

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Watermill Bridge, Wash Water

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October 2021

REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (“SCI”) has been prepared by RPS Consulting Services Ltd (“RPS”) on behalf of Bewley Homes (“The Applicant”) in relation to their land interests at Watermill Bridge, Wash Water (“the Site”).

1.2 A residential led hybrid application (“the proposed development”) is proposed to Basingstoke and Deane Council (“the Council”) for consideration, comprising the following elements:

a. an outline planning application for up to 350 dwellings (Use Class C3) including dwellings for older people; a 1,600 square metre community building (Use Class F2(b)); a 1,200 square metre Health and Wellbeing Centre (Use Class E(e)) and a 250 square metre convenience store (Use Class F2(a)); demolition of Common Farm and associated agricultural buildings; the provision of open space, allotments, community gardens, a riverside park/nature trail, drainage attenuation, landscaping and associated infrastructure; and

b. a full planning application for the first phase of residential development including 90 dwellings (Use Class C3), public open space, associated landscaping and infrastructure works. Full planning approval is also sought for access arrangements including a new vehicular access onto the Andover Road (A343).

1.2 This SCI sets out the details of the pre-application consultation carried out for the proposed development. The Applicants have taken active steps to engage with the local community, in addition to the Council, Hampshire County Council and relevant Parish Councils to ensure that key issues are considered prior to submission of the application.

Importance and Purpose of Effective Consultation

1.3 Community engagement lies at the heart of the planning system. There is no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation in advance of a submission, however, consultation enables an opportunity for early access to the proposals., This process can often allow the exchange of local information, which can expose areas of new evidence previously unknown to the development team, and enrich a planning submission.

1.4 The Applicants have a genuine interest in the views of the community and have sought to make the public aware of the proposals in the most effective way possible.

1.5 The objectives of the community consultation are therefore twofold, and have been undertaken to:

- make the local community aware of the proposals; and
- seek comments, views and feedback in shaping the proposed development.

Structure of SCI

1.6 The structure of this SCI is as follows:

- Section 2 describes the policy background to the consultation process;
- Section 3 describes the approach taken by the consultation exercises;
- Section 4 describes and analyses the feedback received, and sets out how it has been addressed; and
- Section 5 summarises the feedback and how the proposals have changed as a result of the consultation exercise.

2 POLICY CONTEXT

National Policy

- 2.1 The fourth iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) was published in July 2021 and states:

Pre-application engagement and front-loading

39. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality preapplication discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

40. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.

- 2.2 The NPPF makes clear that pre-application engagement is encouraged, but not required.

Local Policy

- 2.3 Basingstoke and Deane Council published a Statement of Community Involvement in 2018. It sets out how, where and when the Council will consult on planning matters such as Policy documents, planning applications and neighbourhood plans.
- 2.4 Following the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Council adopted a temporary Statement of Community Involvement in September 2020, to reflect the current barriers social distancing and lockdown has presented.
- 2.5 According to the Council, the adopted temporary SCI will be enforced until social distancing measures have been relaxed. This SCI is still being enforced by the Council, as of October 2021.

Consultation

- 2.6 The SCI sets out that the council expects planning applications to have undergone some form public consultation before being submitted. The Council advises the use of virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, and video conferencing. The Council states that the consultation should be accessible and clear to the whole community.

- 2.7 Once a planning application has been validated, neighbours and consultees are notified by the Council and invited to comment on a planning application for a period of 21 days, as part of the statutory process. Any member of the public can comment on the application, which is usually registered online. All comments – even after the 21-day period has ended - will be taken into consideration.
- 2.8 Appendix 2 of the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement states that a Major Development must be publicised through advertisements in the local press, the Council’s website, by site notice and also notifying neighbours. This will be undertaken by the LPA. The Council also specifies the press to be *“the local newspapers, the Basingstoke Gazette, the Andover Advertiser and the Newbury Weekly News, as appropriate for the site in question”*.

