

Alnwick Town Council - Objection to planning application 19/00500/FUL

Alnwick Town Council urges the Committee to reject this application

It is clear that your decision rests on a knife edge.

It is contrary to policy ENV3 in the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood plan as '*very special circumstances*' for development of this '*Local Green Space*' have clearly not been met.

The ADNP was Made in 2017, following extensive community consultation, thousands of hours of volunteer effort by Alnwick residents, examination by an Independent Examiner and a 79% majority in a democratic referendum.

Neighbourhood Planning assesses the needs and aspirations of the whole community and plans positively for the future. Our plan accommodates housing volumes exceeding those required for Alnwick, and allocates appropriate sites. The south side of this field was never one of those sites. This is despite the applicant, a major landowner, being an active participant in the plan making process and having ample opportunity to argue their case. A late submission by the applicant to challenge the area of land in the '*Local Green Space*' designation on this site, was dismissed by the Examiner at Independent Examination.

Alnwick Neighbourhood Plan Policy ENV3 protects the southern section of the Duke's School Playing field as '*Local Green Space*' (a designation with close equivalence in planning terms to Green Belt) , for its '*beauty*' arising from the presence of its '*mature trees*'.

The context of the listed school building, the playing fields and the horseshoe of mature lime trees surrounding it is unique and very special to the community in Alnwick. It is part of what makes Alnwick town special and has been enjoyed by generations of residents, not least those who attended the Duke's School in their youth. Most people born in the town and many of those choosing Alnwick as their home have a close connection with, and a deep appreciation of this '*Local Green Space*'

The NPPF states that '*Local Green Space designation is a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities*'

The southern part of the site is protected by the ADNP for its beauty, whether or not it has public access. It can be viewed from outside of the site and particularly in winter when the leaves have fallen from the lime trees, the former Duke's School building can be viewed and the space itself appreciated as part of the wider townscape from Summer Seats path. It should always remain that way. The best option for the community would be to secure public access to the green space through transfer of ownership or another agreement with the landowner, allowing use for sport and other recreation in perpetuity.

Within the current proposal to approve the application, there is no legal mechanism to guarantee that the public would not be at some point restricted or indeed excluded from the remaining green space left on the north side of this site, or that it will not be in-filled at a future point in time

We consider that the development laid before you simply does not align with the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan.

The proposal to sensitively re-develop the former Dukes' School listed building is acceptable and welcomed

Limited and sensitive development of the eastern edge of the playing field area would also be acceptable

However, the 49 unit, 3 story residential block, jarring architecturally with the local vernacular and causing harm to the setting of the listed building it is supposed to help protect, is simply untenable. In addition, our designated '*Local Green Space*' must remain protected.

Alnwick Town Council has successfully defended its Neighbourhood Plan at Appeal from an inappropriate housing application brought in the recent past. The integrity of Neighbourhood Planning is dependant on Councillors supporting their communities when the plans are challenged by poor development proposals.

We urge Councillors to consider very carefully the serious implications for '*Local Green Space*' designations in particular, and Neighbourhood Planning more generally when deciding this application.

Neighbourhood Plans are the aspiration of each community, articulated in a spatial plan, independently examined and democratically mandated. There is a real expectation by residents that such Plans will be respected. That is the reason you should reject the application before you.