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Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Martin Stickley
Planning & Development
Dacorum Borough Council
The Forum, Marlowes
Hemel Hempstead
Herts. HP1 1DN

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

20th May 2022 (by email)

Dear Mr Stickley,

Application no. 22/01187/MOA - Land East of Tring

Hybrid application (with access details of two main access points from Bulbourne Road and Station Road in Full and the main development on the rest of the site in Outline with all matters reserved) for the demolition of all existing buildings on the site and the development of up to 1,400 dwellings (including up to 140 Use Class C2 dwellings); a new local centre and sports/community hub; primary school; secondary school; and public open spaces including creation of a suitable alternative natural green space.

I write with reference to the above planning application and await your response to the query raised in my letter of 27th April 2022 regarding the operation of the moratorium on the issuing of planning decisions related to the impact on the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Notwithstanding the status of the potential moratorium, CPRE Hertfordshire objects strongly to this speculative residential development covering over 120 hectares for the following reasons.

1. The proposed development is located in the London Metropolitan Green Belt as defined in the adopted Dacorum Borough Core Strategy, according to criteria in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless very special circumstances apply and it is entirely inappropriate to suggest that an allocation in an emerging Local Plan is justification for the proposal in the present circumstances.
2. It is noted that Dacorum Borough Council has decided to defer further progress on its emerging Local Plan pending further information and evidence. This is due in large part to the huge public opposition to the Regulation 18 consultation to the many proposals being made on designated protected land in the Borough.
3. It is perverse of the Applicant to suggest that this application should now be determined when the reasons for the deferral of the Local Plan are directly relevant to the consideration of this proposal. As a responsible local planning authority, Dacorum

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CPRE Hertfordshire is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation

President: Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, KCVO

Chairman: Allan McNab

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Borough Council rightly wishes its Local Plan to reflect local community concerns and aspirations, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

4. Responses to the Regulation 18 consultation overwhelmingly rejected proposals for development on the Green Belt throughout the Borough and local community concerns have been reflected in recent Ministerial statements re-emphasising the significance of designated protected land. This is particularly the case for the east of Tring growth area where this proposal would constitute a major encroachment on the Green Belt with significant impact on the openness of the countryside, and considerable expansion into land which provides important spaces between existing settlements, in direct contravention of the key reasons for Green Belt designation.
5. A key element in the consideration of this proposal should be the gradual accretion of residential developments in the Tring area. Reference may be made to the recently developed “Roman Park” and market housing developments between Aylesbury and Tring and the cumulative impact such developments have on the existing settlements and the open countryside in between. The character of Tring as a historic small market town will be jeopardised by this huge proposal with attendant problems of air quality, traffic generation and impact on social and community services.
6. The site borders the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the north, south and east. Inappropriate development of the magnitude proposed would seriously and detrimentally affect the setting of the AONB. Of particular concern is the potential damaging impact of the additional 1400 households on the highly valued Chilterns Beechwoods SAC, as has been recognised by the recent Natural England instruction to impose a moratorium on planning decisions in this area.
7. The promotion of “Marshcroft” as a “garden suburb” is both misleading and inappropriate. In the Planning Statement, the Applicant notes that an “illustrative masterplan ...demonstrates one way in which the Marshcroft garden suburb could be developed to provide a sustainable settlement in accordance with garden communities principles.”
8. There is extensive treatment of design issues as aspiration with no detailed elaboration of what the place may look like in reality, even as examples. Design coding is promoted, as are issues relating to biodiversity, landscaping, and open space, without any specific indications of specific outcomes to illustrate how such elevated objectives may be achieved. Such an illustrative approach is entirely inadequate for a proposal of this magnitude.

9. The Applicant identifies the “failure of the local plan and plan-led system” as justification for the proposal on several occasions in the Planning Statement, and the need to provide further housing as the very special circumstances required for progressing with this application. This is to misrepresent fundamentally key elements of the local planning system which are to articulate local community concerns as much as to promote development which is inappropriate in this location by virtue of its planning status.
10. There continues to be significant debate about the objectives of the planning process and recent statements by former and present Ministers of Housing in response to queries by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Daisy Cooper MP (from Minister of Housing Chris Pincher) and Jane Marson MP and Sir Oliver Heald MP (from Minister Stuart Andrew) and others including CPRE Hertfordshire, have reiterated the government’s intention to resist development on Green Belt. These statements have policy weight and highlight the inconsistencies which have arisen recently in council and planning inspectors’ decisions on applications and appeals on designated protected land throughout the County and further field.
11. To conflate issues relating to genuine local concerns for maintaining open countryside, and the inconsistencies in Government guidance with regard to the calculation of housing need leading to inflated housing targets and support for developers providing speculative market housing, is inappropriate. Very special circumstances need to relate to local conditions and be determined on the merits of each case rather than general matters which relate to the local planning system as a whole, as is asserted in the Planning Statement.
12. A similar argument relates to the provision of affordable housing. Recent research by CPRE Hertfordshire indicates the almost complete inability of speculative market housing to address in any meaningful way the demand for housing by average or below average income households in both Dacorum and Hertfordshire as a whole. The high proportion of “affordable housing” proposed is regarded by the Applicants as supporting the case for very special circumstances and again this is misleading.
13. Without a binding legal agreement to provide truly affordable housing for average earning households, with an appropriate provider, assertions by a developer in support of a planning application are meaningless. Too often, affordable housing proportions are reviewed by developers following the granting of planning permission, quoting viability issues, and statements of intent by the Applicant are inadequate to provide the security needed to ensure that appropriate affordable provision will be made.
14. Notwithstanding our objection to the size of this proposal, the level of information provided for this application is inadequate with regard to the increasing requirements of



the Environmental Act 2021 and Climate Change Acts. It is noted that an Environmental Assessment will be required and the scope of this should address the increasing attention to these issues being reflected in the recent Environment and Climate Change Acts.

15. CPRE Hertfordshire continues to challenge the scale of development proposed for the Green Belt, based as it is on out-of-date information relating to future housing need, as we noted in our response to the Regulation 18 consultation. This is in addition to our opposition to the principle of allocating designated protected land for development; which is receiving increased attention and likely to be affected by provisions of the new Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill recently introduced in Parliament.
16. It would be highly inappropriate for the Council to determine this application in advance of this new legislation which is seeking to respond to the justifiable concerns of the Government and local communities. We urge the Council to refuse this application on the basis of it being inappropriate development in the Green Belt and affecting the setting of the AONB.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Berry
Planning Manager