3 PRE-APPLICATION

Pre-application with the Council

- 3.1 A request for pre-application advice was sent to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council in May 2021. As part of this request, information was submitted to the Council including concept plans for development, details for the overall vision and scale of development. This was supported by some high level evidence that had been undertaken at the time.
- 3.2 Further to this, a pre-application meeting was held in August 2021. The Case Officer facilitated the discussion supported by technical documents including: landscape; heritage; transport; environmental protection; planning policy; urban design and arboriculture.
- 3.3 In addition to meeting the Council, the Applicant has also engaged with Hampshire County Council (“HCC”) as the Local Highway Authority (“LHA”). As detailed in the supporting Transport Assessment, a scoping note was sent to HCC in June 2021, outlining the details of the development, and subsequently a number of outcomes have been agreed as a consequence.

Parish Meetings

- 3.4 Two pre-application meetings with ward members and local parish councils have taken place.
- 3.5 The first meeting was an informal meeting on 02 June 2021 with Bewley Homes and Councillors John Izett, Graham Falconer and other representatives from East Woodhay and Highclere Parish.
- 3.6 The second meeting was a presentation to Councillors, held on 07 September 2021. This involved members of the consulting team (Bewley Homes and RPS), along with ward members from East Woodhay, Highclere, Enborne and Evingar.

4 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

As part of an initial approach to consultation, the Applicant has been keen to allow for an early presentation of the proposed development, accepting that there will be changes resulting from evidence prepared along the way. The Applicant has been careful not to marginalise groups in the community who may not have access to the internet, and an approach to present information electronically and physically has taken place . Consultation Leaflet

- 4.1 In advance of the submission, leaflets setting out details of the site and the proposed development were distributed to approximately 1,500 homes and businesses throughout the area. The leaflets were delivered to the homes between 23-24 July 2021, for approximately one month, ending on 20 August 2021. Submissions received beyond this period were however still considered.
- 4.2 The leaflet was sent to the households within the geography defined in Figure 4.1, which included Enborne Road and the suburb of Wash Common.

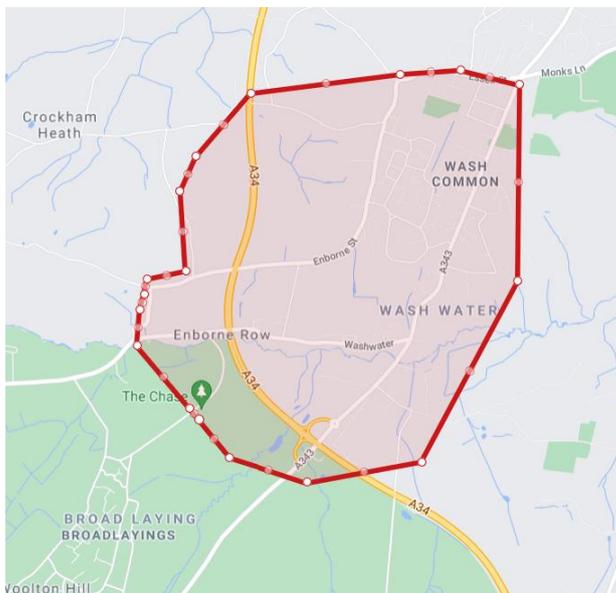


Figure 4.1- Leaflet Catchment Area

- 4.3 These leaflets sought to provide an overview of the Site location, along with the aspirations of the Applicant, ahead of making a formal planning submission.
- 4.4 The leaflet made clear that Bewley Homes were interested in receiving comments on the proposal to assist in finalising the details of the scheme.

