Moorpool Allotment Association.

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The Planning Department,
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18th November 2008.

Planning Applications:

S/00872/08/FUL
S/00869/08/CAC
S/00874/08/FUL
S/00870/08/CAC
S/00873/08/FUL
S/00871/08/CAC
Flood Risk Assessment Issue 2, September 2008.

Dear Sirs,

I refer to the above planning applications, and write to submit our comments and objections in particular to the flood risk assessment as detailed below. The Committee of the Moorpool Allotment Association (MAA) has considered the plans and flood risk assessment as submitted by Grainger plc.
Further, the MAA has seen the content of objections from the MRG (Moorpool Regeneration Group) and the MRA (Moorpool Residents Association) and fully supports the points contained in those documents.

The Moorpool Allotments Association, on behalf of its members and all residents who, over a number of years, have expressed a desire to cultivate and maintain allotments upon the Moorpool Estate has already submitted a formal objection to the development proposals by Grainger plc. We ask you to consider fully the points contained in the objection dated 18.3.2008 which we still consider to be fully applicable to these applications. Grainger have now submitted a revised Flood Risk Assessment which we believe has major implications. Our comments are as follows.

1. Glanville 1.2 states that flooding was reported by ‘a resident’. This clearly understates the various submissions to the planning authority with images detailing the flooding problems. The issue is also known previously to Severn Trent Water (STW) with whom the drainage consultants have had contact. This remark seems to minimalise the issue which clearly occurs more frequency than Glanville’s projection

of once in 30 years and, for those who have to suffer the consequences now and in the future, is a very real problem. Fundamentally this is a valley site with a large pool (the Moorpool) and both valley slopes feeding a partly culverted stream running down the centre of it. Prior to the garages being built allotments ran down on either side of this formerly open stream. Clearly the original builders of the Moorpool Estate understood these potential problems on the valley site and carefully avoid temptation to build in its most accessible areas.

2. The applicant now acknowledges these issues with their vastly amended drainage plans. Why though were these problems not addressed originally by those who are supposedly expert in these matters? If such issues can be missed what other factors have not been taken into account in the revised plans?

3. The following is a comment from the Environment Agency.

The Environment Agency

Even if you live miles away from the coastline or a river, there's still a chance flooding could affect you. Take a look at your location. Is it at the bottom of a hill or valley, or in an area below sea level? If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', it may be worth taking extra precautions. Properties located at the bottom of hills - even small ones - can be vulnerable to rain water surface run-off, which can be dangerous during excessive rain.

So no surprise there are problems in the Valley Site.

4. The major soakaway shown in Site A spans 4 existing allotments (one of which is a double width plot and another next to it with no boundary shown) and 2 mature hedges. The excavation of the trench will require removal of a large portion of these hedges at the trench position and also access for and working clearance for heavy equipment to carry out the work. The hedges are an important aspect of the allotments. They provide shelter, security and a habitat for wild life. Replacement with fencing would be completely inappropriate and new hedging would take a considerable time to mature.

5. The slightly smaller soakaway to support road drainage spans a single hedge and 3 allotments (one of which is a double width plot and another next to it with no boundary shown). The excavation of the trench will require removal of a large portion of these hedges at the trench position and access and working clearance for heavy equipment to carry out the work.

6. There is no assessment or report on how the ground will be removed and reinstated and the work supervised. A considerable amount of excavation will be required to install and accept these crate soakaways. In addition further excavation and disturbance is necessary for the soakaway connections to the new build area. The soil on these allotments is very good and crude removal methods or scraping will not only damage the immediate area but the adjacent allotment ground. What measures will they take to preserve the topsoil? Where will the topsoil be moved to? Will foreign top soil be brought in to replace it? What precautions will be taken to prevent contaminated fill materials being brought on site?

7. It is unclear how much excavation work will take place with regard to the Foul Water Sewer which passes under the allotments. Any such works will have similar problems.

8. There is a significant potential for pollutants associated with construction plant, operations and materials to affect the soils on the allotments and elsewhere at the site. How will this be dealt with?

