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Moorhouse Tile Works Planning Application 2018/1792

The Westerham Society represents some 300 residents of Westerham and the surrounding area. The Westerham Society is a recognised historic and heritage group founded some 100 years ago and strives to protect the beauty and character of Westerham and the surrounding countryside for residents and visitors.

The Westerham Society strongly objects to the current planning application for the development of a parcel distribution depot. The latest revisions by the Applicant to the height of the proposed building, revised parking and revised landscaping do not address any of the fundamental objections previously registered. Our strong objections are summarised as:

Development: The revised proposal intends to replace the existing storage and warehousing of the tile works with a huge super distribution depot with an unchanged footprint of 5,595 square metres. This is a huge development in any location, but this site is located within the Green Belt and the Surrey Hills AONB and, as such, the location must receive the highest levels of landscape protection (NPPF 2018, para 172). The Applicant’s planned development does not satisfy the exceptional circumstances required for building development within the Green Belt and an AONB and should therefore be rejected.

Traffic: The Applicant’s forecast traffic movements for the distribution depot have been challenged by other parties (Save Oxted’s Road and Environment/Westerham Town Partnership/Westerham Residents Association/Westerham Town Council) who have previously submitted counter projections and their estimates are significantly higher than those outlined in the application. Following a review of the statistics we fully support their conclusions that the Applicant’s traffic projections are understated. The latest revision does nothing to address the discrepancy and understatement of forecast traffic movements.

More than 70% of the traffic from the distribution depot is forecast to move eastwards from Moorhouse. The A25 to the East of Moorhouse, through Westerham, Brasted and Sundridge, is a narrow single carriageway road with sharp bends and is already seriously congested, even more so when there is a problem on the corresponding section of the M25. The A25 in Westerham has two significant road width restrictions of only 4.8 metres (pinch points), compared with the government recommendation of 7.3 metres minimum width for a major road classification. At these pinch points HGV’s, buses and large vans cannot pass one another and this has resulted in traffic accidents, pedestrian risk and building damage. In addition, there are other existing congestion points in the centre of Westerham, particularly at the junction of the A25 and London Road. Also the DPD delivery vans movements will be concentrated in the morning rush hours when local residents are commuting to work and children travelling to school and this will therefore increase the level of congestion.

In summary, the road system is considered unsuitable for such a large increase in vehicle traffic flows eastwards from Moorhouse.

Pollution: The large increase in traffic flows from the planned huge super distribution depot will result in significant and harmful increases in air and noise pollution along the A25, where many residential buildings are located very close to the road. Westerham, 1.3 miles from the site, is identified as an Air Quality Management Area. Whilst over the last two years NO2 readings have improved in the town, the realistically calculated number of LGVs passing through Westerham and onwards along the A25 will inevitably worsen air quality. Planning Authorities have a responsibility to prevent such increases in pollution in residential areas.

Damage to historic and listed buildings: There are 148 Listed Buildings in Westerham, many alongside the A25. Whilst traffic accidents at the two pinch points has caused damage to these buildings, the greater damage is caused by pollution from road traffic. Brickwork and ragstone base-work on several old properties shows significant deterioration and erosion caused by sulphur-laden pollutants in the air and by water splashed onto the brickwork from close-passing traffic in wet weather. Again increased traffic will cause this erosion to impact at a faster and more effective rate.

Economy: We do not agree that any significant number of new jobs will be created for the benefit of Westerham or Tandridge residents. Rather we see the opposite where jobs could be lost due to the overall negative affect of this development on the existing local tourist and retail sector. Westerham and the region is a major draw for UK and overseas visitors who enjoy the semi-rural nature of the town, the easy access to historic Kent and Surrey, and the quality of our historic buildings. As outlined above, this proposed development would have a negative impact on all these qualities, thereby reducing visitor numbers and associated retail, eating and tourist employment.

In conclusion, for all the above reasons, The Westerham Society strongly objects to the current proposals and requests that the latest planning application be rejected.

Peter Hills
Chairman,