

P & R Committee, 13 March - 16/P/0888/F - Moor Road, Yatton

As officers guide you through the application shortly, I hope they will provide some context to the site location. I have circulated [a map](#), which I hope will help.

I do not have time to cover all the ground I would wish in 3 minutes, but I did want to correct a few errors and omissions in the Committee Report.

- On p.4 the report says “*there are no specific proposals in relation to the application site*” in the Yatton Neighbourhood Plan (which will go to referendum next month). While technically correct, this is incredibly disingenuous. The orchard was recommended for designation as Local Green Space in all the Plan drafts only to be removed in January by the examining inspector at the last minute. This scheme fails to reflect the community’s needs and wishes.
- On p.6 the reports states that the site is *within* the settlement boundary for Yatton. It is not. It sits adjacent to... but **outside the boundary**.
- On p.10 the report mentions “*possible [bat] roosts*” at the Grange. Clarkson & Woods completed a bat survey last August on behalf of the applicant and found evidence of horseshoe bats roosting at the house. They are also using all the hedges. Bat guidance adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document last year should carry weight.

Members will have received emails from local residents in recent days going into some detail regarding specific objections. The last 4 pages of the Committee Report includes substantive objections submitted by Yatton Parish Council.

I would like to highlight four:

1. **The setting of the orchard is a valued gateway into the village that must be protected.** The proposed scheme would significantly compromise the visual amenity and character of the gateway approach to the village.
2. I disagree with officers that the scheme would cause less than substantial harm to **the setting of the Grade II listed Grange**. Officers should be aware of the Forest of Dean High Court case which provided judicial guidance on the assessment of the ‘harm’ in the planning balance. Anyone approaching the village from across the moors will appreciate how the proposed development would cause significant harm to its historical setting.

3. This is a sensitive site. **Two years of construction traffic through the orchard would cause in my view irreparable harm.** The plans do not respect the biodiversity significance of this site - with an SSSI literally the other side of the road, the bat roosts, important hedgerow, and a remnant orchard with a rare fungus of national importance. Natural England has ultimately deferred to the Council, but you should be in no doubt that they strongly object. Last April Alison Howell advised that *"in [her] view... the proposals, which include the access road through the orchard, are not acceptable."*
4. I have real concerns regarding highways and access. I would add that the submitted Road Safety Audit is singularly one of the flimsiest and misleading documents I have read in 4 years of scrutinising planning documents and I would urge members to visit the site to look at these issues for themselves.

It feels like officers have been trying to find reasons to approve inappropriate development, turning this into a desktop exercise... chipping away at genuine material objections over a period of 3 years. But **we should not lose sight of whether - fundamentally - this is an appropriate site for development. It is not.** Not only that... an adjacent site has come forward. As officers will be aware, progress is now being made between Yatton RFC and Strongvox and the next step will be the working up of two 'linked' applications - residential on the club ground and relocated facilities for rugby club.

If you are minded to accept housing on the northern field... the applicant must be made to wait for alternative access onto the main road - through the rugby club site - and not through the orchard out onto a narrow unclassified road. You must not cede your authority to developers but pursue what is right for the community.

I urge you to refuse... or at the very least defer a decision to enable you to make a site inspection.

Steve Bridger
13 March 2019