- 4.5 Alongside the leaflet, local residents were also provided with a short response postcard, which could be filled in and returned, via freepost. The leaflet also included the web address for the public consultation website, where consultees would be able to find out more about the proposals if they were interested, and also submit comments directly via the online form, rather than via the postcard. Both the leaflet and the feedback form are reproduced as part of **Appendix 1** to this statement.
- 4.6 Residents were asked for their views in relation to series of matters:
- Our Vision is to work with the existing natural environment on the Site such as the River Enborne to create a healthy and socially sustainable residential community. What are your views on this approach?
 - What community facilities would you like to see at Watermill Bridge?
 - Do you have any comments to make on our initial concept masterplan?
 - Do you have any general comments you would like to make?
- 4.7 The questions touched on a variety of important themes that run throughout the scheme, such as the River Enborne, community facilities and the creation of a socially sustainable residential community.

Public Consultation Website

- 4.8 The website created remains live, and is accessible via the link: <https://www.watermillbridge.co.uk/>. The web address was provided on the postcards posted to the local community, as well as being circulated to relevant Town and Parish councils for broadcasting via their own websites and social media channels. It is considered that the details of the consultation reached the greatest number of people this way.
- 4.9 The website was organised into a number of pages, provided the following:
- Details about the applicant ('About Us');
 - An overview of the scheme at Watermill Bridge ('Our Vision');
 - The approach to Placemaking in the scheme;
 - Our Proposals;
 - A space to record the feedback from the council ('Your Views'); and
 - A news tab (updated periodically).

4.10 The website provided information about the proposals in a clear and concise way. It did not overload the reader with minute detail but also did not oversimplify the scheme; the website sought to put across the details of the scheme as clearly as possible.

4.11

Public Consultation Event

4.12 As a follow up to the initial leaflet drop, a public consultation event was held on 02 September at the Woodpecker Pub in Newbury, adjacent to the Site, which sought to update local residents on the evolving evidence base to support the proposed development, and present an updated masterplan for the Site.

4.13 The event ran from 3pm until 7pm to allow an opportunity for a greater proportion of the local community to come and engage with the material.

4.14 In order to advertise the event, consultation leaflets were distributed to area wider catchment area, which also captured the settlements of (defined in figure X) which advertised the consultation time and details.

There was not an overwhelming response from the local community in terms of written comments; with more informal comments being taking place. There were only three formal comments – these discussed the residents worries about building on a flood plain and the infrastructure on roads and surrounding services such as schools and healthcare facilities.

5 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Responses from Website, Email and Feedback Form

5.1 The methods of initially commenting on the proposal, in the first instance, was to comment on a feedback form either virtually on the website or completing and returning the form that was sent out to the surrounding residents. Emails to our dedicated address were also recorded within the consultation responses.

5.2 The website also provided an option for users to sign up to a service that will notify them if there are any website changes or updates to proposals as the course of the development proceeds.

5.3 The feedback form consisted of 4 questions:

- Q1: Our Vision is to work with the existing natural environment on the Site such as the River Enborne to create a healthy and socially sustainable residential community. What are your views on this approach?
- Q2: What community facilities would you like to see at Watermill Bridge?
- Q3: Do you have any comments to make on our initial concept masterplan?
- Q4: Do you have any general comments you would like to make?

5.4 The responses were recorded in full. Although no personal information was requested from respondents, some of the responses were received via email. This information will be stored in line with GDPR guidelines, and disposed off once the planning process has concluded. Key themes or points were picked out through these comments to provide a thorough overview which has been translated into the below graphs.

