

Cheltenham Borough Council Planning Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 21 August 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 7.35 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Frank Allen (Vice-Chair), Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes (Chair), Barbara Clark, Jan Foster, Iain Dobie, Dr Steve Steinhardt, Suzanne Williams and Jackie Chelin

Also in attendance:

Chris Gomm (Head of Planning), Michelle Payne (Senior Planning Officer), Ben Warren (Senior Planning Officer) and Simon Aley (Locum Senior Planning Solicitor)

1 Apologies

Councillors Andrews, Oliver and Wheeler sent apologies. Councillor Chelin was present as a substitute.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Clark declared an interest in 25/00380/FUL Pittville Pump Rooms, as a trustee on the Cheltenham Trust Board, and said she would leave the Chamber for that item.

Councillor Steinhardt declared an interest in 25/00788/FUL Scout Headquarters, Leckhampton Road as his son is a scout leader elsewhere in Cheltenham. It was agreed that this does not constitute a prejudicial interest, and he was therefore not required to leave the Chamber for that item and was allowed to remain and vote.

3 Declarations of independent site visits

Councillor Clark had visited the following sites:

- 25/00637/FUL 11 Hamilton Street
- 25/00848/FUL The Nurseries, Kidnappers Lane
- 25/00788/FUL Scout Headquarters, 207 Leckhampton Road

4 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

5 Public Questions

There were none.

6 Planning Applications

7 25/00380/FUL - Pittville Pump Room, East Approach Drive, Cheltenham, GL52 3JE

Councillor Clark left the Chamber.

The planning officer presented the application as set out in the report, with a recommendation to permit, subject to conditions.

There were no public speakers.

In response to Members' questions, the officer confirmed that:

- he could not say what type of food trailer would be permitted at the site, and some would clearly be considered inappropriate in this setting, but could confirm that the conservation officer will need to see the details before the food trailer is agreed;
- it would not be appropriate for the discharge of conditions application, with regard to the trailer details and implementation of cladding works, to come back to Planning Committee for review, as this function lies with officers. If Members are concerned about an inappropriate trailer or unattractive cladding being allowed, they should not vote in support of the application, but officers are confident that these matters can be dealt with by condition, whilst allowing the applicant a degree of flexibility;
- when originally submitted, the application lacked detail and justification around the economic impact of not having a trailer providing refreshment on the Trust's ability to maintain the building and retain the visitor asset. Officers sought further information and were advised that the café had provided vital income for the Trust to maintain the building, and helped as an income stream for other Trust-run buildings and events around the town. In addition, with a lot of planned maintenance required for the Pittville Pump Rooms, some of its usual functions may be out of action, and income from the trailer is likely to help make up some of the short term loss;

- the applicant's submission states the intention to put tables and chairs out each day, either on the hardstanding or under the portico of the main frontage of the Pump Rooms. No permanent seating or covered area is proposed.

Debate

In debate, Members made the following points:

- Section 16 of the NPPF is concerned with conserving and enhancing the historic environment, and not knowing the full intention of the applicant regarding the type of vehicle and the positioning of the tables and chairs adjacent to a Grade 1-listed building is worrying – the council should be trying to preserve the outlook to the very best of its ability;
- when the original café application came before the committee, a strong economic case was made for retention of the facility constructed during the pandemic. Although it was relatively well obscured from most aspects it was not permitted, and since then, the Trust has been looking for ways to minimise the substantial loss of income. Although the lack of detail is a concern, the Trust cannot propose anything more minimal than this, and residents and visitors enjoy having a refreshments area in this location;
- although serious consideration needs to be given to the cladding and the design of the trailer, it is crucial that the Trust gets the support it needs to maintain, fund and supervise the Pump Rooms with minimal impact on its heritage and appearance, and the proposal is therefore worth supporting;
- people want the Pump Rooms to be a destination, not just a postcard view. The trailer will add social value, and while it is a poor alternative to a permanent café, it should be supported.

Vote on officer recommendation to permit

6 in support, 1 against, 1 abstention

PERMIT

Councillor Clark returned to the Chamber.

8 25/01013/FUL - 2-20 Grevil Road, 44-64 Orchard Way and 210-228 Arle Road, Cheltenham

The case officer presented the application as set out in the report, with a recommendation to permit.

