

Implementation Date: 01 September 2023

Template for Requesting Speaking Rights at the Planning Committee

The Protocol for the Operation of the Planning Committee provides for interested person(s) to register to speak on a planning application that is scheduled to be determined at the next meeting of the Planning Committee. This request must be received by the Planning Department no later than 10am on the Monday before the Planning Committee meeting via email account planning@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk.

Planning Reference LA01/2	LA01/2022/1587/F.
Name NOALA LOUGHRAN.	
Contact Details	Tel: Email:
Support or Objection – please tick relevant box	Support Objection ✓

Written representation summarising key points to be addressed and supplementary information in support of your case (minimum font size 10 and maximum length two sides of A4 page).

PLEASE ~~SEE~~ SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENTS.

Members of the Planning Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I come before you not merely as a concerned member of the community, but as a representative voice for the residents of this area who are deeply troubled by the proposed construction of two two-storey semi-detached dwellings at 12 Sunset Ridge, Portstewart. We understand that development is necessary for progress; however, it is imperative that such progress does not come at the expense of our environment, our safety, and our community's well-being.

Firstly, let us consider the legal framework that guides our planning decisions. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 mandates that any development **should not adversely affect the amenity of the area** and to promote sustainable development in **the long-term public interest**. Similarly, the Northern Area Plan 2016 and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland emphasises the need to protect the character, integrity and quality of existing residential areas. The proposed development raises significant concerns that contravene these guiding principles. It is the position of the Residents of this community that this proposal raises significant legal, environmental, and social issues that cannot be overlooked - as they have been thus far.

The extent of discontent around this proposal can be demonstrated by in excess of 30 objections from the local residents who are the most familiar with this area.

The issue of privacy is paramount. The introduction of these new dwellings will result in a severe loss of privacy for residents, particularly for those at No. 13 Millford Avenue and Nos. 82 & 84 Lever Park, which is situated approximately 1-2 meters lower. The elevated positioning of the new dwellings will result in direct overlooking, thus infringing on the privacy of neighbouring homes, a clear contravention of PPS7 on quality residential environments. This overlooking from the upper floors of the proposed dwellings will intrude on the sanctity of private gardens and back bedrooms of various homes, violating the principles outlined in PPS7, which advocates for quality residential environments. The resultant loss of light, increased noise levels, and potential devaluation of property, which the Planning Department note but we believe have failed to give full and proper consideration to, directly oppose the addendum to PPS7, which seeks to safeguard the character of established residential areas.

The proposed development also poses a substantial risk in terms of traffic congestion and safety. The increase in vehicular movement, coupled with inadequate parking arrangements, could lead to blocked access points, increased accidents, and a heightened risk for children in the area. The lack of adequate visitor parking may lead to road blockages, exacerbating these access issues. The road is currently struggling to manage the congestion already with No. 10 being a student rental in the term time and Air B'N'B out of term time. The area was not built in order to withstand the demands that are currently being placed upon it. (Please see attached photo). This is just one example of how the real lived experience of residents isn't being reflected in the reports which are being used to endorse planning recommendations. In light of PPS3, which focuses on access, movement, and parking, it is clear that the current proposal fails to address these critical concerns adequately. Furthermore, the restriction of access for emergency vehicles is a grave concern that cannot be overlooked. Prior to making any decision on this proposal we would welcome you to visit the area and see the lack of space being described - only then will you get a true sense of what we are referring to.

Moreover, the Northern Area Plan 2016 and the Regional Development Strategy emphasise the importance of safeguarding existing communities' character and quality of life. The proposed development poses a real threat to the quality of life for residents, particularly the elderly and vulnerable, who will bear the brunt of increased noise, traffic, and privacy invasion. In fact this entire process has failed to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable residents in the local area who are indeed some of the most impacted by the proposed development. Lack of internet access has meant that a number of local residents have been excluded from the process after submitting initial responses. PPS7 and its addendum specifically highlight the need to maintain the character of established residential areas, and this proposal, with its potential to disrupt the peace and privacy of the neighbourhood, falls short of these requirements.

Beyond the immediate human impacts, we must also consider the ecological implications. The site in question is a vibrant ecosystem, serving as a habitat for bats, hedgehogs, kestrels, and other wildlife. The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 provides statutory protection for these species and their habitats. Any development, disturbance or destruction of these habitats would not only contravene legal protections but would also result in a significant loss of biodiversity, an outcome that is inconsistent with PPS2 on Natural Heritage and the broader goals of sustainable development as outlined in the Regional Development

Strategy. The Strategic Policy Statement of Northern Ireland emphasises the need to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability, a balance that this proposal fails to achieve. Whilst we accept there are a number of documents indicating the proposed development would have no impact on the biodiversity of the area, we would like the committee to be aware these were prepared in July 2023 some 6 months after the site was cleared. The site is now beginning to recover and we believe a further study at a future time would produce a very different recommendation.

Moreover, the environmental concerns extend to sewage and water management. The current infrastructure may not support additional demand, risking environmental pollution and potential harm to the local ecosystem. The addendum to PPS7 emphasises safeguarding the character of established residential areas, and this includes maintaining the environmental integrity of the area.

From a social perspective, these proposed dwellings are likely to be beyond the reach of first time buyers, thus contributing to the trend of properties being converted into second homes or short term rentals. If this proposal is endorsed it simply contributes to the concern of the displacement of local residents, placing economic interests over that of the needs and interests of the local community and an increased carbon footprint - none of which aligns with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement's emphasis on creating sustainable and inclusive communities.

Furthermore, the planning department's recommendation to endorse this proposal, despite numerous conditions being attached to the proposal, fails to adequately address the holistic impact on the community, the environment and the safety and character of the area. On a number of occasions throughout the report there are references made to potential issues with the proposed development but it is noted that this in itself wouldn't be enough to prevent approval. We believe that a global approach needs to be adopted and the issues can't simply be treated in isolation. The number and extent of the issues raised in the planning recommendation when accumulated become materially relevant to the case.

We also note that various agencies have given their support based on the fulfilment of certain conditions. However we point out that a number of these are based on 'desktop assessment'. Which in this particular case is wholly inadequate based on the complexity of the site and issues raised.

There is a collective belief and genuine concern by residents that the proposed conditions will not be adhered to. It is essential that we adopt a balanced approach, weighing biodiversity and community welfare against mere profit. The voices of the people, particularly those most affected, must be heard and considered. This proposal should not become another instance where economic interests overshadow the needs and rights of the local community. It is the people of Portstewart who have to live with these decisions and they feel that their voices have been neglected in respect of the issue of the development of secondary homes for years. We are asking the Committee to reject the proposal to ensure that this is not yet another example of that.