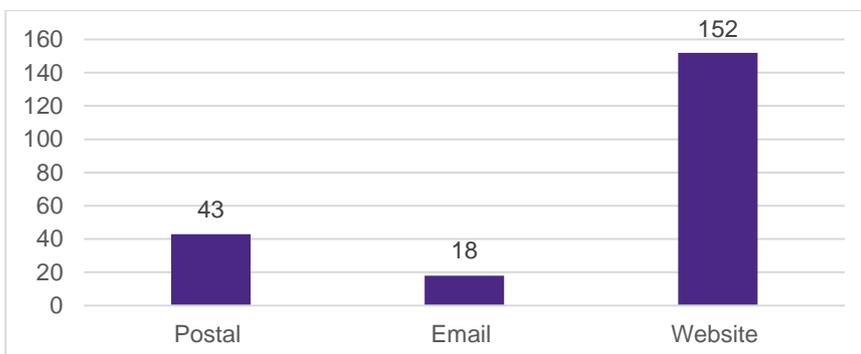


Figure 5.1 Consultation Response Methods

5.5 In total, there was 212 responses – 152 responses coming through the website; 18 coming through the dedicated email address and 42 coming from postal responses. From these responses we had 196 responses against the development: 4 in favour and 6 neither for nor against. The remaining 6 used the form the subscribe emails alerting them to updates from the website.

5.6 Bewley Homes Ltd and RPS expresses thanks to all local residents and stakeholders who have taken the time to contribute to the consultation process. This section explores the consultation responses to the individual questions and the response from the Applicant.

Question 1 - Our Vision is to work with the existing natural environment on the Site such as the River Enborne to create a healthy and socially sustainable residential community. What are you views on this approach?

5.7 The feedback received for the question “Our Vision is to work with the existing natural environment on the Site such as the River Enborne to create a healthy and socially sustainable residential community. What are you views on this approach?” has been shown below in Figure 5.2.

