Batheaston Parish Council Meeting, Tuesday 26th January 2021

Agenda Items 8.1.7 and 8.1.8

Resident Comments on Planning Applications 21/00089/AGRN and 21/00090/AGRN
The Vine House, Bailbrook Lane, BA1 7AB,

<u>From Mr Peter Wardle, 25/1/21:</u>

"Dear Richard,

Along with other neighbours, I am objecting to these two planning applications to construct more buildings on land belonging to the Vine House and I hope that the Parish Council will support us. As these applications are apparently "Agricultural", a point which is highly debatable, scope for public scrutiny, comment and objection is sadly limited.

21/00089/AGRN - extension to existing barn (doubling its size)

21/00090/AGRN - creation of agricultural workshops (34m x 9m)

There are four substantial agricultural/horticultural buildings already on this relatively small land holding (8.5 acres) and very limited evidence of farming activity. There seems little justification to build another substantial building and to extend the already large existing barn based on the limited agricultural use of the land - there is a kitchen garden, two polytunnels and a small orchard. Most of the machinery on the land appears to be for construction rather than for agriculture.

The proposed new building and barn extension are very close to peoples' homes and will look down on them.

On the "Proposed Block Plan" included with the application a "New Access Track" is marked. This is a misnomer as this track leads towards the private drive belonging to 207 Bailbrook Lane which is not a right of way or access.

The proposed large new building and the extension to the existing barn would be visually prominent on the slopes of Solsbury Hill. Unfortunately the landowner has felled the many mature trees that screened the site. The Parish Council should consider the negative visual impact these building would have on the rural setting of the World Heritage City.

The underground hydrology of the area is complex with several springs on these steep slopes. Large building works, as proposed, could easily have negative implications for several houses further down the slope.

About two years ago the landowner was given permission to build two substantial agricultural buildings for workshops and storage of produce. These were built but are unlikely to be used to capacity given the limited level of agricultural activity.

Last year the landowner applied to convert the existing barn into a residence - the planning application was refused by the BANES Council and an appeal turned down by the Planning Inspectorate.

Previous planning applications suggest that the landowner wishes to substantially increase the residential footprint on this Greenbelt land. Perhaps the long term agenda is real estate development rather than agriculture. The landowner unsuccessfully tried to overturn his legal obligation to demolish the existing Vine House before construction of the planned "eco house" -

which would have added another large house to this Greenbelt Land. There was plan to convert existing the barn into a residence - already mentioned. And the two recently built workshops/stores have space, foundations and a footprint that could easily be used in future for the building of houses.

I hope that the Parish Council will consider the points I have outlined and firmly object to these two planning applications.

Kind Regards,

Peter Wardle”

<u>From Mr Steve Denny, 19/1/21</u>

“Hi Richard

Two more planning applications have been submitted by the owner of the Vine House for the development of 2 substantial barns: one is a new barn and the other is an extension to an existing barn. My neighbours and I are going to object to these planning applications and we hope the Parish Council will support us. We are questioning the size of these barns and whether they are proportionate to the scale of the "farming" that is undertaken on the unit. Mr Mercer is not a farmer. He is a developer who runs a number of businesses (including the development of power stations and data centres) none of which have any relevance to farming. He has a small orchard, keeps a few bees and has erected two poly tunnels for the purpose of growing vegetables. His "market garden" is extremely modest. Typically the only time he spends on the farm is for a short period on a Sunday afternoon. Over the last two years, he has erected two agricultural buildings for the purpose of storing horticultural produce. To date these buildings have been seldom used and given the modest size of his market garden, this is entirely understandable. It is therefore difficult to understand what justification can be given for erection of another building and the doubling in size of an existing barn. The existing barn was never built for farming purposes (built in 2003), but for running Mr Mercer's business interests. At the start of 2017 he retrospectively applied to convert the first floor of the barn to an office and shortly after to convert the office to a dwelling (the latter of which was refused). Given that Mr Mercer already has an office that he no longer appears to require the use of, what justification can there be for doubling its size.

Should these planning applications be approved, there would be a total of 4 agricultural buildings all of which are located behind 199, 201, 203 and 205 Bailbrook Lane and spaced out such that if they were converted to dwellings they would "sit comfortably within their own plot". Further, there are other developments that have also taken place on the land. Extensive earthworks have been carried out to level the land and with the exception of the woodland most of the trees have now been removed. The area is now an open expanse of land with virtually no trees remaining. Benches along the public footpath running through the land have all been removed. All the trees and

hedges along the lane leading to the Vine House have been cleared, the lane widened and tarmacked. The verge on the opposite side of the road to the entrance to the Vine House has been dug up and the road widened. Bit by bit, the land is being prepared for development. The land itself is located in the greenbelt on the very edge of the conservation area and Mr Mercer has been taking every opportunity to purchase additional land. Most recently, Mr Mercer purchased the land behind 199 to 205 Bailbrook Lane. Since then, he has submitted a total of 15 planning applications to the council (as well as many other applications prior to this period). I have already mentioned the planning application to convert the office to a dwelling. He also recently sought to discharge the S106 obligations to demolish the Vine House following the construction of Bath Springs. There is no doubt that in the future there will be further planning applications to convert the agricultural buildings to dwellings. The incremental development of this land is an abuse of the planning system and it is not fair for the neighbours who have bought homes that back onto the greenbelt thinking that they would be protected from development. We believe that these planning applications are not being submitted for agricultural purposes, but they are part of Mr Mercer's plans for the development of this land for residential dwellings. I therefore request that the Parish Council object to these planning applications.
Kind regards

Steve Denny

203 Bailbrook Lane”