

LOCATION: COWORTH FLEXLANDS SCHOOL AND ROUNDABOUT
JUNCTION, CHERTSEY ROAD VALLEY END, CHOBHAM,
WOKING, GU24 8TE

PROPOSAL: Installation of V-board entrance signs. (Amended plans rec'd
06/02/2018).

TYPE: Advert - (Non-Illuminated)

APPLICANT: Mr Underwood
Coworth Flexlands School

OFFICER: Duncan Carty

This application would normally be determined under the Council's Scheme of Delegation, however, it has been called in for determination by the Planning Applications Committee at the request of Cllr Tedder.

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This application relates to the provision of a non-illuminated v-sign board for a school on land opposite the main entrance to the school. The land is part of a wooded area which forms a part of the Sunningdale Golf Club. The site is located in the Green Belt and area of nature conservation importance.
- 1.2 The proposal would provide directional advice for road users and there are no objections to the proposal on public safety grounds. However, noting its location and the size of the sign, an objection is raised to the proposal on visual amenity grounds. The proposal is recommended for refusal.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site is located on the north side of Chertsey Road and north of the Coworth Flexlands School. The site is wooded in nature and lies in the Green Belt. The site also falls within a defined Area of Special Control under the advertisement regulations. The area of special control extends to the rural part of the Borough and in such areas a greater range of signs come under Local Authority control.
- 2.2 The site lies within the international nature conservation designations of a Special Area of Conservation and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area; and national designations of a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserve.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 None.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The proposal is to provide a non-illuminated v-board signage opposite the entrance to the Coworth Flexlands School in Chertsey Road, Valley End, Chobham. The sign-boards are each 1.5 metres wide by 1 metre in height and positioned up to a maximum height of 2.35 metres above ground level. It would replace an existing unauthorised sign in this location which is of a similar size but installed at a greater height (above ground level). The sign would be set back about 2 metres from the kerb-edge of Chertsey Road (beyond the extent of the public highway).
- 4.2 The application has been amended to delete a proposed sign on the roundabout junction of Chertsey Road and Windsor Road, opposite Chobham Common.

5.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

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|-----|---------------------------------|--|
| 5.1 | Surrey County Highway Authority | No objections to amended proposal. An objection was raised to the proposed sign at the roundabout junction (now deleted from the proposal). |
| 5.2 | Chobham Parish Council | Objection – Inappropriate nature of signage in a Special Area of Conservation; commercial-style signage which does not respect rural character; and retrospective nature of signage. |

6.0 REPRESENTATION

- 6.1 At the time of preparation of this report, one representation of objection has been received summarised below:
- Retrospective nature of signage [*Officer comment: The current proposal would replace the unauthorised sign*].
 - Signage provided on common land and would result in commercialisation of common land [*Officer comment: This relates to the sign that has been deleted*].
 - Precedent [*Officer comment: Each application is treated on its own merits*].
- 6.2 At the time of preparation of this report one representation received with the following additional comment:
- Signs outside the school should be sufficient for the site.

7.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATION

- 7.1 The application proposed is considered against Policies CP1, CP11, CP14, DM9 and DM11 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document 2012 (CSDMP) and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is also a relevant consideration.

7.2 Paragraph 67 of the NPPF confirms that advertisements should only be subject to control in the interests of amenity and public safety. Paragraph 68 of the NPPF indicates that special areas of control can be established where closer scrutiny of advertisements is required. In this respect, the rural part of the Borough falls within such an area of special control. As such, the main issues to be considered are as follows:

- Impact on amenity; and
- Impact on public safety.

7.3 Impact on amenity

7.3.1 Paragraph 67 of the NPPF indicates that poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment. Control over advertisements should be efficient, effective and simple in control and operation. Only those advertisements which will clearly have an appreciable impact on a building or their surroundings should be subject to the local planning authority's detailed assessment. Policy DM9 of the CSDMP indicates that development should respect and enhance the local or natural character.

7.3.2 The site falls within the Green Belt. Paragraph 79 of the NPPF indicates that "*the essential characteristic of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.*" Supporting paragraph 5.6 of CSDMP Policy CPA (Spatial Strategy) indicates that inappropriate development within the countryside will include proposals which harm its intrinsic character and beauty, landscape diversity and wildlife. Policy CP14 seeks to protect the features of interest for biodiversity within designated nature conservation sites with high ecological value.

7.3.3 The site has a rural character with the siting within part of a wider area with significant nature conservation value. The land in this location north of Chertsey Road remains relatively open, wooded and undeveloped. In such locations, such signage has an alien and urbanising feature which is considered to conflict with its nature conservation value and openness in this Green Belt location.

7.3.4 The current proposal relates to the provision of a directional sign opposite the school entrance, to assist site access visibility to road users including visitors to the school, which can include both users of the school and the community/recreational uses outside school hours. The entrance is on the inside of a bend in the road, with more limited visibility (including signage at the entrance). The sign is prominent in this respect and it is considered that this sign would have a significant impact on local amenity.

7.3.5 Whilst there are some public safety benefits to this signage, as outlined above, the proposal would have an adverse visual impact on visual amenity and as such, the proposal would not comply with the NPPF; and, Policy DM9, and the intent of Policies CPA and CP14, of the CSDMP.

7.4 Impact on public safety

7.4.1 Policy DM11 of the CSDMP indicates that development should not adversely affect the safe and efficient flow of traffic movement on the highway network.

7.4.2 The County Highway Authority has raised no objection to the proposal considering that the sign would not have an adverse impact on public safety, with reasonable visibility maintained on the public highway. It is noted that this directional sign would improve visibility of the site access for road users, to the benefit of highway (and public) safety.

7.4.3 As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of public safety and in line with Policies CP11 and DM11 of the CSDMP and the NPPF.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 The current proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact on public safety. However, an objection is raised to the impact the proposal would have on visual amenity. The application is recommended for refusal.

9.0 ARTICLE 2(3) DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE (AMENDMENT) ORDER 2012 WORKING IN A POSITIVE/PROACTIVE MANNER

In assessing this application, officers have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner consistent with the requirements of paragraphs 186-187 of the NPPF. This included the following:

- a) Provided or made available pre application advice to seek to resolve problems before the application was submitted and to foster the delivery of sustainable development.
- b) Provided feedback through the validation process including information on the website, to correct identified problems to ensure that the application was correct and could be registered.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE consent for the following reasons:-

1. The site lies in an Area of Special Control and the proposed signage by reason of its siting on the northern side of Chertsey Road and size would result in a prominent and incongruous addition that would be harmful to the visual amenities of the area having an urbanising effect upon the openness of the Green Belt and rural character of the area; and, be an alien feature at odds with the natural assets that the land possesses including its status at an international level as part of a Special Area of Conservation and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area; and, national level as a part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserve. The proposal would therefore fail to respect and enhance the area and be contrary to Policy DM9 and the intent of Policies CP1 and CP14 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Informative(s)

1. The applicant is strongly advised to remove the unauthorised sign without delay as the display of an unauthorised advert is an offence under section 224 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and can result in prosecution.