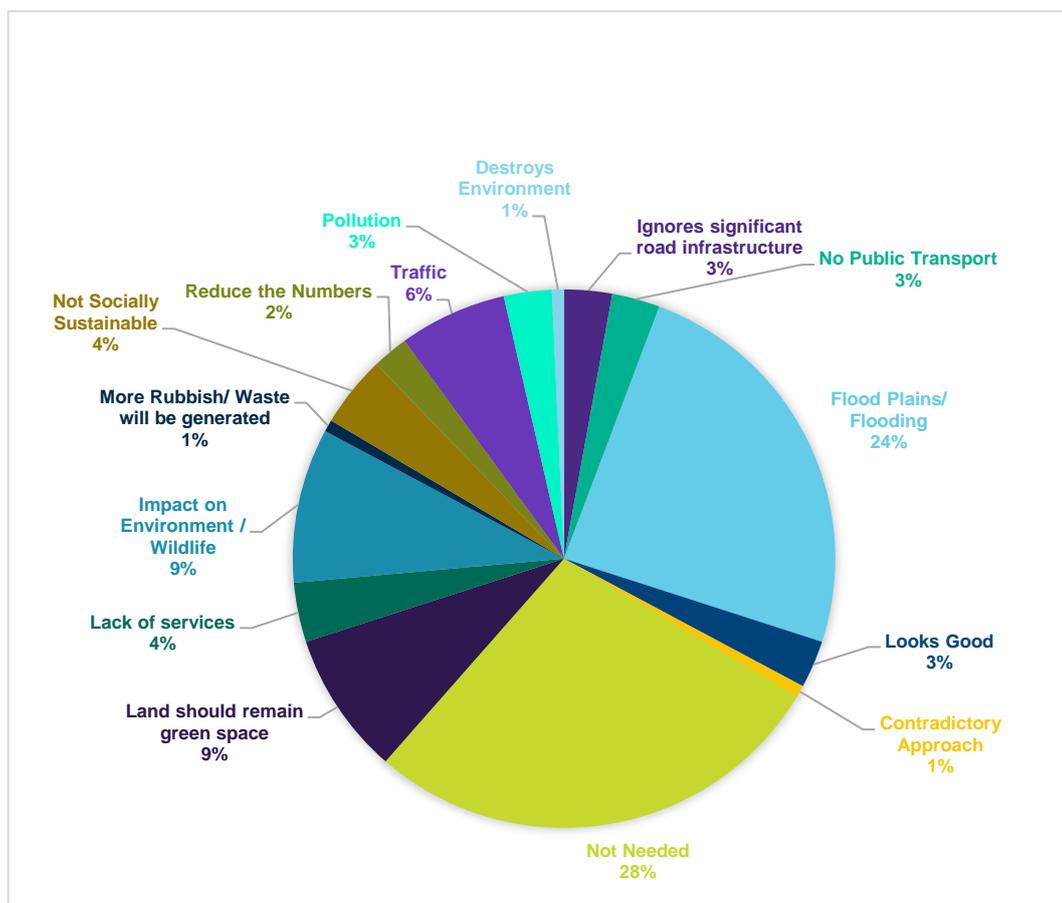


Figure 5.2 Responses to Question 1

- 5.8 The above chart shows the responses from the public consultation from the leaflets delivered to the homes or via the website/email.
- 5.9 The most common response to Q1 was that the scheme isn't needed at the site (28%) and the second more common response was the worry of Flooding and the site is a Flood Plain (24%).
- 5.10 The comments on impact on the wildlife; lack of services; pollution and traffic are views that have been expressed throughout all questions.
- 5.11 RPS note that this question has been in part subsumed within the more general context of considering the principle of development, however turning to some of the particular observations, many responders have highlighted matters of flooding and the wider impact of the environment as part of the proposed development.
- 5.12 The evidence base supporting this application has from an early stage sought to consider what the impact of the floodplain on the northern boundary will be. The Applicants have taken care to look at this matter comprehensively, including a detailed modelling of the current and future flood plain and how that would shape where development could go. As a consequence, the built form of the development has avoided all areas of flooding sensitivity.
- 5.13 Whilst it is noted at the majority of the site is classified as undeveloped land, the development of the Site will create new opportunities for accessible greenspace, and will lead to biodiversity gains of 17% on the site itself.

Question 2 What community facilities would you like to see at Watermill Bridge?

- 5.14 The feedback received for the question "What community facilities would you like to see at Watermill Bridge?" has been shown below in figure 5.3.

