

WHBC Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/W/20/3265925
SADC Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/W/20/3265926
LAND OFF BULLENS GREEN LANE, COLNEY HEATH

CLOSING STATEMENT BY 4COLNEYHEATH, RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

In a nutshell – the proposed development site is not in a sustainable location

1. The rural village

Colney Heath is a village, not of the chocolate box variety but it has the traditional basic components – church, pub, village hall etc. It has a strong community evidenced by the many community organizations and clubs for culture and sports.

Colney Heath village is special because

- It is a rural community adjacent to, but distinctly separate from, St Albans City and its suburban fringe separated by a large tract of open land and the A414 (as it is by the A1M from Hatfield).
 - The Common and surrounding agricultural landscape creates a peaceful rural environment.
- Colney Heath is not a St Albans fringe suburb.

2. Real, serious and important concerns

At the beginning of May this year 4ColneyHeath circulated a newsletter to every household in the village. This included an article about proposed developments and an opinion survey. Every response received expressed the concern about appeal site and the proposed 6,000 to 8,000 houses Bowmans Cross Garden Village that would coalesce Colney Heath and London Colney.

The article expressed the opinion that our community would not object to “limited infill” housing in the village, a few houses in some of the gaps, especially if these were genuinely affordable. Not one contrary comment has been received on this opinion. While not technically “limited infill” (as understood by LPAs) the village has absorbed small scale housing developments such as Coopers Gate off Church Lane and The Rickyard off Roestock Lane.

A very large number of objections were made to both Local Planning Authorities on the appellant's Planning Application. While some may be viewed as “NIMBY” or simply “the Green Belt is sacred” there were many real concerns about the overstretched important public facilities for education and medical services, the traffic congestion on the roads, as well as the loss of open space and visual impact on surrounding houses.

And, underlying the objections, is the concern that if this development of Green Belt land is allowed, Roundhouse Farm off Roestock Lane will be next. It appears site investigations may have already been started there. That site is inappropriate for almost all of the same reasons.

3. The compensation goes elsewhere

The appellants proposal provides up to 100 dwellings but is not of sufficient scale to add any other substantial benefits to the village other than maybe some additional patronage to the village shop, pub etc.

56 of the 710 houses in the village are in Welwyn Hatfield Borough, i.e. 8%. However, residents in Bullens Green are part of Colney Heath and have no community connection to Welwyn Hatfield and North Mymms Parish (other than tax).

To the extent that we understand it, the draft section 106 agreement is revealing.

The “compensation” to the village amounts to

- a. £16,000 to two bus stops in Hall Gardens where 2 of the 3 bus services are on one day of the week only, and the other the 305 with a limited service to St Albans and

- b. An undisclosed amount payable to the District Council for use towards improvements to the Roestock Park Scout Hut which, if it is returned to the Scouts by the Colney Heath Parish Council, would be of great benefit but this group is a very small proportion of the community.

The remainder of the “compensation” accrues on the other side of the A1M in locations far away from the development site via routes seen as unsafe for pedestrians or cyclists. There are no bus services to these locations which are realistically only accessible by motor car.

- A contribution towards the costs of refurbishing and reconfiguring the existing Queensway Health Centre in Hatfield
- A contribution towards sports facilities at the University of Hertfordshire and/or Hatfield Swimming Pools
- A contribution of £1,384,290 to a proposed new primary school located to the south of South Way (A1001) and to the east of Hatfield Cemetery Hatfield
- A contribution £1,494,006 to a proposed new secondary school located on the North Western edge of Hatfield (adjacent to Hatfield Garden Village)

A contribution towards improving drainage of grass pitches and/or towards repairs to the bowls ground at the Welham Green Recreation Ground is of no discernible benefit to Colney Heath, nor is a wildflower meadow in Angerland.

4. The proposed site is not sustainable

In the real world of our village, apart from access for local recreation and leisure in the village, private motor cars and taxis are the only realistic and practical means of access (other than our primary school). Beyond the village Coursers Road and Tollgate Road have no footways and are too dangerous for most cyclists. Access to St Albans is an extended cycle route on busy roads or the unlit Alban Way.

There is one daily bus service to St Albans which returns too early for anyone working normal office hours. Bus services have deteriorated over the years and it is not realistic to imagine additional services will be provided for a development of this scale.

Most adults have a motor car which means in our “real world” parked cars in Tollgate Road, Fellowes Lane near Tollgate Road, and Bullens Green Lane up to number 58 are effectively single track roads. Traffic has to wait in turn to pass through resulting in both traffic queues, and cars speeding through when its their turn to pass.

5. Impact on Green Belt openness

We are not convinced by the appellant’s judgement who “feels” that the development would have a low visual impact. While basing this “feeling” on the illustrative layout, with no 3D visualisation of the proposed development, this judgement is not adequately objective. The site is not contained or “wrapped around” and this is clear from key viewpoints on the footpaths.

6. Unsuitable site for development

If Green Belt land must be released to meet the demand for housing, the site proposed by the appellant is unsuitable. It is a tier 6 site in the “settlement hierarchy”, ie the lowest out of 6 categories, a village and would not be selected by either LPA as a suitable when the finalise their Plans. It has limited facilities and does not have sustainable modes of access. The section 106 agreement provides negligible compensation to Colney Heath.

John Clemow
Representative appointed by the Committee of 4ColneyHeath
6 May 2021