput and causes traffic to back up or queue on the approach arms. No attempt has been made to consider this issue. The reduction in junction throughput will also have affected the stop line traffic counts

Without this essential information it is not possible to gain an insight into the operation of a congested urban highway network such as that in Caversham and Reading. A peak period visit to Caversham Centre and the bridges would have provided a better understanding of the transport issues than the restricted survey data collected for the applicant.

The developer has provided Linsig outputs for the Peppard Road/Henley Road/Westfield Road/Prospect Street traffic signalled junction. This junction is not free flowing due to exit blocking during peak periods, therefore the baseline flows were suppressed and the Linsig model cannot realistically show the operation of the junction under free flow conditions. It is remarkable that the model shows queuing traffic. It is clear that, if restricted stop line flows were used, all of this traffic passed through the junction and no queue should have been generated within the model. Had demand flows been estimated correctly and, used in the model, it is likely queues would have been generated. Validation of the model against the observed queues would be difficult as the junction is not free flowing during critical peak periods. Inferring that the junction model shows realistic queuing traffic and can be used to predict future scenarios is incorrect.

Linsig is only suitable for stand-alone, free flowing junctions and not the right tool for gaining a full understanding of the congested highway network in Caversham. A network model would have shown that the problems in Caversham are almost intractable. The potential for further development with its associated generated traffic, would have been dismissed.

Strategic Issues

It is undeniable that Caversham and Emmer Green suffer from past piecemeal developments and inadequate transport infrastructure. This problem is exacerbated by increasing numbers of developments within the South Oxfordshire and Reading Borough.

Reading Borough has included an orbital road and third Reading bridge within its draft Transport Strategy for 2036 but this is opposed by residents and local authorities north of the Thames and the Chilterns Conservation Board. This major infrastructure proposal could have the potential to alleviate the current transport problems, but its benefits would be eroded if further developments are allowed on the boundaries of Reading.

Approval of a residential development within the Borough by RBC whilst maintaining objections to developments just over the border in Oxfordshire is inconsistent. The Authorities across Reading's northern border are likely to be sceptical of future RBC objections to developments.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Initially the unprecedented Covid 19 lockdown caused a significant reduction in all traffic. Later there was a welcome increase in cycling as people avoided public transport and sought maintain their fitness. The exceptionally warm spring weather gave further encouragement to cyclists and this continued through the summer. Delivery traffic has increased significantly however. Since the easing of lockdown private car traffic has recovered to 90-95% of pre-lockdown levels. The early indications are that post-lockdown, cycling will remain slightly higher, white van traffic will be significantly higher, public transport usage will be lower and private car traffic will be the same or slightly higher than before. Overall, the 'new normal' is likely to see traffic flows and congestion in Caversham and Reading similar to or greater than the 'old normal'.

Conclusion

The cumulative effects of piecemeal developments north of the Thames within Reading and South Oxfordshire have placed unacceptable transport pressures on, Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading.

The developer has failed to demonstrate the development of Reading Golf Club would not place further pressures on transport within Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading. Indeed, a passing examination of the highway network leads quickly to the conclusion that any major development would have a serious detrimental impact on Emmer Green, Caversham and Reading.

The granting of planning for the development of Reading Golf Club would send a strong, but incorrect, message to potential developers in South Oxfordshire that residential developments might have an acceptably low impact on the town of Reading.

Therefore, **CADRA strongly objects to the redevelopment of Reading Golf Club and the application should be refused in its entirety.**