



Wolvercote Mill Site news – Outline Planning

The outline planning application for the development of the Paper Mill site in Lower Wolvercote was approved on Tuesday 1st December by the West Area Planning Committee. The full officer's report is available with the agenda of that meeting on their website. There are a number of conditions to the approval.

The Neighbourhood Forum and the Wolvercote Commoners combined to make further representations at the meeting reflecting the views of their members. The text below is the speech made on their behalf by John Bleach.

WNF & WCC joint statement for planning committee meeting – 1st Dec. 2015

I am speaking on behalf of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum and the Wolvercote Commoners' Committee, in favour of the application.

We are in favour of development but there concerns still about the size of this development and the consequent traffic and parking.

We welcome the report in general, but we think that the scheme could be more sustainable and more ambitious. It could better reflect the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF clause 50) in serving the needs of the local community – for instance, by making provision for elderly people, for key workers and for some form of communal housing, such as co-housing.

In our survey this summer we found that there was overwhelming support for key-worker housing and this site is particularly suitable. We hope that, by the time that the Reserved Matters associated with the application come to be considered, the Council will have reviewed its policy on this.

We are concerned that the Balance of Dwellings Supplementary Planning Document, published in 2008, is by now out of date and needs to be revised.

There are a number of advisory points we wish to make:

1. The Balance of Dwellings SPD should be updated.
2. Given the limitations of current legislation, there should be encouragement for the development to be carbon neutral and for standards of building to go beyond the Building Regulations.
3. We welcome the Travel Plan and recognize that it needs to be refined. However we would like consultation with the existing community on this and for it to take place at the earliest stage, rather than left just before completion, which is what is proposed in the report.
4. The improved bus service, rather than just providing a link towards the city centre, should link to the new Oxford Parkway railway station.

5. Concerning surface water drainage, we would like to see the comments made by our drainage expert considered at the detailed stage of the design.
6. Mitigation of noise from the A34 road is conspicuous in its absence from the proposed conditions. In this respect we consider that the conclusion of the report is not satisfactory and we would strongly advise a review of this.
7. We endorse the provision of community facilities and space in the centre of the scheme, even if the health centre is not provided and would welcome consultation on its final uses.
8. A coordinated plan for the maintenance of the site after completion of building works is essential, and this should be made in consultation with local residents.

These points were discussed and we asked to have them incorporated in the minutes, but as you will see from the letters copied below, this was not possible.

Dear Cllr Upton,

We write in connection with the recent planning committee meeting on 1st December, when outline consent was given for development at the site of the former Wolvercote Paper Mill. As you know, one of our members, John Bleach, spoke on behalf of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum and the Wolvercote Commoners' Committee at that meeting. We have since read the draft minutes of that meeting and we want it to be known that we are disappointed with the brevity of these minutes, particularly as regards the recording of our statement. Since we represent the local community, being a properly registered forum engaged in formulating a Neighbourhood Plan, it is important for those in the community who were not present at the planning meeting to know what was said on their behalf.

The minutes correctly state that we “spoke in support of the application but highlighted a number of outstanding concerns”. However, they do not state what those concerns are.

Our statement was read out from a written statement prepared by members of our committee and we attach it now requesting that the essence of its contents is properly recorded in the minutes.

*Best wishes,
Christopher Hardman,
Chair, Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum.
Copied to Jennifer Thompson, Committee Clerk.*

Dear Mr Hardman

I am replying on behalf of the Chair, Cllr Upton, although she may wish to add her own comments.

The minutes of local authority meetings are generally short as their main purpose is to provide a formal record of the decisions of the committee and the reasons for these. It is both normal and best practice to include in the minutes:

- *The decision*
- *the key elements relating directly to the decision which is eventually made, but only what is actually relevant and nothing else*
- *Anything else which affects the validity of the decision – hence the noting of who was there, who stepped down/left.*

So, disappointingly for those speakers like you who spend hours preparing statements, it is actually best practice to simply record that they spoke and include the briefest of details. Where their speech did not materially change the decision, no details need to be recorded. Where their points were all picked up in the officer's report or in the conditions/debate or no changes are made, we don't record anything. To record speeches in detail risks both losing the actual decision in what would be lengthy minutes and misrepresenting the speaker in summarising their statements. It's disappointing for you I know but we will not be able to include the contents of your statement in the minutes as this is simply not their function.

The Chair has said that she was very impressed by your contribution, and the thorough and positive way in which you have engaged with the process, and your comments contained several excellent suggestions.

You may want to send the text of your speech to your members and circulate this email by way of explanation.

If you have any further questions, please contact me.

Regards

Jennifer

In addition to the response from the clerk to the Planning Committee, the Chair wrote saying that that she was sorry that the full text of what was said at the meeting could not be included in the minutes and expressing the hope that it might be circulated to Wolvercote residents and that whoever develops the site takes on board our comments.

One issue about which we know that residents were particularly concerned was the risk of flooding and the provision for adequate drainage. It is our understanding that the proposed Outline Surface Water Strategy prepared to support the outline planning application is a 'Conceptual Design'. The level of information provided was proportionate to support the outline planning application and the marketing of the site. It will have to be further refined and developed both at the full planning application and at the detailed design stage. We will, of course, do our best to monitor future planning applications.

Christopher Hardman
Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum

22nd December 2015