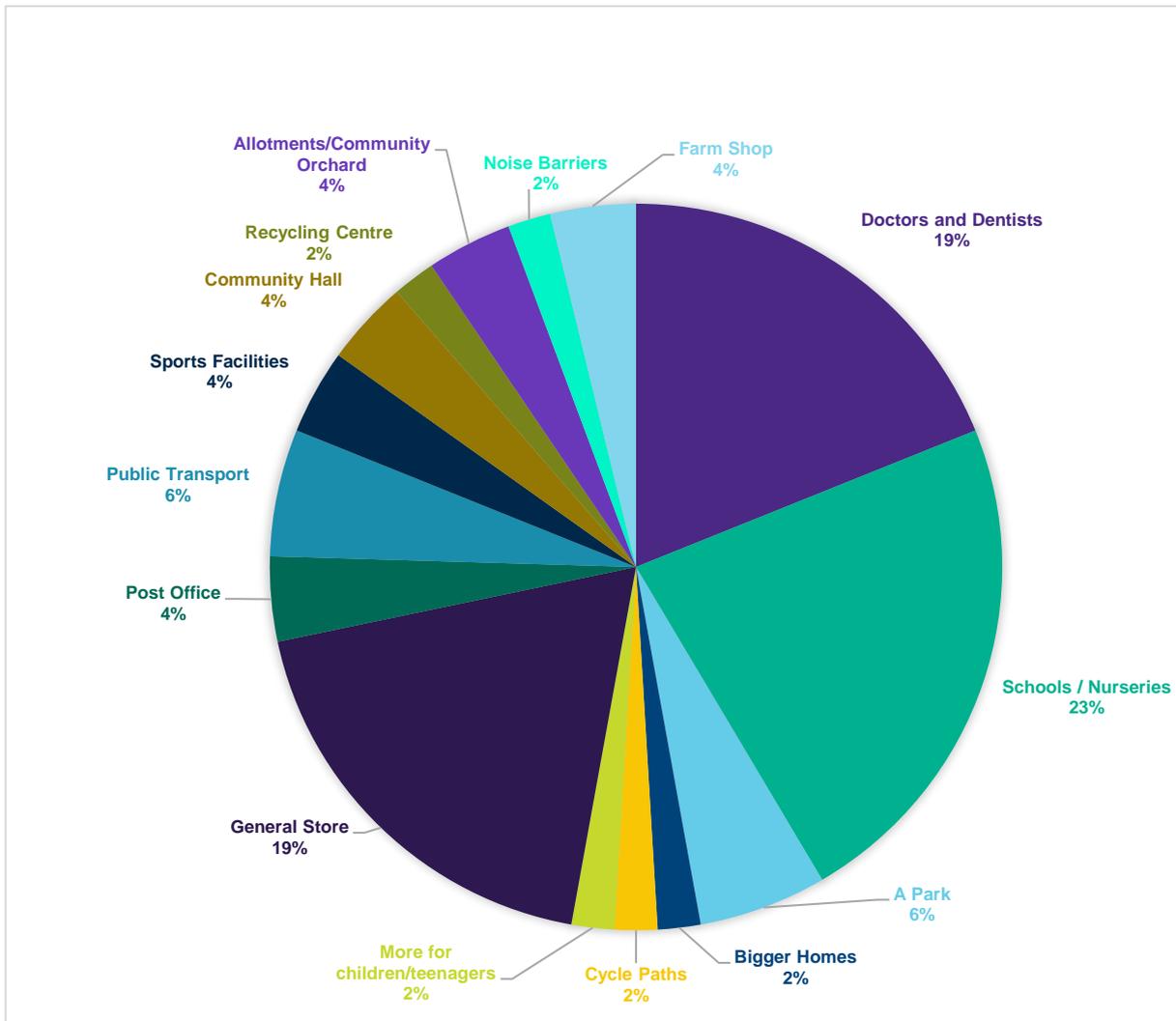


Figure 5.3 Responses to Question 2

5.15 Figure 5.3 shows that the main responses from the consultation is that the community would like to see schools and nurseries (23%); doctors and dentist’s surgeries (19%) and the provision of a local/general store (19%). Although the proposed development does not have the critical mass to support a new school, other community facilities are proposed to be met here, including a health and wellbeing hub, a convenience store and a community hall, responding to a number of observations from the consultation. Additionally, some of the peripheral comments also refer to the desire for cycle paths, public transport and allotments, which are to be included as part of the development.

Question 3 Do you have any comments to make on our initial concept masterplan?

5.16 The feedback received for the question “ Do you have any comments to make on our initial concept masterplan?” has been shown in figure 5.4 below.

