

Wilcoxholm Farm, 220 home residential development

Planning application 1007/P/25

Objection from Spokes Linlithgow, 20.1.26

Terminology: The existing cul-de-sac leading from the bend in Edinburgh Road at Maidlands to the railway underbridge, and thence to the Regent Centre, is named “Edinburgh Road” in the application documents. However, we will use “**Edinburgh Road**” in its locally understood sense of the main B9080 which continues westward to the town centre. We will refer to the cul-de-sac, from Maidlands to the rail underbridge, as ‘**Boghall Road access**’ since it becomes Boghall Road for the short distance after the underbridge.

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0. Top requirements if planning permission is granted

We consider **3.1 and 3.2 below to be vital conditions** to be included in any planning permission, also with a requirement that they be delivered before any house is occupied. Various other desirable improvements are covered in other sections.

Secondly, given the geographical location of the site, near all facilities needed for local living, we also urge an **experimental innovative scheme**, involving the developers and council, to maximise use of walking and cycling, as recommended for this site in [Linlithgow Local Place Plan](#) (proposal T15) – see section 7 below.

1. Introduction

In principle Spokes would love to support this development, but sadly we have to lodge a strong objection.

Geographically the site is close to public transport, schools, shops and other local services. The indicative layout is moderately dense, with significant terraced housing (though see 2 below), a village centre and excellent internal recreational opportunities. At a time of growing climate crisis these are essential factors for major developments, as, *in theory*, they enable significantly reduced car use, with residents potentially able to live locally and reach shops, schools and other services on foot or by bike.

Sadly, whilst the developers highlight the **geographical nearness** to local services, **accessibility nearness** by active travel (especially cycling) is extremely poor under the existing proposals, due to the absence of a convenient connection to the towpath (3.1 below), an unsatisfactory canal crossing proposal (3.2), no proper connection to the cycle/pedestrian route to the Regent Centre and High Street (5), and the hostile nature of Edinburgh Road (5.2) particularly for cycling. The proposals fail even to recognise most of these issues, despite them being raised in earlier written submissions to the developer, let alone address them adequately. As such, the potential of the site for high levels of active travel is lost and it will become another car-dependent suburb, also adding to town centre congestion. Hence our strong objection.

Furthermore, if accessibility was properly built in to the scheme, this would have a massive side-benefit for Springfield residents in at long last giving them a safe walking/cycling access to the canal towpath, as well as enabling the new residents to access the Springfield educational and recreational facilities by active travel.

2. Site internal

A moderately dense development here, assuming good active travel connections, makes a lot of sense for the reasons above, also for public health and to help meet housing need. We indeed suggest a further increase in density, for example replacing many of the detached houses by semi-detached or terraced. The space gained could be used for allotments, other greenspace, or additional housing. If additional housing, further benefits on top of those in (1) above would include helping improve the viability of the village centre, and greater energy efficiency of semi-detached or terraced housing rather than detached.

Main internal paths should all be designed for shared pedestrian/cycle use – notably the east/west canalside park path, and the paths linking to it.

There should be adequate secure cycle storage for all residents, with management arrangements where storage is shared; as well as 'Sheffield rack' parking facilities at the village centre, playparks, moorings and any other appropriate locations, also bearing in mind that other Linlithgow residents (and long-distance towpath users) are likely to visit the area and require short-term bike parking.

3. Active Travel accessibility requirements

The only active travel accessibility features proposed by the developers are (1) improved pedestrian footways along Edinburgh Road from the site to and under the canal bridge, with pedestrian lights there and (2) improvements to the existing canal bridge at the extreme east of the site.

