

Application no. 3/24/0966/OUT

Land North of A507, West of A10, Buntingford

Outline planning application for development of up to 600 dwellings (C3), elderly accommodation (C3), Mixed Use Local Centre

I write with regard to the above planning proposal to which I would like to strongly object. I am raising concerns on behalf of the local community in my role as Buntingford Ward District Councillor.

There is very strong local feeling against this proposed development and with good reason. There are already enormous pressures both on local infrastructure; including water supply and treatment (Thames Water has particularly noted "an inability of the existing FOUL WATER network infrastructure to accommodate the needs of this development proposal"), local roads, health care and other services and marked lack of access to green space both within and surrounding the town. This is a result of the large amount of development that has already taken place in Buntingford. The extra burden that this proposed development would put on already overstretched local services would be enormous and have the potential to increase local traffic to even more worrying levels.

This is a speculative proposal and there are currently no strategic sites in Buntingford as part of the East Herts District Plan in recognition of the quantum of development that has already taken place in the area. The site also falls outside the boundary of the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan area. The review of the East Herts District Plan is now underway and a call for sites has been issued. This is the mechanism by which new, planned development should be brought forward as part of the master planning process and not through speculative applications such as this one.

Unsuitable Site

The proposed development is incongruous due to its scale, building density and overbearing nature on the western side of the A10 bypass and on the open plateau outside the Buntingford town settlement boundary. It would be unsustainable in nature with a high reliance on private car journeys to access employment, main food and comparison shopping elsewhere and also to access the centre of Buntingford for local shopping and services. This reliance on private car journeys would also raise particular concerns around the extra burdens imposed on the local road network with increased traffic volumes, particularly at peak times, and road safety issues.

The affect of the high level of large scale development around Buntingford over recent years has been to change the unique character of this historic market town and the surrounding rural area. The Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan particularly mentions the need to: "prevent the merging of towns and village settlements within the BCA". This proposed development would risk this happening and would mean a significant increase in the built up area of the town on the west side of the A10 bypass and significantly encroach on the small village of Throcking and have further impact on existing road safety concerns and traffic levels.

I refer to Policy HD2 of the BCNP which states: "All new housing developments should be sensitive to the landscape and be of a height that does not impact adversely on views from the surrounding countryside. All development proposals should

demonstrate how they conserve, enhance or strengthen the character and distinctive features of the BCA landscape."

With reference to EHDP Supplementary Planning Document: "Great care should be taken in granting further permission for more development in and around the Town if this is to remain the case and if we are to ensure that the highly prized landscape remains the attractive area for all types of walkers and riders that it currently is."

Biodiversity and Sustainability

The *BCNP - Wildlife and biodiversity - Environment and sustainability policy* states:

"The richness of the biodiversity within the BCA is due to the particular landscape assets in this part of East Hertfordshire: its plateaux, woodlands and rivers." This proposed development would put these landscape assets at risk and seriously reduce the amenity of the local countryside for local residents and visitors to the area.

The proposed site is also made up of high grade agricultural land categorised as 'Best and Most Versatile' by DEFRA and should be kept for agriculture use for local food production and to maintain food security. This is an issue which is gaining significance due to global trade uncertainties and climate change. The land is also designated as 'Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt' in Policy GBR2 of the East Herts District Plan which states that:

"Rural Land Beyond the Green Belt is a considerable and significant countryside resource which Policy GBR2 seeks to maintain by concentrating development within existing settlements".

The objectives in both the East Herts District Plan and the Buntingford Community Neighbourhood Plan state that such areas will be protected and Policy ES7 in the Neighbourhood Plan requires development 'to protect and enhance biodiversity in line with the NPPF requirements and must demonstrate a net gain in biodiversity. I do not believe that this proposal will meet those requirements.

The development also comprises of a substantial extension to the built-up area of Buntingford which would extend the settlement for the first time on the western side of the A10 seriously taking the focus away from the High Street and historic town centre and it's position on the ridge to the west of the town would mark an unacceptable intrusion into the "extensive rural hinterland".

I strongly object to this planning application but would suggest the following if S106 contributions were to become available for local projects:

Provision of an additional indoor space/community building or refurbishment of an existing space that would serve as a community hub for a mixture of sporting and social activities.

Further green space provision.

Funding to improve active travel infrastructure: including segregated cycle paths, improved footpaths and lighting and provision of a town-wide 20mph speed limit that

benefits the whole town, preference to the piecemeal and patchy approach that has been implemented to date.

Funding to secure existing premises or the building of a new centre for primary care healthcare provision that is sited centrally in the town and easily accessible to the whole community.

Yours sincerely

Sue Nicholls
District Councillor, Buntingford