



Dorking housing plan rejected again over affordable homes shortfall

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Plans to build even more homes on the former Aviva site in Dorking have been thrown out after developers failed to include enough affordable housing. It is the second time the application has been before councillors after the original plans, which included no affordable homes, were deferred in November.

Then, Mole Valley District Council’s planning officers had recommended the application for 69 homes at the Pixham Lane site be approved – despite there being no affordable housing included. The updated plan, which included 15 affordable units, was later recommended for refusal because it again fell short of the council’s 40 per cent target, and independent assessors believed a higher proportion could feasibly be delivered.

Developers Stonegate Homes (Pixham) maintained it was economically unviable to include any more affordable homes and warned that rejecting the proposal could result in no homes being built. They told councillors: “We genuinely understand this is a very important topic. However, critically no two sites are ever the same and while the overarching policy targets are in place the amount of affordable housing each individual site can deliver will be different.”

They said three different affordability consultants had reached different conclusions about what the site could support, arguing this showed there would inevitably be disagreement. “Within four months we’ve gone from the council’s own retained affordability consultants supporting zero affordable housing to the most recent ones concluding that 40 per cent is achievable. With respect this must not be the case of asking the same question until you get the answer you want,” they said.

The developer added that their proposal would still make a significant contribution locally. “Our offer is above what would be required at appeal and would provide 23 per cent of the council’s annual affordable housing in one go. Refusal would not help address shortfalls in affordability.”

There have already been a series of planning applications approved on the site, which was originally earmarked to be a new stadium for Dorking Wanderers FC. Around 300 new homes across the Pixham Lane development have already been granted planning permission.

Residents speaking against the latest proposal said developers were prioritising profit over community needs. “The developers are clearly trying to maximise the amount of space that is income generating while minimising the amount that isn’t,” they said. They also warned about the cumulative impact of development in the area, adding: “Residents are really concerned about the serious cumulative impacts that all these applications for the Aviva site, plus the developments close by at Station Approach and Lincoln Road, will have on the local environment. The overall total of around 300 new residential units on this site that have already been agreed is more than sufficient.”

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Former Aviva site in Pixham Lane, near Dorking (image Google)

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