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Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

James Langsmead
Development Control
East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

23rd September 2020 (by email)

Dear Mr. Langsmead,

Application No. 3/20/1557/OUT
Proposed outdoor meditation and yoga retreat with all matters reserved
on land To South Of Kettle Green Lane, Much Hadham,
Hertfordshire SG10 6AN

CPRE Hertfordshire object to this proposal as inappropriate development in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt.

This application is for development of what appears to be a plot-land site on agricultural land outside of the settlement boundary of Much Hadham.

The applicant believes that as this proposal is for 'outdoor recreation' it is compatible with East Herts District Plan Policy GBR2, which allows such uses in the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt, "*provided that they are compatible with the character and appearance of the rural area.*" The purpose of Policy GBR2 is to maintain the openness and character of the countryside beyond the Green Belt. That countryside is recognised in the Local Plan as being "*a considerable and significant countryside resource, which Policy GBR2 seeks to maintain by concentrating development within existing settlements.*"

That purpose complies with paragraph 83(c) of the National Planning Policy Framework which says that Local Plans should support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments *which respect the character of the countryside.*

The application as submitted raises a number of issues:

The bulk of the proposed development consists of substantial enclosed structures consisting of Reception, Workshop and Accommodation buildings. It is not made clear in the documentation what their intended uses are. The Supporting Statement refers to an enclosed Business Plan but none is posted on the Council's website. As the facility is described as a

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CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

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

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retreat, it may be that the accommodation use is residential. The applicant's website says that "Practicing yoga in a heated room increases your pulse rate and metabolism." The technique appears to require a room, heated to 25 degrees celsius, which is filled with Himalayan salt crystals. If we assume that the buildings are for the teaching and practice of this type of yoga, that does not appear to be 'outdoor recreation'.

As we mentioned above, the site is one of several plots into which this field has been subdivided. This plot is described in the application form as Plot 8 and sits in the centre of the field. There is no guarantee that any of the other seven plots will ever be developed. This proposal, if allowed, could result in two large structures standing isolated in the middle of a field.

Access must necessarily come off Kettle Green Road which is a single track lane. The Supporting Statement makes no reference to the access arrangements on to the lane, vision splays etc. Nor is there any discussion regarding the proposed road network within the site which will give access to the properties on this plot. Given that this plot is in the centre of the site, the road to it will have to cross other plots, which will be in other ownerships and way-leaves will have to be in place to facilitate it. That then raises questions as to who will provide and maintain the necessary road infrastructure.

Similarly there is no mention of the provision of utilities such as gas and electricity, or mains water, surface water drainage or sewerage. All of these are essential for the development of this plot to proceed but there is no indication of who will pay for, provide and maintain them. Again, given the location of the plot, these services will have to cross land in other ownerships.

There is no mention of how refuse freighters or emergency vehicles will access the site, or provision made in the plan for suitable turning circles.

The field is currently still being farmed. Development of this plot, together with the infrastructure required to support it, will inevitably disrupt that usage, effectively sterilising the agricultural capacity of the site. There is no agricultural land quality assessment accompanying the application, but Agricultural Land Classification map Eastern Region (ALCO08) indicates that it is Grade 2. The NPPF says that development on best and most versatile land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) should be constrained. As there is no statement provided on the agricultural land status in the submitted documentation, the Council should require the applicant to demonstrate that the land is not in a best and most versatile agricultural classification before determining the application.

Public views of the site will mainly be from Public Right of Way 011, which runs up the eastern edge of the field as well as some long views in from Kettle Green Road. The emerging Much

Hadham Neighbourhood Plan lists some of these views as 'priority'. This development would be visually intrusive and would alter the character of the landscape.

In the absence of the Business Plan, we are unable to determine the proposed catchment of the clientele who would use such a facility. The nearest significant settlement (and railway station, if clients are coming from outside the immediate area) is Bishops Stortford, some 6.8 kilometres distant. The nearest bus-stops in Widford Road are 600m away. From the settlement boundary Kettle Green Road is a single track road, with no footways or street lighting. It is not conducive to pedestrian use. Consequently this proposal will be car dependent, which runs counter to the sustainability principles in the District Plan and the NPPF.

As we have mentioned above, this appears to be part of a plot-lands scheme, where land is subdivided into small plots. This particular plot was auctioned on 24 June 2020, being sold "on an unconditional basis without the benefit of planning permission but may have future potential for development." The Applicant was advised to make their own enquiries with regard to development potential and planning consents, but we note from the application form that no pre-application advice was sought.

From past experience, we know that the first step in development of plot-land sites is the erection of fences to demarcate the individual plots. These fences inevitably impact on the landscape character of the area. Consequently we ask you to undertake all steps necessary to ensure that such fences are not erected and that any future proposed development does not take place. This can be done by means of a direction under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, prohibiting any construction under permitted development rights which will cause harm to the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt.

We urge the Council to reject this application and to place an Article 4 Direction on the land which has been subdivided into plots.

Yours sincerely,

David Irving