

**Reference: S.18/0492/FUL**

**Site Of The Former Ship Inn Bristol Road Stonehouse Gloucestershire**

19/11/2018

*Dear Councillors*

Stonehouse residents are overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the town's Ship Inn site for community use rather than making it over to social housing. A current online petition on 38° website has 246 signatures in 7 days.

<https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/keeping-the-ship-inn-site-for-community-use>

We would like the Development Control Committee to delay its decision on the site until the end of this financial year (April 2019) to allow for a feasibility study for the purchase of the Ship Inn site through local Community and Business funding. Since the Ship Inn site has remained undeveloped for over 20 years we consider that a deferment of four months is not material, especially since making the right decision about the future of the land is both important to the community of Stonehouse and will play a vital part in ensuring the ongoing success of the canal project for the whole district.

Please propose and support this deferment on the Ship Inn site and give the community of Stonehouse the opportunity to purchase the land and to develop a viable and attractive asset for our town and Stroud District alongside the canal project.

Please find attached a summary of the objections received on the planning website for this development. The comments encapsulate why this proposal is so crucial to the people of this community and to the whole area.

Yours faithfully

*Stonehouse residents*

# THE SHIP INN SITE DEVELOPMENT

## STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL (SDC) IS BIASED

At every opportunity steps have been taken to bias the report in favour of this proposed development.

- Publicity was limited to very local catchment (bearing in mind the historic controversy of this site).
- Ongoing significant developments which will affect the A419 have been ignored: road widening at Horsetrough roundabout through to Nupend; 1350 new houses being built in Nupend; other social housing in the area.
- SDC's traffic survey report (performed at the time of least flow) differs widely to the survey by Gloucestershire highways regarding the A419 modification. At busy times traffic is solid from the Horse trough roundabout queuing past the M5 slip road onto the hard shoulder. Air and noise pollution is already significant.
- Failing to recognise this Greenfield site and to respect it.

**Having refused an outline planning application from Gloucestershire County Council in June 2002 for a residential development on this site, SDC now expects to pass their own proposals. They are police, judge and jury in their own court. Their actions appear devious and underhand, and their actions are designed to minimize any obstruction.**

SDC understandably seems determined to get its own way, to cover the cost for purchasing the site from Gloucester County Council, and the subsequent planning and investigative reports for this and past proposals undertaken so far – probably amounting to a similar sum. This is all about finance, and this proposed development will not be benefiting the whole community – indeed it contradicts the statements recently made by Alison Fisk and David Marshall.

Alison Fisk SDC Property Service Manager said *'Our aim is to make the public open spaces more accessible and more inviting for people and wildlife as well as helping Stonehouse benefit from canal restoration'*.

SDC Canal Manager David Marshall *'The restoration of the canal is not just about improving the canal itself but also benefiting the communities alongside. It's important that people have their say now, there will be other opportunities to do so in the future'*.

The Ship Inn site is in an ideal location to help bridge the gap directly from the canal and to the town. It should be considered holistically alongside the other sites at Wharfdale Way and Boakes Drive to maximize on footfall from the canal and to encourage visitors into the town.

## HISTORY OF THE SHIP INN SITE

Gloucester County Council originally acquired the Ship Inn site from Gloucester Highways in 1997 following the widening of the A419. On several occasions they sought permission to sell or develop this site. There has always been considerable opposition to development on this site from residents culminating in a number of large public meetings.

Local residents were promised that this site would be used for recreational and amenity purposes following the demolition of their public house, the Ship Inn and as access to Regent Street was closed to traffic to ease the flow. The busy A419 effectively became a barrier cutting Bridgend off from Stonehouse. The original intention should be honoured and this Greenfield site kept as such for all to benefit not just a few.

**Previous applications have been refused; a precedent has been set and should be respected.**

In 2001 permission to build a pupil referral centre on the site was refused. Then in 2002 an appeal was launched by GCC against refusal for the pupil referral centre but seeking outline permission for residential development (Ref 01/1526 920393). This was refused as the development would result in the loss of an open space which would contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. Also that the noise protection measures required to protect the amenities of any occupiers of the proposed dwellings would be unlikely to contribute positively to the character of the conservation area. The site is within the settlement boundary, an appeal for residential development of the site (in outline) was dismissed in 2002 (REF: APP/C1625/A/02/109754).