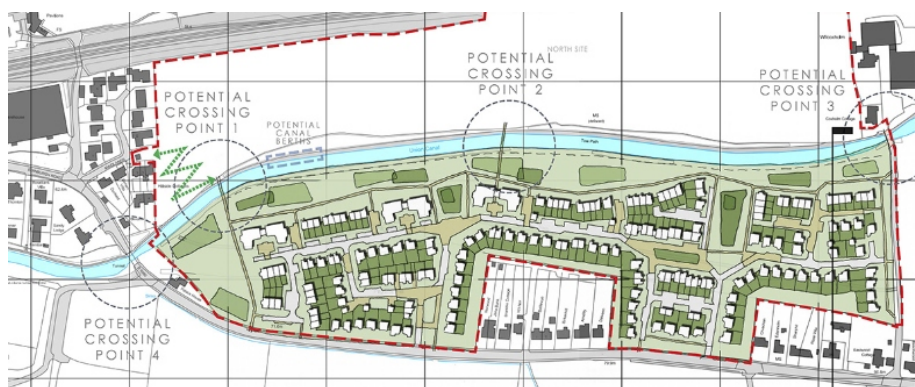
Whilst there is merit in both proposals, they are by themselves wholly inadequate to ensure the type of accessibility that will make active travel to the town centre an obvious and easy choice. They will result in the development being largely car-based, a shocking waste of opportunity.

The two essential requirements to ensure that it is quick, easy and safe to get to the town centre by foot or bike are 3.1 and 3.2 below. These should be delivered before the first house is occupied, to encourage sustainable transport habits from the start.

3.1 Ramped access to the towpath from Maidlands, together with minor improvements at the junction of Maidlands, Boghall Road access and Edinburgh Road. These latter improvements are needed to make the junction safe to turn right when exiting Maidlands by bike or on foot, to enter Boghall Road access, for the Regent Centre, Town Centre, Springfield etc, and in the opposite direction. At present a cyclist turning right here has to enter Edinburgh Road at the blind bend, and immediately leave it again! The pedestrian crossing point from Maidlands to the footway on the west side of Boghall Road access is also poor.

Even without a bridge over the canal at this point this access is vital for all towpath users (including those new residents who live near the bridge at the east end of the site, or are willing to travel to it) giving them safe largely off-road access to the town centre. It would also be of huge benefit to Springfield residents in getting safe access to the towpath. Other existing canal accesses are not suitable alternatives: see 4 below.

This vital link was included at earlier consultation stages (see drawing) **but now, inexplicably, appears to have been deleted from the application.** The link is already well used informally by fit walkers, although users of prams, wheelchairs and bikes can not. The Council must make this link a condition of planning permission.



Earlier version of consultation materials, showing link from Maidlands to towpath

3.2 A bridge over the canal at the west end of the site. Although this is ruled out in the application, we urge the Council to insist on it. Together with 3.1, this would provide the new residents with a safe, convenient and direct active travel connection to the Regent Centre, town centre and Springfield.

The alternative proposed, widening Edinburgh Road footway, with an all-red phase under the canal bridge, whilst it has some utility, is far inferior for encouraging active travel. **On foot**, it would be less pleasant than being away from main road traffic, whilst parents would be less happy sending their children on a road route than an almost traffic-free alternative. We cannot find on the plans how the site paths will connect to the B9080 footway, but given the level differences will the access be ok for wheelchairs and pushchairs? **For cyclists** this is a very poor option, and certainly young cyclists would not be allowed by parents to use this route. Cyclists would have to join the traffic coming down the hill. If they went through the tunnel during the red phase they would then be followed by the stream of waiting traffic. If heading for the Regent Centre, they would have to turn right off Edinburgh Road into Boghall Road access at the blind corner, with traffic behind; or, if staying on Edinburgh Road, risk being overtaken on the blind left hand bend. This could only be (partially) resolved by widening the footway to a 3m walk/cycle shared use path between the development exit and Maidlands junction, for which the necessary carriageway width seems unlikely.

The existing bridge at the extreme east end of the site is of course an alternative for residents at that end of the development, but is too far away for many others, particularly those on foot or wheeling.

The visual aspects of a bridge are of course in the eye of the beholder, and, for those who find it visually inappropriate, have to be weighed against the active travel implications, which could have a major impact on whether the development becomes just another out-of-town car-dependent suburb, or plays its part in climate resilience and in protecting the town centre from yet more car congestion.