9. There is no assessment of the implications to drainage on these allotments by the positioning of these soakaways along the side of the valley slope and across the allotments. Depending on the type of construction, these soakaways could form a barrier to springs and groundwater flow causing problems in the areas above the soakaways and drought below.

10. The use of heavy earth moving equipment will clearly have an adverse effect on the ground causing compaction resulting in potential water logging. The bottom of the double plot already exhibits wet conditions suggesting an underground spring. Compaction can seriously damage soils, reduce permeability and can only be reversed very slowly.

11. The report states the infiltration values are unproven. There will have to be site testing before the drainage can be finalised. This will necessitate trial pit holes be dug to observe ground conditions? How will the site be accessed and equipment used to dig infiltration test trenches and access for a water bowser? Between these trenches being dug, drainage approved installed

and allotments ‘reinstated’ a considerable time will elapse during which time the allotments cannot be used. How will the (semi)reinstatement of these allotments be managed in a time frame which does not prolong the negative impact on the local amenity?

12. 7.3 of the FRA says that intrusive geotechnical testing will have to be carried out on site to determine whether the soil infiltration rates, level of groundwater and any contamination can be verified and the drainage design completed. This work is necessary but not acceptable on the allotments. Further there is the implication that subsequent changes to the design are possible. If that is the case such changes should be subject to review and comment by all interested parties, or, even better, all these issues should be resolved before a formal planning decision is taken.

13. We also request that if percolation tests are carried out, an independent expert monitors their conduct.

14. There are several mature trees affected by the proposals to reduce the size and install soakaways on the South Valley Site allotments. One of these mature trees which is not shown on the FRA plans is located close or over the main soakaway. This is a mature tree well positioned on the site which should be retained.

15. We would ask you to consider access to these allotments during the building program. As effectively the length of the site is involved, the only practical access is by passageways from Moorpool Avenue which is not conducive to allotment maintenance by those who live on the Margaret Grove or north side. Now that building work is proposed on these allotments themselves, they will have to be cordoned off and will deteriorate. Timing will dictate that at least one but several growing seasons could be lost.

16. We question whether the proposed position of the soakaways is ideal in relation to where the flood waters actually gather.

17. The soakaways are located on the sloping sides of the Valley Site. Depending on depth, stored water can flow to the surface some further distance downstream.

18. If the soakaways are to receive water from the whole site they will need to be deeply excavated. We contend that the damage from this will be unacceptable to the continued proper use of the allotments.

19. Suppose these soakaways are already at capacity before a flood event occurs? What happens then?

20. There is no indication of what restriction will be imposed on allotment holders who have soakaways on their plot. What will comprise the cover of the soakaways? Can anything be grown on these covers? There will presumably have to be some restriction around the periphery to avoid damage to the crates. How will the locations be marked? How will restrictions on the allotments cover planting of fruit trees, deep rooted crops, digging of the ground and staking to support protective fruit netting? Who will monitor such restrictions? Who will be responsible for damage? Normally an allotment holder would not expect to encounter such problems and the user in 10-20 years or more may have little concept of what is beneath the allotment and where.

21. We understand crate soakaways have a limited useful life before requiring major maintenance or replacement and this can be as little as 15 years based on commuted sum calculations.

22. We do not consider that the developer has proved that all other reasonable options for the disposal of surface water have been thoroughly investigated.

23. The MAA has already indicated that further damage to these allotments is unacceptable. Further we submit that if any land is no longer used for garages then it should be returned to its former allotment use. We would argue on the contrary that the opening up of the stream would be an encouragement to wild life and a better solution to the drainage problems. A team of scientists at the Government agricultural research station at Silsoe in Bedfordshire, proved that leaving uncultivated strips, gave shelter to predators, which then spread into crops to reduce pests and increase yields. Since then, there has been Food Ministry encouragement for leaving uncultivated field margins and strips. Recently issued Government advice on allotment management urges the leaving of uncultivated patches to shelter 'amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates and small mammals.'

