

Ref: 49776/004 New Outline Application – Land at Lynch Hill. Alton Society comments.

We are disappointed that these new plans make no attempt to address the fundamental problems with the applicant's previous submission (49776/002), and remain firmly opposed to this scheme as it stands.

1. **Skyline Impact:** The design still shows two substantial buildings at or very near to the top of Lynch Hill. We simply cannot understand how this proposed layout has reached this far, given the particularly high contours on this part of this site, and the impact on views (both near and distant). Considering that only 7 of the 9.4 hectares of the allocated site is to be developed we see no reason why the equivalent floor space cannot be accommodated on the lower slopes to the south.

We note the proposed 'central tree belt' around these two buildings, but being mainly on the lower slopes this is far from adequate, especially when viewed from the south, and from the A31 itself. Apart from policy CP20 (quoted below) the Alton Neighbourhood Plan (DE1) stipulates:

"Development proposals that impact on the discrete setting of Alton within the surrounding landscape must demonstrate that the setting is maintained".

These plans clearly fail to achieve this, and we maintain our view that the top of the hill should be kept totally free from development. (Once again, we cannot find amongst the documents any accurate representation of views into the site from critical vantage points, to enable a proper evaluation of the impact).

2. **Access Arrangements:** There is nothing in this new application that will mitigate the harm and risks to road safety that would result from the proposed new road junction in Montecchio Way.
 - i. Firstly, having two 'industrial' access points into Montecchio Way (this and Mill Lane), so close to the A31 roundabout, is simply unacceptable in terms of increased traffic congestion (despite the claims of the Highways Authority), and contrary to Policy C31 of the Joint Core Strategy. It should be pointed out that not only were HCC Highways *"concerned regarding the proposed access arrangements"* as far back as Feb 2017, and *"recommended that exploration of upgrading access at this current location [i.e. Waterbrook Road] is undertaken"*, but the applicant has already withdrawn an application, and had another refused for this very reason. And so we repeat our earlier assertion: Not only does the applicant admit (in this application) that access from Waterbrook Road is preferable, but development up the southern hill-slope was historically always assumed to be a logical extension to the Waterbrook Estate itself. This is supported by the applicant's own admission that it was stated policy (when the site was first allocated in 2015) that access would be from Waterbrook Road. Indeed, the Planning Statement says the application site is already "... accessed from Waterbrook Road off Mill Lane in Alton".

There is clearly no evidence in planning terms that Montecchio Way is even *equally* acceptable as Waterbrook Road as a means of access, yet we are told that Montecchio Way is 'more plausible' simply by virtue of being 'constrained by site ownership and potential ransom' as asserted by Tanvale. Difficulties of access rights from Waterbrook Road should surely not be classed as a planning consideration - the application must be decided purely on its merits.

Anyone with local knowledge will understand the conflicts of traffic movements and severe traffic congestion on Montecchio Way, especially at peak times, and we strongly urge the planning committee to visit the proposed access point on a weekday between 8.00 am and 9.00 am, and see for themselves the likely affect of such a new road junction.

- ii. In terms of the harm to the character of this important gateway to the town, we would simply reiterate the Planning Committee's reason for refusal in December 2018, ie that the damage to what is currently a pleasant green gateway to the town would cause significant harm. The Tree Removal Plans vividly illustrate the extent of the loss of vegetation resulting from cutting into the hillside. This, and the urbanising effect on Montecchio Way, is totally unacceptable in our view. Policy CP20 of the Joint Core Strategy states:

New development will be required to "protect and enhance settlements in the wider landscape, land at the urban edge and green corridors extending into settlements".

- iii. Within the site itself, the adjustment of the access route away from the western edge of the site will do nothing to mitigate the damage to existing biodiversity. The new roadway will completely cut off the tree belt at the top of the escarpment from any undeveloped land and new tree planting. This will partition the current green infrastructure, and destroy the integrity of the continuous wildlife corridor represented by the belt of hedgerow and scrub running parallel with Montecchio Way. Thus the plans are plainly contrary to Policy CP21. Clause b) states that:

New development will be required to "extend specific protection to, and encourage enhancement of, other [non-designated] sites and features which are of local value for wildlife, for example important trees, rivers, river corridors and hedgerows, but which are not included in designated sites".

We are also concerned at the amount of earth moving that would be necessary to connect the access road to Montecchio Way and the effect this would have on the unspoilt escarpment down to the river, just to the North of this proposed access road. At present the area around the fishing lake is a haven of tranquillity which is becoming increasingly rare so close to Alton. It is surrounded by dense woodland and harbours a diverse wildlife population - kingfishers and herons are still a common sight. This environment must be protected.

For the all the above reasons, we strongly object to this application in its current form.

Rod Eckles,
The Alton Society
19th August 2019