

Planning Inspectorate

Thank you for agreeing to allow me to speak this morning and represent once again, the over 6,500 residents of this wonderful area.

I am one of the Ward Councillors for St Stephen - elected last year by the people of Chiswell Green and Bricketwood.

I am also a School Governor at Killigrew School, where I am now Chair of Governors.

I also run my business of cocktail bars from the centre of St Albans

This feels like a game I play with my 8 year old son, Thomas.- Whatever game he wishes to play, we start at best of three until such time as one of us feels like the odds are stacked against us in which case one of us negotiates a new rule of best of five.

So far with these major applications, the Planning Officer has granted one and rejected one.

When I got to speak as a Ward Councillor at the Planning Committees, as well as representatives from the Parish Council, Keep Chiswell Green and the Developers and present all the information methodically, the scores shifted to 2-0 (Two refusals)

This application is made more difficult, by the name Chiswell Green. Without being disingenuous, you could say that the clue is in the name.

If it were Chiswell upon Lyme, or Chiswell le Clay it might not resinate that much.

The residents even have an open space called Greenwood Park, so the Green credentials do not stop here.

St Stephen ward is also comprised of Bricketwood. Again, a beautiful area to the south west of Chiswell Green. 'Bricket' refers to the many ancient water features and 'wood', well there are acres of woodland and trees, ranging from Bricketwood Common, Nottlers Wood and the Munden Estate. Historically, renowned for "nudists and witches" I am pleased to report that elements of these can still be found today. But on a serious note, the residents of Bricketwood will also be impacted by the decision made today. Whether it's the road network connecting the M25 / M1 or the soon to be shared Parish Community centre at Greenwood Park and the static traffic along the Watford Rd.

NPPF puts a plan in place

St Stephen Neighbourhood Plan, ratified in June 2022, reflect the residents aspirations and culture.

Much of St Stephen Parish lies within the Green Belt, and thus it is particularly important, that development is directed to appropriate locations and that sprawl and village-to-village coalescence are avoided.

Both these applications hinge on

- weather to build on GREEN BELT - NPPF Para 147.
- "Special circumstances". - NPPF Para 148.
- Weighting given to certain elements.

My firm belief is that the Harm outweighs the benefit, some of the weightings are misguided and so the Special Circumstances therefore do not exist.

Special Circumstances

- St Albans has 85% of its land classed as Green Belt.
- We do need additional housing. I run a Cocktail bar business and have one of my sites in St Albans. I employ over 30 young people here, who either live with their parents in St Albans, pay a very high rent to live close to the centre of town, or commute in from other areas such as Hatfield. Aspiring to own a flat in St Albans is a distant dream for many of my team.
- I also work with our lead Councillor on Housing and Inclusion, where our City is crying out for social housing for 3 bedroom properties.
- But without sounding like a NIMBY, there are other solutions.
- Hemel Garden City is an example of where housing needs can be met without taking Green Belt space. It has a plan to build over 11,000 new homes in a sustainable way, whilst tackling huge infrastructure projects around transportation and community.
- Housing targets are said to be dated and wrong by the Secretary of State for Housing and Levelling up. Let's not turn Green belt into concrete before these figures are confirmed, bearing in mind the consultation only completed in March.

Cost effective Housing

- Avg Property price St Albans £554k (2018-19)
- Avg Property price Chiswell Green £590k
- Avg Price inc due to Cost of Living £770k
- The cost of living crisis, will have impacted the developers costs and are probably still escalating, since this project was first conceived. Interest rates are now at their highest rate for over a decade and even this appeal will have an inevitable price tag attached to it. These costs will have an impact on all the houses it proposes being built and potentially the proportion associated with social housing. Evidence of this practice can be seen in the Elephant & Castle scheme, where a far lower percentage of social houses were delivered due to rising costs.

Infrastructure

- Highways roads - double roundabout by Three Hammers at 103% capacity at peak times and the housing development South would not have any significant impact.
- Traffic - 721 houses = an extra 1080 cars on the road. (x 1.5 cars per household)
- Vehicular access via Forge End and Chiswell Green Lane will be a severe bottle neck and at peak times, the Watford Road would become log jammed.
- The Highways agency report on Chiswell Green Lane could take one development and not two and yet these applications come to appeal as one.
- I might add at this stage, that the area at the end of Chiswell Green Lane, formally called Butterfly World, has now at last been served 8 eviction notices. This land should never have been built on in such a way and should not set a precedent for these developers to pick up on.
- The outlying villages of St Albans have poor bus routes, but bus vouchers offered as part of the developers plan.

- In a recent HCC audit, it was found that the Highways department was understaffed and poor in service delivery. This has to call into question the accuracy and validation of the recent traffic information that was used to produce the Highways reports that supported just one of these developments. Traffic figures from the Pandemic period, cannot surely influence future infrastructure needs?.....

Education

- On the South development, there is space for a Primary School. In my previous speech, I indicated how detrimental this would be to all local primary schools, as there is spare capacity at each local school. By example, last year , Killigrew received just 34 children in its double form entry Reception classes. This gives the school the burden of underfunding (by 26 Children), for 7 consecutive years. We are not the only primary school in the area that suffers from these boom and bust times. How Wood, Park Street and Prae Wood primary schools also suffer and at a time where funding is beyond tight.
- Killigrew has the space and capacity for “bulge years” should the need arise to increased birth rate. 6 years ago, it was able to accommodate 90 children in its reception year (3FE) and carry this bulge on for 7 years.
- In the Officers report on the Cala Homes development - 8.7.9 - The provision of land for a new 2FE primary school is therefore afforded substantial positive weight. - I strongly disagree with this.
- I believe that these compelling and practical points caused the word “Primary” to be removed from this resubmitted application. The square footage of the site, does not lend itself to a secondary school. So what is the plan for this incentivised space....

My job as a Ward Councillor of St Stephen, is to listen to residents and represent them appropriately. Two ears ; one mouth, that’s what my parents taught me. The residents all understand that there is a need for additional houses in St Albans, but they are also incredibly protective of their Green Belt space - no concrete can be laid until matters are 100% resolved ; This decision cannot be reversed. With the Climate Emergency being the number one consideration of this Council, the decision here should be to NOT build on the Green Belt.

Thank you for allowing me to speak at this inquiry, on behalf of the residents on St Stephen Parish. I trust our comments will be taken on board.