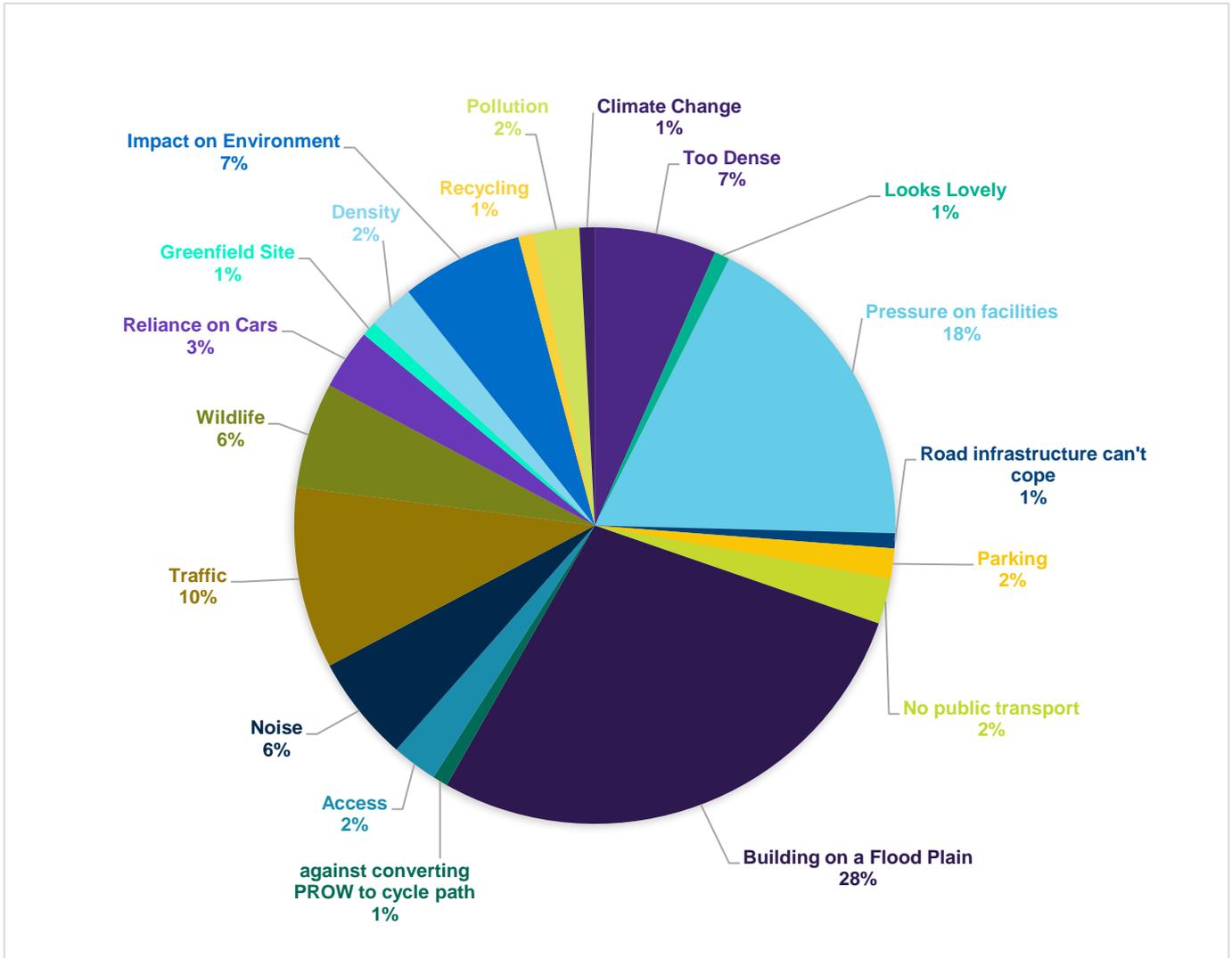


Figure 5.4 Response to Question 3

5.17 Figure 5.4 shows the main response from this question is the statement that we are building on a flood plain (28%) as well as pressure on local facilities such as doctors and schools (18%). As outlined in response to Q1, whilst RPS is very aware of local concerns related to flooding in the area, the proposed development has taken care to extensively model and understand the position in respect of local hydrology. The Applicant is confident that the evidence underpinning the strategy for flooding and drainage is correct and robust.

Comments also showed an increased concern on road infrastructure; with comments discussing the increased traffic on the roads (10%); pollution (3%); reliance on cars due to the lack of public transport (3%); access onto the site at the junction (3%); parking (2%) and the concern that Road Infrastructure Can't Cope (1%). The application is supported by a Transport Assessment, which has demonstrated that when accounting for existing traffic, the proposed development can be accommodated on the existing network without giving rise to any significant outcomes on key roads and junctions. Whilst any development will be expected to increase levels of traffic, the additional of this development is not expected to be severe, mitigated by the proposals to increase cycling and access to public transport.

Q4: Do you have any general comments you would like to make?

5.18 The feedback received for the question 'Do you have any general comments you would like to make' has been shown in figure 5.5 below.

