

Our ref: 19308086
7 December 2020

Linda Baddeley
Letter via email

Account reference:request-706027-b84bfcea@whatdotheyknow.com

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Dear Linda Baddeley

I can confirm that the information requested is held by Birmingham City Council. I have detailed below the information that is being released to you.

Request

Dear Birmingham City Council,

An outline planning application from Rochda Ltd seeks permission to build five housing blocks, ranging from five to seven storeys, at Western Business Park, Great Western Close, Winson Green.

The plans for 310 new homes have been recommended for approval by the BCC planning officer, despite a suggestion that the site could be better used as a nature reserve, with respondents to a public consultation voicing concerns that the "proposed buildings are too high and the development over-intense" with "no benefit to the local community".

An online article from The Evening Mail quotes the planning officer as saying, "The application proposals are considered, on balance, acceptable and would comprise an appropriate form of residential development. Whilst it is regrettable that the development would not be able to sustain financial contributions or on site affordable housing, the benefits that could be achieved through a net gain of biodiversity, the provision of accessible and usable public open space, and the delivery of a substantial quantum of residential development."

The proposed development does not appear to include any 'family homes', which are needed in the area and which would be more likely to establish a 'community' in the new development, than would the proposed 310 apartments, and more likely to contribute to and benefit the existing local community.

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The planning officer's statement indicates that approval of the plans is recommended, without the usual requirement of a Section 106 agreement and inclusion of 'affordable housing'.

I'd be grateful for answers to the following questions:

1. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending approval of a large development, with no family housing included, in Winson Green, an area in need of family housing.
2. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending approval of this large development, without a 'financial contribution' in the form of a Section 106 agreement, nowadays an expected requirement of planning approval for a large development, when the developer's profit from the sale of the proposed properties is likely to be millions of pounds.
3. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending approval of a large development, which does not include any 'on site affordable housing', nowadays an expected requirement of planning approval for large developments, when the developer's profit from the sale of the proposed properties is likely to be millions of pounds.
4. In what way(s) does the BCC planning officer consider this to be "an appropriate form of residential development".

Response

1. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending approval of a large development, with no family housing included, in Winson Green, an area in need of family housing?

- The other benefits that the scheme achieves in respect of redeveloping what is currently known as a problem site; ecological enhancements and biodiversity gain; and access to POS are weighed against the lack of affordable housing provision. To refuse the application would result in the site not being developed which would not resolve the existing issues of anti-social behaviour at the site, etc. A substantial area (0.9ha) of Public Open Space is proposed to be delivered as part of the scheme, alongside a nature play area for use by the local community and new residents of the development.

2. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending

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approval of this large development, without a 'financial contribution' in the form of a Section 106 agreement, nowadays an expected requirement of planning approval for a large development, when the developer's profit from the sale of the proposed properties is likely to be millions of pounds.

- The planning obligation requirements associated with this scheme are clearly set out within the Officer's Committee Report. Reference is made throughout to the independent Financial Viability Assessment undertaken by Lambert Smith Hampton which reaches the conclusion that the residential development would not be viable if required to support financial contributions or deliver affordable housing.

3. What is the BCC planning officer's rationale for recommending approval of a large development, which does not include any 'on site affordable housing', nowadays an expected requirement of planning approval for large developments, when the developer's profit from the sale of the proposed properties is likely to be millions of pounds.

- The Section 106 Agreement includes a clause which would require affordable housing to be provided if the scheme were to benefit from grant funding to improve its viability to the point that it could support Affordable Housing. We are satisfied that applying this mechanism secures any prospective benefits that could be delivered in the future development of the site.

4. In what way(s) does the BCC planning officer consider this to be "an appropriate form of residential development?"

- Redevelopment of previously developed land (former railway sidings) which has been left to nature. Whilst there are ecological benefits to the site in its current state, this is being eroded due to lack of management. The site is currently subject to fly tipping, criminal use and other anti-social behaviour. The development of the site would bring the land back into use, resulting in a 12% biodiversity gain beyond the existing, and seek to deliver 0.9ha of publicly accessible open space with nature play area, which would be to the benefit of the local community. The use of the land would go some way towards addressing anti-social behaviour

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with a view to remove it completely, and would seek to deliver residential development, making a contribution towards the delivery of housing in the city

Publicly available information on the planning application webpage (2020/03216/PA)

<http://eplanning.idox.birmingham.gov.uk/publisher/mvc/listDocuments?identifier=Planning&reference=2020/03216/PA>

Planning Officers Report –

<http://eplanning.idox.birmingham.gov.uk/publisher/docs/D75385AC8F6CAA98935D9B4172D0E791/Document-D75385AC8F6CAA98935D9B4172D0E791.pdf>

Lambert Smith Hampton Report On Independent Review of Financial Viability Assessment in relation to the Proposed Development at:- Western Business Park Great Western Close Winson Green Birmingham B18 4QF –

<http://eplanning.idox.birmingham.gov.uk/publisher/docs/63B4C9B396F8C1630E33D930B3CDC77D/Document-63B4C9B396F8C1630E33D930B3CDC77D.PDF>

Please quote the reference number 19308086 in any future communications.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within 40 working days from the date this authority issued its initial response to your original letter and should be addressed to:

Corporate Information Governance Team
PO Box 16366
Birmingham
B2 2YY
Email: infogovernance@birmingham.gov.uk

If you are still dissatisfied with the Council's response after the internal review you have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office

Website: www.ico.org.uk

I will now close your request as of this date.

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Yours faithfully

Kelly Gould
Business Support Coordinator

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