The rejection was well received by residents of Stonehouse. In the Stonehouse Neighbourhood News November edition, David Drew MP is quoted as saying. *'I was pleased that the County Council lost their appeal to build houses on the Ship Inn site. This ill-conceived and poorly thought through proposal was rightly roundly condemned by residents and those who know the site well. I hope we can begin to put something that is popular on this site, linking it directly to the canal and making sure that it is combined with an open area. Many ideas have already been formulated. I feel that it is time the County Council took notice of the wishes of Stonehouse and was sensitive to those demands.'*

Quote from Stroud News & Journal 16 October 2002; Chairman of Stonehouse Town Council (Mattie Ross) *'This is another victory for Stonehouse in the battle to win a green site for the area.'*

In 2002 a body was formed to consult with the people of Stonehouse to prepare the Stonehouse Design Statement (supplementary Planning Advice). Issued 2004 with guidance from officers of SDC including Town Mayor and Chairman of Stonehouse Town Council; Councillor Mattie Ross. On 10/11/2005 SDC agreed formally to use the Stonehouse Design Statement as supplementary planning advice. It states that the Ship Inn site is a most important site within the boundaries of Stonehouse and it is the wish of the Town Council that its future be linked to the restoration of the canal and the provision of access to the Town centre by those using the Canal corridor. If this were to happen it would help regenerate the town's high street.

SDC acquired the remainder of the Ship Inn site from Gloucestershire County Council. The site was valued at £500,000 and was transferred to SDC on condition that they pay this amount to The Stroud Canal Company to support ongoing restoration of the canal.

SDC have since neglected this land, and abused it by allowing it to be used for storing building materials and barges. It has been cleared of plant life only to aid selling. These activities have harmed the wildlife habitat that could house endangered species.

### **Proposal for 10 dwellings on the Ship Inn site**

In May 2017 a public consultation for a proposed development of 10 homes was held, and comments were invited. They were notified in March 18 regarding modified plans for 9 dwellings and again in September but this time only to a small minority of homes directly bordering the site. The wider community and interested parties have been kept in the dark since then. A Development Control Committee meeting was held on 16/10/18 to vote on the final plans but the item was deferred without chance for public speaking due to the last minute submission of wildlife reports. This next meeting on 27/11/18 is scheduled to commence at 2pm when most objectors will be at work and unable to attend.

## **SDC DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS**

**40+ comments opposing the proposals have been received from members of the public (~~none in favour~~).**

The outline Development Control Committee Schedule 16/10/2018 states that the scheme was considered to significantly and negatively impact the open nature and character of the site, to the detriment of the Industrial Heritage Conservation Area. The concern was the impact of any residential development, and its impact on the transitional function of the site from the canal to the urban development beyond. The Inspector weighed heavily against residential development of the site, stating that even with landscaping and careful design, developing the site will be to the detriment of the area. Development of the site as proposed would result in the loss of an open space which could add positively to the character of the conservation area.

### **SDC summary**

SDC's watered-down summary ignores sections of the Stonehouse Design Statement and summarises the following public objections:

The site was promised by SDC for a neighbourhood use (park/public house/café etc);

- 1. The design of the units are not in keeping;**
- 2. The number of proposed units are too many for the size of site;**
- 3. The site should be protected in line with conservation policies;**
- 4. The development will be overbearing and impair privacy;**
- 5. The gardens will be dangerous for young families (next to canal bank).**

Below we will try to convey the consistent thoughts and feelings of the local residents and objectors within the SDC summary framework.

### **1. The site was promised by SDC for a neighbourhood use (park/public house/café etc)**

According to Kate Russell – Senior Conservation Officer, the land is considered a Green Field site as it was the former garden of the Ship Inn and an allotment.

The importance of this Greenfield site to Stonehouse residents cannot be understated. It has greater significance to the wellbeing of humans and wildlife than monetary value. If it is built on it will be gone forever.

