

Planning Application Woodilee Road, Lenzie

Planning Reference Number: TP/ED/17/0885

The East Dunbartonshire Council's Planning Applications list received by Lenzie Community Council on the 17th December included an application to build a "Twenty-eight bedroom lodge building to provide hotel accommodation associated with the existing pub/restaurant with associated car parking and landscaping".

Lenzie Community Council wishes to oppose this application on the following grounds:

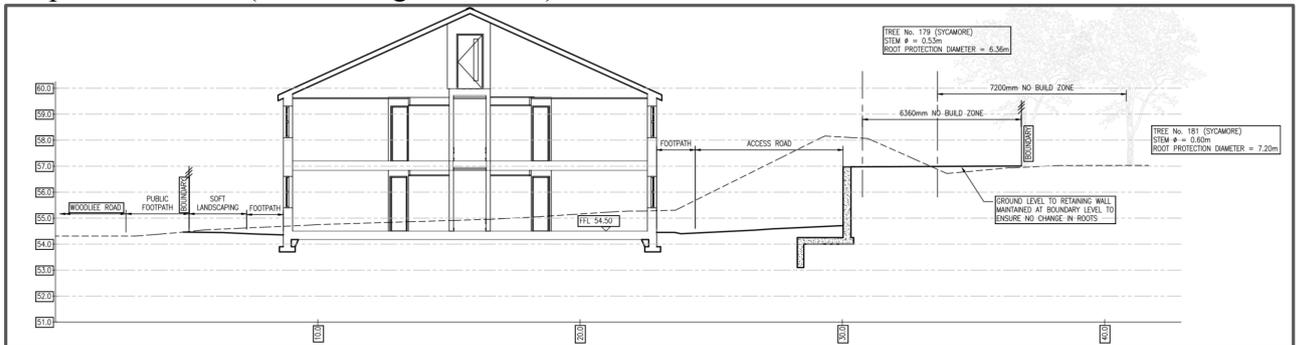
1. Environmental Impact

Lenzie Community Council (LCC) is concerned that the proposed disturbance of the former railway embankment remnant (the earth bund) will threaten the wellbeing of the line of trees along Seven Sisters which are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). LCC is not reassured by the claims of the developer's agents that the steps proposed in the documents accompanying the application will succeed in protecting the Seven Sisters trees from harm.

The site of the proposed development was once part of a railway embankment which carried a line that connected Kirkintilloch and Milton of Campsie with the Central Scotland rail network. The line was closed in the 1960s. In the 1980s the embankment was partly removed along with a low bridge that crossed Woodilee Road at the site of the recently opened Old Gatehouse restaurant. The embankment was not removed completely from the proposed lodge site. A remnant was left along the south-eastern side in order to avoid possible damage to the roots of the Seven Sisters trees. Over time, secondary-growth trees became established on the remnant (called the "bund" in the planning application) and these offered additional protection to the TPO trees.

The trees on the bund were felled without permission earlier this year by Muir Construction Ltd. while constructing the Old Gatehouse restaurant. The claim by the developer's agents in their Planning Statement that "*The site previously contained a group of unprotected trees, which were cleared to make way for the site storage compound related to the construction of the new pub/restaurant*" is clearly untrue. The storage compound was located at the northern end of the proposed lodge site and was nowhere near where most of the felled trees were growing.

As stated earlier, LCC is not convinced by the claim by the developer's agents that "*the TPO protected trees on land to the south east of the application site will be protected from any impact from the proposed development*" (Planning Statement). This claim cannot be proven. The agents state that "*at its narrowest point, the proposed lodge building is 15 metres from the south-eastern boundary of the site and 17 metres from the protected TPO trees.*" While that statement is true, it is largely irrelevant because it is not distance from the trees to the development that could cause problems, it is the removal of the bund that is likely to endanger the protected trees (see the diagram below).



[The dotted line to the right of the lodge section shows the existing bund. Note that well over half the bund would be removed at this point if the proposed development goes ahead.]

Source: Document PL13, Planning Applications Documents.