There were no public speakers, no questions and no debate on this item.

Vote on officer recommendation to permit

9 in support – unanimous

PERMIT

9 25/00637/FUL - 11 Hamilton Street, Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, GL53 8HN

The officer presented the application as set out in the report, with a recommendation to permit, subject to conditions.

Public Speaker, in objection

The neighbour began by saying that residents and businesses were in favour of development of the site, but 29 households had objected due to serious concerns about the impact of the proposal on their lives, mainly around parking:

- Hamilton Street is short and narrow, with insufficient on-road parking for existing residents, who compete daily with staff and customers of the Six Ways businesses. Despite campaigning, no solutions have been implemented, and a further 12 homes with no additional parking will exacerbate an already dire situation. This point was raised in the highways report of 16 May, but the report of 05 August states that the plans are acceptable, given the sustainable location;
- most residents own cars, and with protected bin store access, there will be room for only six cars outside the development, in conflict with Gloucestershire County Council parking standards;
- lack of spaces and very tight parking cause many issues, including the road being used as a rat run especially during rush hour; residents forced to park a considerable distance from their homes; dangerous and illegal parking and reversing; road blockages due to deliveries and unloading; and pavement parking which forces wheelchair and pushchair users and people with walking aids into the road. 12 extra households without parking provision will make the situation more difficult and dangerous for everyone.

In addition, she said that:

- neighbours regard the current application as overdevelopment, and not in keeping with the locality;
- privacy will be severely impacted, particularly for residents of Oakland Street;
- the proposal is contrary to the Local Plan, Supplementary Planning Document, and GCC Manual for Streets.

She ended by reiterating that residents are not opposed to redevelopment of the site but urge decision-makers to consider the severe highways issues and hold out for a more suitable proposal that sits comfortably in the locality and limits negative impacts to create a safe, functioning, living environment for all.

Questions

In response to Members' questions, the officer confirmed that:

- the second highways comment raised no objection, noting that drivers currently park on the highway and the proposal will not create a situation that doesn't already exist. The fact that drivers park over drop kerbs was not specifically addressed, and highways officers did not give any indication of where cars should be parked instead;
- although the dropped kerbs may appear to be just low kerbs, they were assessed by highways officers and a traffic consultant as dropped kerbs; drivers

- should not park their cars across them, but the realistic situation is that they do already, and this will not change as a result of the proposed development;
- the proposal provides 17 secure, integral cycle parking spaces for 12 apartments;
 - there is a regular bus service between Six Ways and the town centre;
 - she was unable to comment whether or not highways officers conducted a site visit when assessing the application;
 - it is not possible to include a condition removing the right of residents to apply for parking permits in the area.

Debate

A Member started the debate with the following comments:

- although it can be argued that redevelopment of the original buildings is the best option for site, it could be done more sensitively, for example with fewer dwellings, more back bin storage and, critically, more consideration of highways issues;
- highways comments do not match the reality of the site, and with no space provided for cars, and the parish council's comments that the street is used as a rat run, the impact on traffic in the area will be immense, both during office hours and at night;
- it is disappointing that the impact of this on wheelchair and pushchair users and other people with disabilities does not appear to have been addressed in the report – the pavements will be impassable and not helped by the proposal;
- the lack of affordable housing is also disappointing and a disservice to younger residents or anyone trying to get a foot on the property ladder.

For these reasons, the Member suggested that the decision should be deferred. The Head of Planning said that the only planning reason for deferral is lack of sufficient information to make a decision, which isn't the case here; it cannot be implemented simply because the committee doesn't want to make the decision.

Another Member welcomed the proposal to redevelop the site, which would improve its appearance and provide homes, but shared the disappointment with highway comments, saying that parking is already a huge problem for residents in the area and with no mitigation, the proposal will make matters much worse. She wasn't happy with these aspects of the overall proposal but was concerned that deferral would achieve nothing.

The legal officer confirmed this, saying that disappointment with highways comments were not grounds for deferral.

