

APPEAL REF: **APP/A3655/W/20/3265969 (APPEAL A)**

Land south of Kingfield Road and east of Westfield Avenue, Westfield, Woking GU22 9PF

Redevelopment of site following demolition of all existing buildings and structures to provide replacement stadium with ancillary facilities including flexible retail, hospitality and community spaces, independent retail floorspace (Classes A1/A2/A3) and medical centre (Class D1) and vehicle parking plus residential accommodation comprising of 1,048 dwellings (Class C3) within 5 buildings of varying heights of between 3 and 11 storeys (plus lower ground floor and partial basement levels) on the south and west sides of the site together with hard and soft landscaping, highway works, vehicle parking, bin storage, cycle storage, plant and other ancillary works including ancillary structures and fencing/gates and provision of detached residential concierge building (Environmental Statement submitted).

APPEAL REF: **APP/A3655/W/20/3265974 (APPEAL B)**

Land south of Hoe Valley School and east of railway tracks, Egley Road, Woking, Surrey GU22

ONH

Redevelopment of site following demolition of existing building to provide health club building (Class D2) also incorporating external swimming pool, spa garden, terrace and tennis courts (including tennis court airdomes), provision of 36 dwelling houses (Class C3) up to a maximum of 3 storeys in height, vehicle parking, hard and soft landscaping, ancillary works including ancillary structures and fencing/gates and new vehicular access from existing road serving Hoe Valley School (Environmental Statement submitted)

APPEAL BY: **GoldDev Woking Ltd**

For inquiry commencing 10 May 2021

Statutory Declaration of David Bittleston

On behalf of Appellant

I, David Bittleston, of Druim Áird, Crinan, Argyll, PA31 8SW, do solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:

Background

1. I was first elected as a councillor at Woking Borough Council in 1998 and served until 2006. I was re-elected in 2008 and retired on 30 March 2021. I served on the Executive from 2004 and from 2008 until 2016 I was Deputy Leader. Then from 2017 – October 2020 I was Leader of the Council. I have never served on the planning committee although I was portfolio holder for planning in either 2009 or 2010, I cannot now recollect precisely.
2. I do not wish to comment on the merits of the planning application as this will be dealt with by others and I am not a qualified planner. However, I was surprised and disappointed that the planning committee turned down this application given that the officers' recommendation was to grant planning permission. I have always had the utmost trust in the quality and professionalism of the council's planning officers.
3. When I was elected in 1998, I was asked by the then Leader to serve on the leisure committee which included all of the sports and recreational facilities across the borough. In 2004 I was made the portfolio holder for leisure and held that portfolio until I became Leader in 2017. I have been involved in every discussion about the football club and its development since 1998. It has always been a key ambition of the council to support the football club. The council has on many occasions discussed possible redevelopments of the club with both the club owners and with outside developers.

Re-development of the appeal site for housing

4. In the period leading up to the adoption of the core strategy the council consulted residents extensively where we should build the homes in the plan period between 2012 and 2027. The response from residents was that we should do everything to protect the green belt. This led to a borough-wide strategy of building in the town centre and on brownfield sites around the borough. This was further consulted on in great detail in the case of the Victoria Square development in the centre of Woking which had support from all parties on the council. The reason for the redevelopment and regeneration of the town centre was to send a clear message to developers that Woking welcomed developers both

in the centre of Woking and at the other sites in the core strategy close to the town centre. We continued to consult extensively with residents regarding this. The green belt review carried out in 2017 again clearly demonstrated that residents did not want such land used for housing. One suggested green belt site in particular received over 40,000 objections to its use.

5. One of the key problems with building in the town centre and on brown field sites is both the cost of the land and the cost of developing it. This means that providing the affordable homes which Woking desperately needs is very difficult which is why it is hard and puzzling to understand how the planning committee could turn down this application when it offered 46% affordable homes.

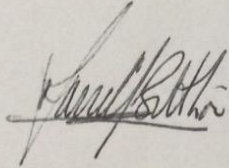
Infrastructure

6. As a council we were always aware that the need to create the infrastructure to accommodate development is the key to success. In the case of the Sheerwater regeneration scheme we spent £5 million improving the access to the site, created new employment opportunities and thereby delivered the leisure, centre and swimming pools before we delivered a single new home. In the case of Victoria Square, we refurbished the existing shopping centre, improved the street scene, undertook major highway improvements and are now building a new combined heat and power energy station to service the new town centre. This resulted in a government 'Housing Infrastructure Fund' grant of £95 million to widen Victoria arch and provide additional sites for housing development.
7. In the case of the Woking Football Club re-development the council forward-invested £40 million pounds in the Hoe Valley Flood defence scheme which is adjacent to the site. The scheme not only protects the area from flooding but provides three new road bridges, a county park for residents' recreation and wellbeing, new sports facilities for Westfield Football club, a new boxing club, and brand new facilities for girl guides, scouts and army cadets. In addition to this the leisure centre and pool in the park have both recently been extensively refurbished and improved.

8. Finally, the extensive work carried out on safe cycle and pedestrian routes to the town centre and railway station mean that the appeal site has probably the safest and most traffic free access to the centre of Woking.
9. My personal view is that planning permission should have been granted for this development as it fully accorded with the policy aspirations of the council as I understood them based on my involvement with the council for over two decades all the way through to my leadership before I retired.

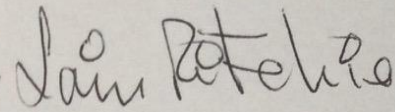
And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the Statutory Declaration Act 1835.

Signed:



Dated 2 April 2021

Witness by



Name MR Ian Ritchie

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