



Mr P. Edwards  
The Edwards Irish Partnership  
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By email - Without Prejudice

Your contact is: Steve Vigar, Planning

Dear Mr Edwards

**Allotment Site, Chapel Hill, Tilehurst - Construction of three 3-bedroom terraced houses with access and parking.**

Thank you for your application.

I am afraid that I have a number of concerns regarding your proposals as follows.

#### *Loss of Open Space*

The allotment site is an area of open space that has not been previously developed. Policy CS28 is clear that development proposals that result in the loss of open space will not be permitted. The supporting text to the policy explains that the policy applies to all open space in the Borough, whether it is public, or privately owned. The visual amenity of the open space is an important consideration, even where public access is restricted.

The allotment site is very prominent when viewed from public areas, being located on high ground above and adjacent to Chapel Hill and Lower Elmstone Drive, which are both busy routes through the local area. The site makes a strong positive contribution to the visual amenity of the surrounding streets and the visual attractiveness and environmental quality of the wider area due to its openness, undeveloped character and green appearance.

#### *Loss of Community Use*

The allotment use of the site is considered to be an important community use (distinct from its role as open space in policy terms). The allotments provide a focal point within the local community and contribute towards open land for food production within communities as referred to in paragraph 17 of the NPPF. Policy CS31 resists the loss of community facilities.

There would appear to be a need to retain the facility based on the popularity of the allotments up to the point at which the allotment holders were required to leave by the landowner. Regardless of popularity, it is considered to be desirable to retain opportunities for food growing at neighbourhood

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level to plan for future demand. On this basis the proposals are considered to be contrary to Policy CS31 and national policy within the NPPF.

#### *Effect on the Character of the Area*

In addition to the harm to the visual amenity of the area resulting from the loss of the open space referred to above, the proposal is also considered harmful in terms of its relationship to its surroundings.

The land within and surrounding the site slopes downwards to the east before falling sharply at the rear of the flats in Lower Elmstone Drive. Although a section drawing has not been submitted, it is apparent that the houses would sit much higher than these flats. It is considered that the proposed scale and layout would result in the houses appearing as a stark feature, jutting out visually as the land falls away. This effect would be particularly pronounced when viewed from the road to the south of the site (Chapel Hill) as the mass of the building would sit against the skyline and obstruct views across the lower land beyond to the north and east. When viewed from lower land close to the roundabout the bulk of the buildings would also be strongly apparent due to the marked change in land levels.

The cottages to rear of the site at 58 to 62 Chapel Hill front on to the open space and provide a distinctive and visually pleasing backdrop. The current proposal seeks to place a row of houses in front at relatively close quarters. It is considered that this relationship would fail to respect this local distinctiveness and would appear as an awkwardly-sited and alien feature in this context.

The proposal also involves a large expanse of hardstanding to the front, which would be occupied by parked vehicles. These would dominate the frontage visually and would further emphasise the stark and uncharacteristic nature of what is proposed.

The proposal is considered to be contrary to Policy CS7 on this basis.

#### *Effect on Residential Amenity*

Although the flank wall of Plot 3 would be 16 metres from the rear of 94-96 Lower Elmstone Drive, it would appear that the significant change in levels between the two would result in an overbearing effect on the rear windows and gardens of these flats, contrary to Policy DM4.

#### *Trees*

The Oak tree and group of smaller trees and other vegetation on the western boundary of the site provide public amenity, screening and wildlife habitat value. This should be retained and worked around. A Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment is required to establish the constraints relating to these trees. Plot 1 will need to be located so that it is outside of the Root Protection Areas and canopies of the trees, informed by the Tree Survey and AIA. This should include construction space outside of the tree's RPA to allow for foundations or retaining walls etc.

Policy CS38 applies.

#### *Transport*

Comments on the parking, access and wider transport implications of the proposal are to follow.

In conclusion, it is considered that the open space should remain and the allotment community use should be retained. These are clear in-principle objections to residential use of the site and would not be overcome by changes to the design. The impact of the proposed houses on the character of the area is also a concern, as is the potential harm to trees of amenity value. The bulk of the houses relative to neighbouring flats would be overbearing and harmful to the amenity of these neighbours.

I would recommend that you withdraw the current application to avoid it being recommended for refusal. Please advise how you wish to proceed by 19 October at the latest.

I am sorry that I cannot be more positive about your proposals.

Yours sincerely

Steve Vigar  
Principal Planner