In further comments, Members said:

- the decision is clear cut – Members must weigh up the impact on the local environment and whether they are comfortable with parking issues against the desperate need for housing; deferral will make no difference;
- a stronger transport assessment and further traffic consideration from the developer, justifying the highways response, would be helpful. Substantial

discussions between the applicant and officers must have taken place but there is no evidence of this in the planning documents or the report;

- voting against the application on highways grounds or for a deferral will have the same effect: the applicant will be able to submit a revised scheme, taking Members' comments into account;
- Members should have all the information they need to make a decision, but in this case they don't, which is why deferral is a better option – to allow the applicant to provide further information.

The Chair could see no reasons for deferring, which should always be a last resort. He agreed that officers will have already had extensive discussions with the applicant and have provided all the information they feel members need in the report.

Vote on move to defer

1 in support, 8 in objection

NOT CARRIED

The debate continued with the following comments from Members:

- the layout suggests that the accommodation proposed is likely to be suitable for young people starting on or moving up the property ladder – a group of people who are currently suffering greatly in Cheltenham, with a shortage of suitable accommodation. In view of the council's stated aims to make more accommodation available, it would be bizarre if the planning committee rejected a good application which will help the situation;
- it is an exaggeration to say the traffic impact will be immense – people living here are quite likely to walk, cycle, or use the bus. Members need to balance scare stories about traffic with the acute need for accommodation – it would not look good for the council if this scheme was to be rejected on highways grounds;
- there are excellent public transport links, and we all need to move towards a culture where public transport is used more. While sympathising with car owners already living in this location, would anyone with a car consider moving here, in view of the lack of parking?
- the town needs more homes and this site needs to be redeveloped, but it is a fantasy to suggest that the proposal won't have a significant impact, and we kid ourselves by calling it sustainable development. There are better ways to provide affordable housing and more places for young people to live, without impacting on an existing neighbourhood. We are a council of balance, we don't have to maximise development of every site if the impact on the locality will be severe, and a rational, balanced approach to this application is needed.

The case officer returned to an earlier Member comment, saying that the application is accompanied by Transport Note 3, relating to the pre-app and previous scheme and providing details of discussions with highways officers referred to in the report. She said the previous scheme was for seven new houses, and highways officers suggested at the pre-app stage that no additional parking was needed as the number of vehicles associated with the existing commercial use, if operational, was equivalent to what would be created by seven new dwellings. She said the

application moved forward with the conversion scheme on that basis, with the accommodation now proposed across the site expected to result in the same level of parking demand. She said it would be difficult to show a severe impact on parking as a result of the scheme.

The Member apologised for not having noted the transport assessment and withdrew his previous comments.

A Member felt that there was a difference between seven houses and 12 apartments, and regretted the lack of reassurance that highways officers had actually visited the site to carry out their assessment, and the fact that a highways officer wasn't present to answer questions on this highly emotional decision. The Chair confirmed that highways officers had been invited to the meeting but were unavailable.

Vote on officer recommendation to permit

6 in support, 1 in objection, 2 abstentions

PERMIT

10 25/00848/FUL - The Nurseries, Kidnappers Lane, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, GL53 0NR

The case officer presented the application as set out in the report, with a recommendation to permit, subject to conditions.

The Chair expressed disappointment that the Member who called the application in was not present to explain the reasons for the call-in.

Public Speaker

Landscape architect, in support

The speaker said he has 35 years' professional experience and is familiar with the area, the local green space and the value attached to it, considering the open rural character and visual amenity to be enhanced by the present equestrian land use. He made the following points:

- replacing the existing stable block, which is in a poor state of repair and detracts from local visual amenity, provides an opportunity to enhance the landscape, the proposed building having a smaller footprint and lower ridge and eaves height, and better aligning with the existing settlement pattern on Kidnappers' Lane. It will maintain recognisable equestrian characteristics, will not introduce any new features or activities likely to cause harm to the landscape character or character of the wider local green space, and the smaller footprint provides an uplift in biodiversity net gain;
- in visual terms, the new stable block is orientated to avoid disruption of views towards Leckhampton Hill and the escarpment, particularly from Kidnappers' Lane. It aligns with the existing backdrop of established vegetation at the field boundary adjacent to residential properties, which already partly screens views towards the hill, and from Kidnappers' Lane the vegetation forms a backdrop against which the narrow side profile of the stable will be seen;

- the location and orientation of the proposed stable will not interfere with general views from the Public Rights of Way (PROW) in the field, with users retaining clear views along the route in both directions.

