



Benjamin Brassett Statement for Planning Inquiry: Land North and South of Chiswell Green Lane

- I have lived in Chiswell Green for 32 years. I was educated at the local primary and secondary schools. After uni, I moved back to Chiswell Green and then purchased my own home here in 2016. Always of the understanding that the area is a premium area and if I wanted to live here in my own home, I'd be paying more than other less desirable areas and that I'd need to work and save hard to be able to afford my own place. I run my own business from home, previously working in central London using the train and around the home counties, commuting by car. I suffer from anxiety and mental health issues. I find access to my doctors surgery very difficult as it is so over subscribed and when I have tried changing surgery I have found new applications have been removed. Fortunately, the area I live in, I find really helps conquer my health needs and improve it greatly from the access to green space and the strong sense of community.
- My home is one of the 2 bedroom terraces, known by locals as the chiswell cottages on Chiswell Green Lane. Dating back to the 1840s, the cottages were for farm workers of the farm across the paddock from the front of the properties. The farm proposed to be demolished by the Cala development.
- The cottages have always been in a semi rural position, within the greenbelt. Developments in Chiswell Green between 1920-1950s, west of Watford road did not reach the cottages, leaving the rural feel intact.
The 7 cottages have views of greenbelt countryside to the west, north and south. To the east are the horse paddocks and the farm. They are quiet, peaceful and private.
The distance from our front doors to the proposed Cala development land varies as they are on a slight angle. It varies from approx 3m to 6m from our front doors. The end of our front gardens directly border the land.
- Parking for the row of cottages has traditionally been on a lay-by on chiswell green lane, for about 5-8 cars that we then have to walk down the lane to our cottages from. In recent years, we have now achieved parking at the back of our properties for one car each, but the lay-by is still used by second cars, trades and delivery drivers. On both proposed developments, the lay-by parking has been removed.
- I also run my gardening business from my home office and greenhouse that backs onto the East side. I film gardening tutorials for people to learn how to grow their own flowers and vegetables

and turn their own green space into a haven for wildlife. Popular with a younger demographic either renting or owning their first home. Conscious of our environment and keen to learn. They comment on the birds singing in the background and the peaceful feel of my videos.

- However, the two proposed developments would impact our historic rural cottages entirely. Surrounding the properties to the South, West and East by the Cala development and the North by the Addison Park development. The developments would not be in keeping with the existing properties, nor the rural feel of them. If the greenbelt were to be lost, it would have a clear negative impact on the character and identity of these cottages and the area they have been, without being impacted prior when other developments have taken place near by for almost 180 years.
- The parking area I mentioned, it looks that this parking would be lost with both of the proposed developments, or if it was kept, we'd then have to share it with hundreds of additional properties that do not have the luxury of generous driveways for more than one car, like the surrounding area currently does, or their visitors. This means more cars parked on the side of the road, disrupting traffic and causing poorer safety for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers.
- The business I run here, I do not believe I would be able to continue. I would need to find another premises away from home or I would need to move house. I could not film any peaceful and education content, grow plants there, or work from this area during and after the building process if the development were to go ahead due to the noise, dust and the lack of light from the new buildings being so close to my house and home office.
- My health would be impacted by the loss of the open green space, that I currently enjoy being by when I walk past with my dogs to relieve my anxiety. The design of the proposed developments would also be to the detriment of the strong sense of community that support me. Instead, the developments, particularly Addison Park is closed off with limited access points. At the risk of being their own micro communities.
- The clue is in the name with Chiswell Green, we have a strong identity as a green and open place to live with a strong sense of community too. There is a very popular footpath that wraps around the proposed Addison Park development which is lovely for walking in the countryside, popular with local residents, dog walkers and runners. We have a visible horse riding culture, horses graze the greenbelt land of the proposed Cala development and the horses are ridden and student taught within this same greenbelt land too.
- Sheep, for as long as I've known have always used the land of the Addison Park development to graze and Cala development land has always been for horse pasture. The proposed Addison Park development even recently had a new barn erected for agricultural use on the land.
- Yet if the two developments were to go ahead, we would loose this agricultural land, the openness of the area and the visual amenity of the greenbelt would be lost for good. The footpath I mentioned, rather than be in the open countryside, would be a tour around the perimeter of a housing estate. The horse riding culture that exists would simply be no longer.
- I can assure you as a local resident with direct views of the proposed land, that I have witnessed the habitat of the greenbelt as rich in wildlife. Like others have reported, I see bats throughout the summer on this land, badgers, red kites, pheasants and a variety of other beautiful birds, muntjacs, foxes, rabbits and an unusually broad range of butterflies. This isn't something you find everywhere, and it's something to be valued and that we cherish.
- The impact of loosing this land, would mean we loose this wonderful array of nature in this area. Due to our location and surroundings, we are not then pushing this nature 'simply further into the countryside', we are condensing the space they have due to the motorway networks wrapping around the Chiswell Green area. There will be little else for them to go.