### **2. The design of the units are not in keeping**

The Stonehouse Design Statement refers to preferred construction materials, and there is no mention of quirky designs & vibrant colours. Housing in the suggested powder-coated aluminium materials with bright colours would resemble an extension to the industrial estate. Inspired by the old Wycliffe boathouse (a rusting tin shack) this carbuncle should not be replicated. At least the boathouse is masked by a natural screen of mature trees.

Something more tasteful and in-keeping like single-story canal-side cottages in more traditional materials would have been more appropriate, however still unwelcome due to the destruction of this greenfield site.

### **3. The number of proposed units are too many for the size of site;**

The plans promote Quantity over Quality. Units closest to the Upper Mills industrial estate are crammed in with hardly any garden space and overlapping the pathway. Has the amount of dwellings been reduced from 10 to 9 to fit a different policy category of regulation, thereby not requiring amenities such as play and garden space? Development proposals for 10 or more dwellings should demonstrate how they meet the requirements for play space set out in Local Plan policy ES15. The policy seeks to enable young children to play safely within the immediate area where they live and to improve their health and well-being through physical activity.

It is immoral that this proposed development with a reduced number of dwellings (ie 9) now no longer needs to comply with this vital requirement. This over-populated island surrounded by busy roads with blind spots at the towpath, a cycle track and a canal (water hazard) is surely not a safe area to house such families with young children? There is no play space available without encountering major hazards.

### **4. The site should be protected in line with conservation policies**

The development should seek to enhance the use and enjoyment of the waterway but would build on a key gap, it is the only Greenfield site between Bridgend and Stonehouse. The adjacent land has been earmarked by Wycliffe College for a leisure complex and could be built on at some point.

The wildlife corridor will be compromised; bats using the alder tree (to be felled) will have to be re-homed, the habitat along with greater crested newts would be destroyed.

It is a shame that this proposal seeks to remove the existing mature trees on the Ship Inn site which could otherwise have been coppiced and retained.

Pollution of the canal could occur from vehicles (spilt oil etc) due to surface water run off, although a nice little earner for the canal company.

### **5. The development will be overbearing and impair privacy;**

Stonehouse Design Statement states, designs should minimise invasion of privacy e.g. by limiting the height of the new houses, arrangement of the houses on the site, and restriction of upper-floor windows facing existing homes, subject to the principles of good design.

The land of the Ship Inn site is at the same height as the bedroom and bathroom windows of the houses directly opposite in Whitefield Close whose ground floor is below the level of the canal. It may be that some regulation regarding distance has been achieved but it does not alter the fact that there will be a clear line of sight at a height advantage leading to loss of privacy enjoyed by long-standing residents of Whitefield Close. Such is the insensitivity of the planners that the modified proposed dwellings have not been turned at an angle to respect and maintain existing privacy, which would ultimately have also improved views along the canal for new residents.

Single story offset buildings with a design that is also in keeping with the period of the canal e.g. lock-keepers cottages, or sheltered accommodation for residents with mobility issues may have been a better proposal, particularly if social housing is to be provided near the High Street.

**Aesthetics are considered above privacy of existing neighbours.**

### **6) The gardens will be dangerous for young families (next to canal bank).**

Just because the proposals are designed cheaply for social housing doesn't mean they should be any less safe.

Canal sides are steep – indeed land needs to be bolstered up to provide a level ground for the houses. With very small gardens, minimal fencing and hardly any play space, children's curiosity will lead them to the waters edge.

## **THE SUMMARY IGNORES:**

### **Unsafe access**

Already access to this 'island' is hazardous and getting worse. Poor visibility and sight lines surrounded by busy roads, school access, cycle track and towpath are all significant, and have played a part in previous planning refusals. Accidents have occurred and the sound of car horns are frequent, indicating conflict of users.

The following will all add traffic to the A419 and will further compromise safety:

- The A419 road modifications (any removal of tree screening would increase air and noise pollution)
- 1350 houses being built at Nupend
- The proposal for an Eco site near junction 13
- The adjacent land has been earmarked by Wycliffe College for a leisure complex, which could lead to the closure of the informal car park and increase right turns across the carriageway.