He hoped that Members would support the recommendation to permit the scheme.

Questions

In response to Members' questions, the officer confirmed that:

- no discussion took place with the applicant about redeveloping the existing stable block structures; officers only considered the scheme as proposed;
- regarding the PROW, the team at Gloucestershire County Council was consulted and provided a generic response. This was forwarded in full to the applicant's agent, who advised that the PROW would not be impacted, and there was no need to divert or extinguish them. He was aware, however, that if a PROW was impacted even on a temporary basis, advice from the county must be sought;
- the NPPF states that any development in local green space needs to be considered in line with greenbelt policy, except for grey belt (previously developed) land. This site is not considered as grey belt and the application was therefore assessed as greenbelt development;
- any suggestion or supposition that the proposed development would block the viewpoint allowing further development to be inserted behind the stable block was speculation and could not be taken into account;
- the proposed hardstanding will be permeable;
- the area currently occupied by the old stable block and hardstanding will be returned to green land when the stable is demolished – this is conditioned to happen within one calendar month.

Debate

There was no further debate.

Vote on officer recommendation to permit

9 in support - unanimous

PERMIT

11 25/00788/FUL - Scout Head Quarters, 207 Leckhampton Road, Cheltenham, GL53 0AL

The officer introduced the application as set out in her report, recommending that permission be granted, subject to conditions.

The Chair repeated his concern that the Member who called the application in to committee wasn't in attendance.

Public speakers

Neighbour, in objection

The neighbour began by saying that he and other neighbours whose properties back onto the site have no objection to a new scout hut, recognising that the current building is outdated and needs replacing. They are, however, concerned about the siting of the proposed building and the potential for noise and disruption:

- the proposed building is substantially larger than the existing, and although the consultant has advised that the intensity of use won't increase, the scout trustees have stated that, while the building will be used first and foremost for scouting, they anticipate higher levels of usage, from inclusive youth programmes to other local organisations which lack suitable venues. This raises serious concerns for residents, increasing the potential for noise and late night activities. The planning officer has said that permission is recommended subject to conditions, but there appears to be no mention of this in the report. Residents request, therefore that consideration is given to a condition regulating use of the premises;
- a major concern for neighbours is that the new building is proposed just 5 feet from their rear fences, with the drop to Leckhampton Hill held in place by a substantial retaining wall. They would therefore request that the new building is stepped back by a couple of feet. The trustees have stated that there will be a significant gap between the new hut and the retaining wall, larger than the existing gap, but there doesn't appear to be any mention of this in the report or conditions. Neighbours request that steps are taken to ensure that this happens

Resident, in support

Speaking as a trustee of the scout group and a parent, the speaker made the following comments:

- the development is necessary to continue the provision of a valuable service. The scout hut has served the community for over 50 years, benefitting thousands of children and community groups. The building is dilapidated, poorly insulated, and lacking modern facilities, including accessibility features; redevelopment will address these issues and provide valuable services for years to come;
- the scout group is a responsible neighbour, and although in place long before the adjacent houses, has made every effort to respect neighbours' interest, with no noisy or late-night activities, and actively encouraging participation at events. Neighbours have been extensively consulted on the proposed design, resulting in fewer windows facing their properties, more sound insulation, and the increase in height kept to a minimum of 20cm;
- the proposed development has broad community support, with more than a hundred children enrolled at any one time, all supportive of the proposal. Responses in support outweigh those in objection, and the planning consultant who has supported preparation of the application on a pro bono basis is a resident of Leckhampton Views.

Questions

There were no Member questions

Debate

Members made the following comments:

- the report is balanced, reasonable and rational, and there are no planning grounds to refuse the application;
- the importance of the scout movement cannot be overstated, with children and young people on the streets susceptible to crime, and a lack of third party community spaces in the town. This proposal is absolutely necessary to allow the scouts to continue their important work;
- the small increase in height will not impact views – although this is not a planning consideration.

The Chair said everyone endorsed the importance of the scouting movement.

Vote on officer recommendation to permit

9 in support – unanimous

PERMIT

12 Appeal Update

An Appeals Update had been circulated and was noted by Members.

13 Any other items the Chairman determines urgent and requires a decision

There was no other business.