



Planning,
Chesterfield Borough Council
Chesterfield S41 1LP

7 October 2018

Planning@chesterfield.gov.uk

Dear Sir

Planning Application: No. 6 Ashgate Road Chesterfield S40 4AA, CHE/18/00605/FUL

Transition Chesterfield would like to object to the above-captioned planning application. Although we have no objection to the development of the site or the facilities proposed we strongly object to the lack of consideration given to adjacent community uses and the impact on local charity Inspire Community Garden, which is a sister project of Transition Chesterfield.

Inspire Community Garden, which received charitable status in 2016, is a local organic demonstration garden which is a hub for the local community, organising numerous public events and providing space for local people to grow their own food and therapeutic horticulture. It receives regular visits from local cub and brownie groups, corporate volunteer groups and has a number of long-term volunteers with physical and mental health problems who benefit from the gardening therapy. It runs weekly workshops and opens 3 times a week for volunteers and public to visit the site. It's Open Days receive around 150 people each time, many of them from the local community. It has forged links with local groups including Fairplay, Macmillan, Headspace and Ashgate Hospice. Last year it received its first visit by a Walking for Health group. Many Chesterfield Borough Councillors, including the Leader and the Mayor, have visited the site. This year the garden received a judges award from the RHS East Midlands in Bloom judges for their contribution to Chesterfield Borough Council's gold medal winning entry in the competition. The judges award stated:

"Inspire Community Garden. Ffor the hard work of the volunteers in creating a fantastic community space in such a short space of time."

When the group took over the site in 2016 it was an overgrown and abandoned allotment site owned by the Council. Hundreds of volunteer hours have been spent restoring the fertility of the land, developing community space and wildlife areas. It has raised funds from fundraising activities such as seed, plant and compost sales, as well as grants from Derbyshire County Council, the Postcode Lottery and the Mansfield Building Society.

While the garden has a pedestrian access via the cycle/walking path adjacent to the gasworks the main vehicular access is via the Ashgate Rd carpark. The new development will involve a 2m retaining wall along the southern boundary which will cut off that access completely for visitors or volunteers with disabilities, deliveries of compost/manure and bulky or heavy equipment. The charity has worked hard and raised funds to make the site more accessible for people with disabilities (eg ramp and decking around the caravan which is the main indoor meeting space and work area). The alternative pedestrian access at the bottom of the site is too steep for anyone with a disability and would be difficult to transport heavy things easily, such as hundreds of plants for plant sales at May Day or sacks of seed potatoes and equipment for the annual Potato Day.

This application is in direct conflict with the vision, strategic objectives and many of the planning policies of the Borough's Core Strategy.



Vision

CBC's vision notes the importance of food growing opportunities (para 3.10); the importance of voluntary organisations in providing community and cultural facilities (para 3.22) and provides the vision that everyone has a healthier lifestyle through access to nature (para 3.27)

Para 3.10: *"Food growing opportunities are maximised, and land for growing food, especially within and adjoining residential areas in allotments and community gardens and the best and most versatile agricultural land, is safeguarded."*

Para 3.22: *"District and Local Centres build on their own, distinct character while ensuring residents have easy access to services meeting their day to day needs. These centres are sustainable places for the provision of community and cultural facilities and the council will encourage their location and development there. Voluntary organisations are key partners for the council in achieving and maintaining this ambition."*

Para 3.27 *"Everyone has the opportunity to have a healthier lifestyle, through improved walking and cycling routes, parks and access to nature, and locating facilities such as sports centres and fresh food shops in accessible locations."*

However, this application will undermine these objectives by jeopardising access to land for growing food in community gardens and the possible future of the garden itself and through the Council's failure to inform or engage with Inspire prior to the application.

Strategic objectives

This application will undermine strategic objective S7: *"Promote a net gain in biodiversity and protect and improve the borough's key green infrastructure assets and landscape character."* The community garden is an important part of the borough's green infrastructure and the charity has worked hard to improve the area for biodiversity, with improvements in soil fertility, creation of a wildlife pond, a number of workshops including by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust on providing habitats for bees, and rough areas set aside for wildlife.

Principles for Location of Development

Core Strategy Policy 2 on Principles for Location of Development states that *"all developments will be required to have an acceptable impact on the amenity of users or adjoining occupiers, taking into account things such as noise, odour, air quality, traffic, appearance, overlooking, shading or other environmental, social or environmental impacts."*

The Design and Access Statement for the application makes passing reference to the community garden but fails to acknowledge that it will have an unacceptable impact on the amenity of users of the garden. There was little or no attempt to try to accommodate the needs of the garden, despite a meeting with the developer where the charity spelled out the implications of the proposal on their operations.

Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity

Core Strategy Policy 9 on Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity states that *"Development proposals...(b) should enhance connectivity between, and public access to, green infrastructure."*

Instead this proposal is limiting public access, and for certain disabled users, blocking it completely.



Social Infrastructure

Core Strategy Policy 17 on Social Infrastructure states that *“Development will not be acceptable where it includes the change of use, amalgamation of uses or redevelopment of existing local community or recreational facilities, if it would result in the loss of a facility which is required to meet a local need or contributes to the network of facilities through the borough.”*

This application will block vehicular access to an existing community facility which contributes to the needs of local residents who benefit socially, physically and emotionally from the therapeutic aspects of gardening and access to green space.

Design

Core Strategy Policy 18 on Design states that *“All development should identify, respond to and integrate with the character of the site and surroundings and respect the local distinctiveness of its context. Development will be expected to: (b) respect the character, form and setting of the site and surrounding area by virtue of its function, appearance and architectural styles, landscaping, scale, massing, detailing, height and materials; (k) have an acceptable impact on the amenity of users and neighbours.”*

This application is clearly having an unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbours.

Sustainability Statement

The applicants Sustainability Statement refers to the existence of the Community Garden and states: *“Discussions between CBC, Developer, Fairplay and representatives of Inspire Community Garden continue to take place in order to provide satisfactory access solutions going forward for all parties.”*

However before the application was submitted no meetings had been held between CBC the developer and Inspire, despite repeated requests from the garden for information.

The proposed development will provide care facilities for adults with a range of care needs, many of whom could directly benefit from the easy access to Inspire Community Garden. The irony of this is that the garden would be an invaluable asset to a development for the elderly or people with mental health problems. The benefits of gardening and outdoor space on mental well-being are well documented. However rather than trying to integrate the development to ensure continued access for the benefit of the charity and its future residents, this applicant has ignored the needs and could put the future of the garden at risk.

In summary we consider this application to be in conflict with many of the Council’s vision statements, strategic objectives and core planning policies, and we are disappointed that so little attempt has been made by the developer and the Council to consult with Inspire prior to the application.

We do not want to prevent the redevelopment of this site, the provision of care facilities and the revenue for the council. We believe it should be possible by careful design to ensure that the care facility can be built in such a way that retains the vehicular access to the garden, as well as easy access for future residents. We are surprised and saddened that neither the developers, the proposed future health provider nor the council saw fit to meaningfully engage with the community garden before this application was submitted. We urge the Council to sit down with the applicants and find a way to ensure future access is retained. Thank you.

Transition Chesterfield