The developer's agents state in their report titled "**Arboricultural Implication Assessment and Tree Protection Proposals**" that "*The soil bund within the site appears to post-date the mature trees 163 to 186 on the adjacent land. This is to be removed to facilitate the development of the site. It is pertinent to note that the eastern edge of the bund only impinges marginally into the RPA of the trees. It is unlikely that any significant tree's roots will have developed upward into the bund. The removal of the bund is therefore **unlikely** (LCC emphasis) to have any adverse impact on the root systems of the trees, providing the following method statement is adhered to...*"

The report states that "*It is **unlikely** (LCC emphasis) that any significant tree's roots will have developed upward into the bund*" but the developer cannot be sure that is the case.

Last year, Muir Homes Ltd. applied for planning permission to build eight dwelling houses on this site. East Dunbartonshire Council refused the application. Muir Homes appealed that decision to the Scottish Government. The Government appointed a Reporter called Mike Croft to assess the merits of the appeal. Mr Croft recommended refusal of the appeal mainly on the grounds that the removal of a substantial portion of the bund could affect the welfare of the protected trees on Seven Sisters. This is what he wrote:

"So, I am drawn to support the council's reason for refusal in this respect. Its concern lies with the potential for harm to tree roots through the removal of the embankment. It points out that damage to the roots of the TPO trees could occur through the change in ground and soil levels, change to ground stability and erosion and change in the hydrological nature of the ground. I accept these points, and in my view the project would be contrary in this respect to local development plan policy 8 which says that development will protect, enhance and maintain trees covered by tree preservation orders."

LCC believes that the removal of a large part of the bund would pose a threat to the protected trees along Seven Sisters. Therefore, it urges the refusal of the application.

2. Design

East Dunbartonshire Council's **Design and Placemaking 2017** (Supplementary Guidance to the Local Development Plan) states:

*4.4. The Council will be supportive of innovative designs, particularly those that take advantage of locally sourced materials. **The design, appearance and scale of proposals must reflect the local context and landscape setting** (LCC emphasis).*

*6.2. East Dunbartonshire's towns and villages benefit from an attractive and distinctive landscape setting. **New developments must be designed to integrate with and enhance the existing landscape character.... New development should be designed to make the most of views into and out from the site and to ensure that views to important landscape features are retained within the design wherever possible** (LCC emphasis).*

*6.3. Designers must also consider how new development will contribute to the townscape and character of the communities in which the site is located. **New development should normally reflect the scale, massing and form of surrounding streets and building styles** (LCC emphasis), materials and colour appropriate to the surrounding landscape character and built form. The density of proposals should be compatible with the established local character.*

*11.1. **The design of development, particularly on the edge of settlements, must protect and enhance the overall landscape character of the area** (LCC emphasis) and any landscape features on and adjacent to the site.*

Paragraph 6.3 above states that "*New development should normally reflect the scale, massing and form of surrounding streets and building styles....*". The buildings in the streets surrounding this site (Larkfield Road, Garngaber Court and the eastern end of Garngaber

Avenue) comprise two storey and single storey detached and semi-detached dwelling houses. The proposed lodge clearly does not reflect the scale, massing or form of these buildings. The illustration below shows the front of the proposed lodge building.



Source: Document PL12, Planning Application Documents

This is a long, wide and tall slab-sided building. It measures around 35 metres long, 15 metres wide and 9 metres high. Clearly, the size and shape of the proposed building conflicts with ***“the surrounding landscape character and built form.”*** (see paragraph 6.3 on the previous page).

The ***“design of development, particularly on the edge of settlements,”*** clearly does not ***“protect and enhance the overall landscape character of the area”*** (see paragraph 11.1 on the previous page).

The Developer’s agents state in their Planning Statement that ***“with respect to scale, massing and form, the proposed single lodge building of 2 stories has a lower density of development than the previously proposed 8 two storey houses (application ref. TP/ED/16/0295).”*** It is very difficult to see how this statement makes sense. The previous plan proposed the construction of eight terraced and detached two storey houses. As Mr Croft stated in his report (referring to the proposed housing density) ***“the density cannot reasonably be considered a high one in principle. It is considerably higher than the Seven Sisters houses and the cul-de-sac at Garngaber Court on the west side of Woodilee Road opposite the site, but it would not be much higher than the density of the line of houses south-west of Larkfield Road that comes to within about 40 metres of the appeal site.”*** The developer’s agents argue that since the proposed building has a smaller footprint than the combined footprint of the eight houses and their gardens in the previous plan, this is an acceptable development of the site. The footprint of the proposed lodge is not the problem, it is the size and shape of the building.