Finally, however, if this bridge is nonetheless deemed unacceptable, then a bridge nearer the site centre would retain most of the benefits and would be an acceptable alternative, but to rely solely on the bridge at the far east end would likely deter many potential active travel journeys.

4. Towpath accessibility

It is truly shocking that Linlithgow is still in the position where there is no wheelchair/pushchair accessible connection to the towpath anywhere east of Manse Road and the canal basin, as far as the Park Bistro.

Only three connections of any kind exist, described in 4.1-4.3 below. Ramp 3.1 above would solve this accessibility problem, and bridge 3.2 would additionally open the towpath to the new residents without having to detour to the bridge at the extreme east of the site.

4.1 Existing formal access 1 The ramp at the west of St Magdalenes looks fine from the top, but as you descend it becomes steeper and steeper, this only being visible as one turns a blind corner, ending with a gradient of possibly 1 in 4 or worse. It is completely unsuitable for wheeling, and dangerous for cycling unless one knows of the steepness and dismounts before the corner. Unfortunately the Council did not insist on an acceptable gradient when planning permission was granted for St Magdalenes.

4.2 Existing formal access 2 The other entry, at the top of an unsurfaced road immediately west of the Edinburgh Road blind corner, consists of steep, uneven and narrow steps, suitable only for able-bodied walkers. Furthermore, anyone using this access has to cross from the footway on the north side of Edinburgh Road at the blind corner, on this 30mph road, a significantly dangerous manoeuvre. Able-bodied residents of the new development wanting to access the towpath on foot, in the absence of bridge 3.2, would be likely to use this dangerous approach, whilst wheelers and cyclists would have no access at all to the towpath without going all the way to the east of the site, then doubling back along the towpath.

4.3 Existing informal access The existing informal unmade access at Maidlands is currently only suitable for able-bodied walkers, and not wheeling or cycling. It is essential that this is formalised and made fully accessible, as part of the development, as in 3.1 above.

5. Accessibility to/from the Regent Centre, town centre and Springfield

There are 3 possible links from the site to various destinations in the town. The application and its Transport Assessment suggest that 5.1 and 5.2 below are adequate options. In reality, option 5.3 is the only opportunity for safe, convenient and largely traffic free travel to the bulk of the town centre facilities (as well as to/from the huge Springfield estate) and will allow the development to fulfil the potential which it has due to its geographical proximity to the town centre.

5.1 Towpath access to the town centre

Section 4 above describes the very poor accesses to the towpath. Once one has managed to reach the towpath, it does provide excellent access to the Canal Basin, the Academy and the Leisure Centre. However it is not suitable as a main access to the town centre or the Regent Centre due to the very steep, bendy and trafficked connections from the canal basin area down to the High Street.

5.2 Edinburgh Road B9080 access to the town centre

The Transport Assessment notes that Edinburgh Road is 20mph for the (very short) sections at Maidlands and at the High Port railway underbridge. It fails to mention that it is 30mph for the entire distance in between! and continuing east to the canal bridge, after which it is even higher at 40mph. The Transport Assessment, astonishingly, also fails to discuss the dangers and difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists of the blind corner which incorporates junctions with Maidlands, with the Boghall Road access (5.3 below) and (nearby) with the canal access 4.2 above.

For pedestrians the Edinburgh Road north-side footway is relatively safe, but is fairly narrow in sections and has a poor crossing point to Maidlands, across Boghall Road access. With frequent traffic, legally travelling at up to 30mph, it is also far less pleasant than the greener and minimal-traffic option 5.3 below. Nor does it link as conveniently to the Regent Centre.

For cyclists Edinburgh Road is only suitable for confident cyclists happy to coexist with traffic. No way is it suitable for the less confident or family cycling, and nor will most parents allow their youngsters to use it unaccompanied. Apart from the speed of traffic, there are kerbside car parking spaces for much of the road. The resulting road width is such that 2 cars travelling in opposite directions do not leave safe space to overtake a cyclist with the clearance required by the Highway Code. Nonetheless, some drivers do this, scaring the cyclist and forcing them into the kerb or the doorzone of parked cars.

