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Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

James Chettleburgh
Development Management
Stevenage Borough Council
Daneshill House
Danestrete
Stevenage
SG1 1HN

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

17th May 2021 (by email)

Dear Mr Chettleburgh,

Application No. 21/00356/FPM

Land to the West of Stevenage, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 2TS

Full planning permission for erection of 390 dwellings (incl 117 affordable dwellings and 4 self-build plots)...[and associated provision]. Outline planning permission for up to 1110 dwelling units (incl 30% affordable housing and self-build plots)...[and associated provision].

I write with reference to the above application for proposed development which extends the built-up area of Stevenage west of the A1(M) into open countryside towards the hamlet of Langley. CPRE Hertfordshire has been in the forefront of objecting to development in the London Metropolitan Green Belt and opposed the release of the land affected by this application at the Examination in Public of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2019.

We accept that the adopted Local Plan now includes policy permitting the release of Green Belt in this location and that the principle of the use of this land for residential development is thereby established. Attention must therefore be directed to the detail of the application submitted, particularly for the first phase of the proposed development, comprising 390 houses and associated provision.

CPRE Hertfordshire urges the Council to take the opportunity of this application to establish a benchmark for high quality development in a highly sensitive area with a significant impact on the surrounding countryside and villages. We understand that a further Design Review Panel has been convened by the Council to consider this application, in line with Government guidance.

We welcome the establishment of the Design Review Panel and would urge the Council to delay consideration of this application until the panel has assessed these proposals in detail. It would be unreasonably premature to determine the proposal in advance of receiving expert advice on an application which will have significant impacts on the countryside and the surrounding villages.

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CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

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

Registered Charity 1162419



CPRE Hertfordshire wishes to raise the following significant concerns and urges the Council to seek considerable improvements to the present detailed application for the first phase of development.

1. The primary concern is of a major opportunity lost with regard to the establishment of high quality and appropriate development with wide-ranging impacts on open countryside and the surrounding rural villages. The applicant's Supporting Planning Statement opens with the "Vision" which states that "West Stevenage will be a new neighbourhood with a great sense of place and its own distinct identity. It will be a development that embraces, the principles of healthy living, sustainability and water sensitive design with high quality building and well-designed buildings and public realm".
2. The remainder of the Planning Statement and Design and Access Statement describe a wide range of aspirations relating to the achievement of planning goals and objectives which are expressed in general and unspecific terms and are therefore unexceptional. Further investigation of the specific information provided in the application does not support the achievement of the initial expectation of the "Vision" in several significant areas.
3. The over-whelming impression of the plans submitted, both in terms of street layout and housing types, is of a standard housing estate with scant attention paid to principles of good urban design, sustainable transport, or the development of a coherent neighbourhood and sense of place. The recently published A Housing Audit for England (2020) undertaken by the Place Alliance and supported by CPRE, identified the lack of design quality in developments on 142 greenfield sites throughout the country, and the criteria utilised in that study would be likely to provide a similar assessment when applied to this application.
4. The lack of ambition with regard to the standard house types proposed together with inadequate landscaping and drainage treatments is most disappointing, when there is the opportunity to provide an exemplar development as part of an extension to the original Stevenage New Town, demonstrating innovative design and provision which addresses the challenges of climate change in a sensitive and valued location.
5. It is most unlikely that the density of housing proposed will provide the level of population needed to support a viable local centre and the visual representations of shopping and other services and facilities suggest bland and banal buildings with uninteresting public spaces. Also particularly inadequate is the treatment of landscape and open space which arises from the lack of detailed consideration of landscape



treatment throughout the proposed development together with the uniformity of housing density, despite the assertions of the applicant's statements.

6. Landscape elements appear to have been added as after-thoughts and lack sensitivity and quality. A detailed landscape strategy is required which addresses and enhances the setting of the proposed development as well as promoting biodiversity and sustainable drainage effectively.
7. Much play is made of the proposed development being an extension of Stevenage in terms of access to services and facilities and the contribution that the proposed development will make to the existing town centre. The inadequacy of the two road links to the east, under the motorway, is immediately apparent, as is the unattractive nature of the tunnels, and significant additional proposals are needed for sustainable transport links to reduce car dependency and improve accessibility.
8. The implications of the inadequate transport and access links to the east to facilitate usage of Stevenage services and facilities, and the lack of meaningful sustainable transport provision, means that the proposed development will inevitably be car dominated. This will have major and detrimental impacts on the surrounding villages and lanes where congestion and danger for local residents will increase.
9. The proposed development fails in many respects to take account of climate change and carbon reduction requirements in terms of building design and resource use. Enforcement of the legislative requirements of the Road Traffic Reduction and Climate Change Acts, for example, is not generally presently undertaken and this is regrettable.
10. In declaring a Climate Emergency, Stevenage Borough Council has taken an important step in accepting the responsibility for tackling these issues but the aspirations of the Vision in these respects, as in the topics noted above, are not translated in the development proposed, with its use of standardised housing units and car dominated layouts. Further proposals are needed to demonstrate how the legal objective of net zero carbon for development by 2050 will be achieved.

In summary, CPRE Hertfordshire considers that the proposed low density overall as demonstrated in the detailed application is a wasteful use of former Green Belt land and countryside. The National Planning Policy Framework requires the efficient use of land when there is a shortage, such as when Green Belt is released. The Housing Audit referred to in 3. above shows that low density frustrates good place-making and high quality design.



In our view, the housing densities and layouts proposed will lead to urban sprawl which is particularly inappropriate in this sensitive location, and the inevitably car dominated development as proposed will have damaging impacts on the surrounding highly valued open countryside and villages. The setting of the proposed development places a major responsibility on both the developers and the Council to seek the best possible quality of development.

CPRE Hertfordshire is committed to campaigning for truly sustainable development in those areas where development is permitted. We hope that the deliberations of the Design Review Panel will be made public and that the Council will seek significant improvements to the proposed development in the areas identified.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Berry
Planning Manager