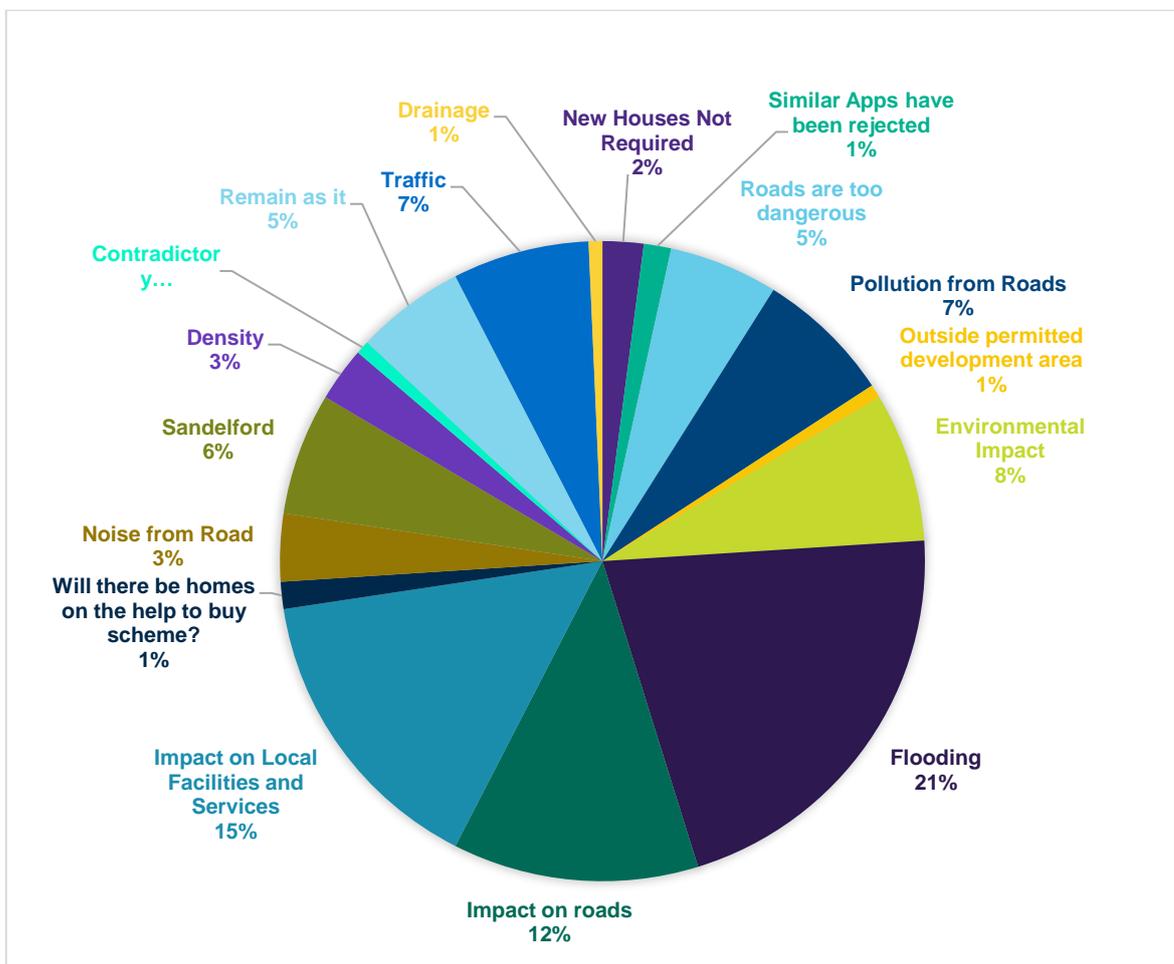


Figure 5.5 Response to Question 4

5.19 Figure 5.5 shows the main response from this question is the concern of flooding (21%). The comments received around flooding reflect the concern of the development being built on a flood plain.

Comments also showed concerns for the impact on local facilities and services (15%) and impact on roads (12%). Both these concerns and thoughts have been reflected throughout the responses as a whole.