



The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

31a Church Street
Welwyn
HERTS AL6 9LW
www.cpreherts.org.uk
office@cpreherts.org.uk
01438 717587

Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Robert Freeman
Planning and Development
Dacorum Borough Council
Civic Centre
Marlowe
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire HP1 1HH

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

12th August 2020 (2nd email with correction)

Dear Mr. Freeman,

Application No. 20/01579/FUL
Demolition of buildings and construction of 9 no. dwellings.
Hamberlins Farm, Hamberlins Lane, Northchurch,
Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3TD

CPRE Hertfordshire object to this proposal for development in the Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

We apologise for the late submission of this objection, the application only having been brought to our attention recently.

In September 2019 the Council granted permission for 5 dwellings on this site comprising the conversion of three of the barns on the site to residential and the demolition of the remaining structures and erection of two new dwellings. The current proposal is for the demolition of all the buildings on the site and the construction of nine dwellings. We note that in the interim the applicant has changed from a private individual to a development company, consequently we surmise that the intent is now to maximise the development potential of the site.

We did not object to the previous application (4/02922/18/FUL) as the proposal conformed to the Chilterns AONB Design Guide and resulted in a 43% increase in the openness of the Green Belt. It retained elements which would continue to evidence the historical agricultural use of the site and the proposed new units were sensitively designed to retain the rural character of its setting,

In the Letter accompanying the application, which we assume is intended to be the Planning Statement, the applicant says that the proposal *"builds off the existing permission for part- demolition and part-conversion."* They then go on to argue that as the Case Officer in assessing the previous application considered that that the benefits 'clearly outweighed' the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, then *"some reduction to the aforementioned benefits can be allowed for while still outweighing the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness."*

CPRE is working nationally and locally for a beautiful and living countryside

CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

President: Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, KCVO
Chairman: Richard Bullen

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While the current proposal is also smaller in footprint than the existing buildings on the site, it appears as residential overdevelopment of a rural site, essentially creating a suburban enclave in the countryside. According to the applicant the intention is to recreate a farmyard appearance of new build dwellings “ *where Plot 4 is designed as the larger Farmhouse and the other Plots are designed to look like converted farm buildings located around the main Farmhouse.*” We fail to see how an ersatz farm will be inherently better than the conversion of the existing farm buildings. Conversion is both more sustainable and, by working with heritage, far more likely to achieve character and distinctiveness.

The applicant also considers that compared to the earlier proposal “ *the proposed replacement dwellings will together create a more coherent and visually attractive design ethos across the site.*” The proposed houses are essentially standard urban units clad in black weatherboarding in an attempt to make them appear as ‘barns’. Their design uniformity, detailing (e.g. UPVC windows etc.) and massing are not conducive to a rural setting. The recent Supreme Court judgement in Samuel Smith Old Brewery (Tadcaster) and others v North Yorkshire County Council held that “*in the individual circumstances of a particular case, there are likely to be visual as well as spatial effects of the openness of the Green Belt, and, if so, whether those effects are likely to be harmful or benign, will be for the decision-maker to judge. But the need for those judgments to be exercised is inherent in the policy.*”

Unlike the previous application, in terms of the estate layout it is difficult to see from the indicative plans how a fire tender or refuse freighter could access the properties easily. We note that this point has been adversely commented on by HCC Highways.

Dacorum Core Strategy Policy CS19 requires that 35% Affordable homes will be provided on developments of 5 dwellings and larger. There is no indication of any of these properties being affordable.

As the Officer’s Report on the previous application points out, a significant portion of the site does not benefit from the previously developed land exception within Green Belt policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. As such, the applicant is required to demonstrate very special circumstances which weigh in favour of the development. Apart from the comment that some reductions to the points raised by the previous applicant “*can be allowed for while still outweighing the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness.*”, the current application does not put forward specific circumstances.

We urge the Council to reject this application.

Yours sincerely,

David Irving