The developer’s agents argue that ***“the proposed materials, proportions and fenestration seek to reflect the style of the surrounding area”*** and ***“although the proposed lodge building is of a modern design in terms of materials and appearance, the scale and height (2 storey) is similar to the adjacent pub/restaurant and nearby houses and will not dominate the surrounding area nor detract from the nearby traditional properties, which give the Conservation Area its character.”*** (Planning Statement). Clearly the proportions of the proposed building do not ***“reflect the style of the surrounding area”*** (see above) while the claim that the ***“scale and height”*** of the proposed building ***“is similar to ... nearby houses and will not dominate the surrounding area”*** is ludicrous. The proposed building is much longer, wider and taller than existing houses in the surrounding area.

The Planning statement states that the ***“fenestrations”*** also reflect the style of the surrounding buildings. Again, this statement is difficult to accept when the front of the proposed building is considered. The windows of local dwelling houses are in proportion to the size of the houses. The windows in the two sections of the proposed lodge do not match in size or shape and those in the brick faced portion appear too small for the size of the building. In the illustration at the top of this page, they look like cell windows in a prison wall.

Paragraph 6.2 from Design and Placemaking 2017 states that “*new development should be designed to make the most of views into and out from the site...*” (see previous page). The photograph below shows what this site looked like before Muir Construction cut down the trees on the embankment. (Incidentally, it is clear from this photograph that the trees on the embankment were not in the sad state claimed by Muir Homes as part justification for their removal in their arboricultural report of 2016.)



Source: Google Maps – Street View

Clearly, placing a long, tall slab-sided building on this tiny plot does not “make the most of views into and out of the site”.

LCC believes that since the proposed development clearly contravenes the standards described in East Dunbartonshire’s Development Plan’s Design and Placemaking 2017 Supplementary Guidance, the application must be refused. LCC would also like to see the embankment replanted with deciduous trees similar to those felled by Muir Homes.

3. Policy

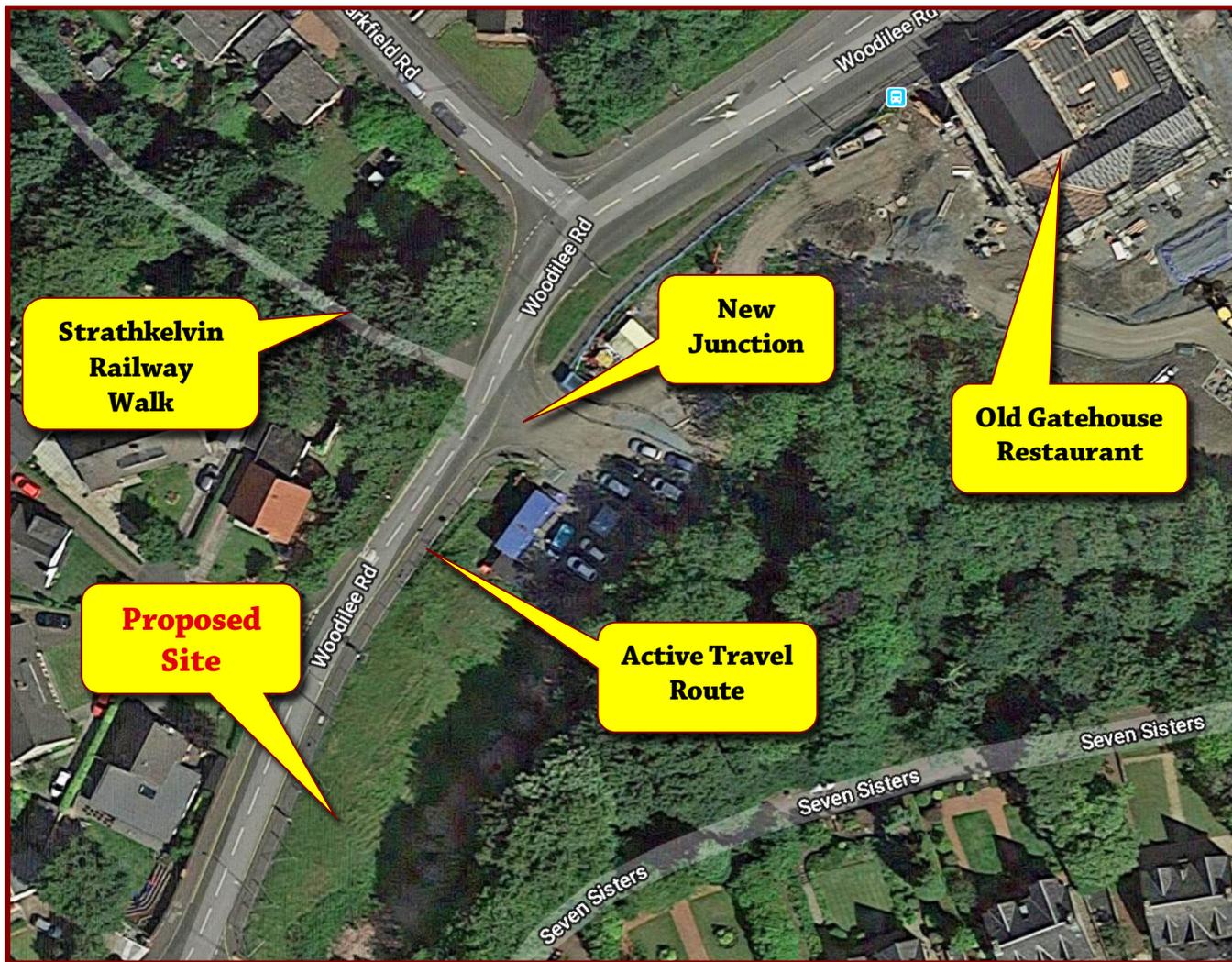
The developer’s agents state in their Planning Statement that East Dunbartonshire’s planning policy states that the Council “*will support the development and expansion of tourism opportunities in East Dunbartonshire and new tourism accommodation will be supported where a site-specific locational need can be demonstrated and where it enhances or contributes positively to East Dunbartonshire’s tourism needs. Given the proposed location is within the urban area, no specific locational need justification is required in this instance. The hotel lodge building will be operated by Marston’s, in conjunction with the adjoining pub/restaurant on the site, with guests at the hotel using the pub/restaurant for catering facilities. It is therefore clear that the combination of the two buildings will serve to support tourism in East Dunbartonshire.*”