In reality, Edinburgh Road could only be made really safe for local cycling access by a segregated route on the north side, between Tesco Provost Road rail underpass and Maidlands, with kerbside parking relocated to the south side; though westbound longer-distance road cyclists would probably not use this (leading to motorist complaints) as it would entail crossing to the north side of the road, then back again.

5.3 Boghall Road access to the town centre

This is by far the safest, most direct and most pleasant link between the development and the Regent Centre, to Low Port school and the town centre, and of course the huge Springfield estate. It has minimal traffic, comprising 2 cul-de-sacs with a connecting 3m path designed and designated for shared pedestrian/cycle use. Capstan Walk, the western cul-de-sac is tree-lined and runs next to Bells Burn, whilst other parts of the route pass the tennis courts, the cricket ground and, opposite the long-stay car park, the woodland edge managed by (we think) the Civic Trust.

All that is required to make this the active travel route of choice to and from the development and the towpath is the ramp and junction improvements in 3.1 above together, if at all possible, with the bridge 3.2.

6. Minor road past Park Bistro and Kingsfield, A803 to B8090

This is a minor road of fairly low traffic volumes, and is useful for cyclist connections. We fear it may become more heavily trafficked if the new development is allowed to generate a lot of car traffic travelling to/from the motorway. Steps to maintain this road as low traffic, and to physically restrict speeds, should be adopted by the Council, with support from the developer.

7. Innovative scheme to maximise use of cycling and walking

Given the proximity of the development to public transport and all facilities needed for local living, it is very disappointing that the proposal does not make a major effort to encourage active travel to and from the site. Indeed, despite the *Transport Assessment* document's subheading, "*Cycle Infrastructure, Proposed*" (4.22-4.27) the proposal is - **nothing**! There is an implicit assumption that nearness as the crow flies, and a towpath (on the opposite side from the development!) are all that is required. There is zero discussion of the difficulties and potential solutions outlined in this submission, despite all these points having been made to the developers in written submissions. Indeed, this section of the Transport Assessment looks purely like a quick paper exercise with no real understanding of the site's connections – we hope that is not representative of the Transport Assessment as a whole!

In contrast, the [Linlithgow Local Place Plan 2024-2034](#) (proposal T15), referencing Scottish Government Planning Advice Note PAN75, suggests that *this site* is ripe for...

"an experiment to attempt to maximise use of walking and cycling by innovative measures in addition to the provision of high quality walking and cycling routes"

Noting that PAN75 suggests "*the appointment of a Travel Co-ordinator*" the Plan points out that "*Sustrans has set up experimental government-funded 'active travel' schemes to encourage sustainable transport (walking, cycling, bus, rail) at household level*" and suggests that such ideas could be tested out "*from the planning stages onwards in a new area-wide development.*"

We urge the developer and Council to follow this up with Sustrans (recently renamed [Walk Wheel Cycle Trust](#)) and with [Regional Transport Authority SEStran](#) (who may have now taken over this responsibility?) with the intention of instituting such an experiment. We envisage that the experiment would include fine tuning of infrastructure, but would be primarily about engagement with new residents as they arrive, through information packs, led local rides, bike maintenance training opportunities, advice on public and active travel options for commutes and other regular household journeys, provision of maps etc (the [Spokes West Lothian cycle map](#), also useful for walkers, includes a detailed town map as well as showing how the town fits into the county-wide cycleroute network).

8. Town Centre congestion

Town centre congestion is a major issue for Linlithgow (as is car parking) given the absence of an alternative through route, and the use of the High Street by through traffic of all types, with frequent congestion and unpleasant pedestrian and cycling conditions, including difficulty crossing this shopping street at busy times.

Commenting on these issues, the application claims (PAC report 1, para 4.50) "*that most trips into the town centre will be undertaken by means of active travel and public transport.*" As we have demonstrated in this submission, that is wholly incorrect with the application in its current form. Our proposals in 3 and 7 in particular would help resolve this matter and limit the increased pressure on the High Street.

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