24. The FRA New development Risk Assessment states that its vulnerability classification is ‘More Vulnerable’ and ‘Overland flooding from SW networks’ could affect the site’. Clearly the proposals are inadequate to cope with the new development.

25. The FRA New Development Risk Assessment section 5b response does not indicate appropriate use of the land regarding flooding. Homes are planned to be built in the areas of land at the highest potential risk of flooding at the bottom end of the site. The levels of roads will need to match the existing properties and connection to surface water sewer culvert. A lower level will be prone to flood if any restriction occurs whilst a higher road level could cause surface water to spill over into the existing end properties (PPS 25 section 8 refers).

26. Despite the data supplied it is unclear how an extended surface water drainage system with an increased number of bends and greatly diminished fall rates can work as effectively. The existing culvert is 1in 43 fall whilst the

diverted sewer is 1 in 165. Whilst the system may have a greater volume capacity, a slower flow will encourage silt and debris build up. A regular system of inspection and maintenance needs to be in place and there is no indication of how this would be managed, who would do the work and how it would be funded. We have no evidence from residents of any drainage inspection or maintenance on the Valley Site over the last 10 years! The issue of blockage is well known where the same water downstream crosses Harborne Road. Here maintenance is apparently undertaken but still flooding occurs. This problem is acknowledged in 8a of the Risk Assessment. Continuous inspection is not practical to ensure blockage never occurs.

27. Whatever work is carried out within the development area of site A, the existing culvert remains the bottleneck. This is exposed in the lower allotment area and the picture enclosed indicates the potential for debris to enter.

Previously blockage of this culvert has cause the covered section upstream to fracture along a length due to water pressure. This area is now a concreted section adjacent to the garages. Whilst new sections of pipework may be more resistant to damage, such an excess will manifest itself instead by reverse flow up through manhole covers.

28. The applicant has referred to a payment of £5000 to the MAA in their Supporting Planning Statement Para 5.9 S0/0872/08/FUL. The MAA has never solicited such a payment as we consider the retention of the allotments above financial remuneration. As the difficulties of developing these sites are becoming increasingly apparent we are unclear as to what level of demolition or redevelopment would trigger such a payment and whether like the reinstatement of the site B allotments it is a meaningful offer for you to consider.

29. Glanville acknowledges the FRA and revisions are not a complete solution to the problems inherent in Site A leaving a residual risk due to sewer blockage downstream which would be managed by regular inspections and maintenance by STW. From our comments we do not believe this is the only risk and we do not believe any such inspection is currently undertaken or is likely to be.

30. The following is an allotment area in the SE corner of the Valley Site. Despite this plot and those next to it being 'unavailable to let' we believe there is no problem with cutting back of the overgrown hedges to let in more light and it being brought back into use.

Summary.

The MAA asserts that the damage and restrictions to the few remaining allotments on Site A is unacceptable in view of their contribution to the Moorpool conservation area and amenity contribution.

We further believe the FRA is flawed in that it does not take into account various other factors which contribute to the drainage problems on Site A, indeed are not a complete solution to these problems and furthermore are acknowledged as such.

We support the continued use of Site A for garages to relieve pressure on the Estates roads, but we believe that if any garages are removed and not reinstated, then those areas should be returned to their original use as allotments in line with the intended design ethos of the estate.

The MAA can evidence demand for allotments and currently have 29 applications on file. We also believe that Grainger has applications for allotments in addition to these.

We are also unclear as to whether the Site B allotments are to be returned to their proper use. The implication was that allowing these allotments to be used again as allotments, would somehow compensate for the net loss of those on Site A- despite this ignoring the fact that this will result in a net loss of allotment area. If restoration of site B allotments is no longer the case then we submit this is further justification for retention and restoration of all allotments on Site A.

In conclusion, for the above reasons the Moorpool Allotment Association strenuously objects, on behalf of its members, and potential members to the planning proposals as submitted and the Association asks that the Committee refuse the applications.

Yours sincerely

Dr M. J. Parkes.
Secretary: Moorpool Allotment Association.