LCC doubts that the proposed lodge would contribute much to tourism in East Dunbartonshire. The planned lodge does not have any facilities for guests except a bed. There is no bar, no TV room, no games room, no swimming pool, no fitness room, no residents’ lounge, no dining room. It would be a bed-only establishment. Guests would need to go to the Old Gatehouse for meals or drinks. These roadside lodges located away from town centres historic sites tend to be used mainly by passers-through who use them for overnight stays before moving off somewhere else in the morning.

The proposed lodge would offer very few employment opportunities to local people because of the dearth of services provided in the proposed building. Staff requirements would be confined to a couple of part-time cleaners and a receptionist. The principal beneficiaries of this development would be Marsden's Old Gatehouse restaurant, not local tourism.

4. Access

In 2016, East Dunbartonshire Council created a new blank, going-nowhere junction on Woodilee Road opposite the Strathkelvin Railway Walkway. Eighteen months later, the junction became the access point for the new Old Gatehouse restaurant. If this application is allowed, the junction will also serve the proposed lodge development. (see photo below).



Source: Google Maps

The new junction cut across a recently established Active Travel Route connecting Woodilee Village with the railway station and other local services in Lenzie. The eastern pavement along this part of Woodilee Road had been widened and resurfaced to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists.

Lenzie Community Council opposed the use of this junction as an access point for both the Old Gatehouse restaurant (planning application TP/ED/16/0294) and the 2016 proposed housing development by Muir Homes Ltd. on the proposed lodge site (planning application TP/ED/16/0295). The Old Gatehouse application was allowed while the housing development application was refused.

At present, heavy traffic entering and leaving the Old Gatehouse restaurant cuts across the Active Travel Route endangering the safety of cyclists, school children, dog walkers, the deaf/blind (heading for the local Deaf/Blind centre on Initiative Road) and other pedestrians. Building the lodge would increase the volume of traffic at this junction and make the situation even more dangerous for users of the Active Travel Route. So far as LCC is concerned, this provides a supplementary reason for recommending the refusal of the proposed lodge planning application.

Conclusion

In view of the arguments set out above under the “material considerations” headings of Environmental Impact, Design, Policy and Access, Lenzie Community Council urges East Dunbartonshire’s Planning Board to recommend the refusal of this application to the Council.

John McFadden,
Planning Convener,
Lenzie Community Council.