- On Chiswell Green Lane, we have mature hedgerows and a narrow single lane road by the cottages, this single lane continues along the South side of the proposed Addison Park development. If any road widening needs to be made, mature hedges where birds nest, badgers, rabbits and foxes all live will be lost.
- Further to this, if this greenbelt were to be lost, it sets a dangerous precedent to the environment in the wider area. If a developer proposes to build on further green belt land, how can anyone defend doing so, if the same reasons put forward don't stand up to scrutiny now. We could, theoretically lose all of the green environment for miles around. When is enough enough and why are we not applying any logic to the fact we have brownfield sites, broader areas we can build on in the vicinity of St Albans and put our environment before individuals need and business profit.
- Traffic is a popular conversation in Chiswell Green. We are also very close to the M25, A414 and M1. Any estate agent listing will feature our strong road links as a positive of living in the area and is to me, one of the main appeals vs living closer to the centre of town or further out. Our location is close to a number of understandably popular private schools with parents driving their children from far wider than the local area to attend via Watford Road. Residents also use a car to get into town over other methods due to the steep hill, making walking or cycling difficult.
- However, if any issue arises on the road networks, our entire area becomes a grid lock. Existing local traffic merges with non-local traffic using our roads as a diversion from the motorways and the local roads can't cope. The extra traffic and pollution on these days is particularly noticeable. At peak times on a normal day, we see our main road, Watford Road, already becoming one long queue toward the centre of St Albans. This also means the busses that use this route are delayed, when already the frequency of them is not convenient.
- For context with car usage and traffic, from speaking to local estate agents, if you look at our area as a prospective house buyer vs other areas they could choose, logically our location appeals most to prospective St Albans residents that want to use the motorways rather than the need of the centre of town for work or commuting making busses irrelevant to them.
- I feel losing the proposed greenbelt, we are making the local environment even worse with the additional toll traffic would have.
- Finally, a note on the generation I feel I am representing here. I, like my peers have inherited a world where our climate has been declared a literal emergency. The headlines, politicians, tv shows and documentaries are constantly telling us we need to act now. Those younger than me, or even of similar age may not feel able, or yet have the understanding to make a statement like me to day, Yet I can assure you, when they come to looking for a home to buy, they will not appreciate the knowledge that the homes they could consider living in, were built to the detriment of the environment rather than on existing brownfield sites.
- I have worked in sustainability and behaviour change before setting up my own business. This included time before, during and after the pandemic. I found younger markets are willing to pay more if positive contributions to the environment can be proved, they value protecting nature, and are the ones that are going to have to make huge lifestyle changes in the future to fix the climate emergency.
- The friends I grew up with, of similar age to me, range from those that can afford London properties and those, including me that can't. Some would like a larger property and accept that they can afford one within a short distance to St Albans (instead of in St Albans), some prefer a flat in the centre of the city. Needs vary and we accept that St Albans is a premium desirable area, just like we all accept desirable areas of London are premium and other places ranked as

top to live. We can't all live in the same place but we can continue to improve areas other through investment.

- Looking broader, the pandemic impacted all my stats I used to rely on for my work. The pandemic was a huge, once in a lifetime moment. I don't feel that has been recognised in this inquiry.
- Yet all industries know the impact and have had to re-look in one way or another their approach since. Data that once may have seemed relevant, in the space of months no longer did. Topics such as sustainability, outdoor space, mental well being all rank much more highly now in importance, topping charts where they hadn't before. My own health and well being (in relation to the greenbelt around my home) I value so much since working from home full time. Daily, it gives me the space and peace and quiet I need to calm my anxieties.
- Going back to data, in terms of greenbelt specifically, YouGuv's regular poll shows 70% of all adults in the UK currently (as of March 2023) oppose building on greenbelt to provide more housing. Our government also says not to build on greenbelt. Yet the developers here continue to use data prior to the pandemic to push ahead with their agenda.
- Our behaviour at home and for travel has also changed. We work from home a lot more, we have discovered and appreciate outdoor space, a lot more of us own dogs according to numerous data sources and enjoy walking them, naturally in open outdoor spaces. We have seen how quick a problem can become an emergency across the world through the pandemic, just like our climate is now becoming and the future we will face.
- Despite admiral ambitions of consumers to now be more sustainable, I also know behaviour change is incredibly difficult. From working with some of the world's leading experts in behaviour change, helping me drive sustainable solutions for consumers, making changes is hard.
- That's why the proposed use of public transport in these developments, as ideal as it would be, is unfortunately highly unlikely to work. Even to the most motivated and climate conscious person, if something isn't convenient, simple and quick, they do not adopt it. They might trial it, but it does not become ingrained as a behavioural choice. As I previously said, logically, Chiswell Green appeals for the car transport links. It's at the bottom of a very steep hill into St Albans, walking is a long way, cycling is too difficult. Buses get stuck in traffic and are infrequent. I can't imagine anyone paying for a new home in Chiswell Green not owning or wishing to use their private car as their primary method of transport. Using public transport or cycling simply doesn't make logical sense nor is convenient in our location, or simple to adopt into their lifestyle or quick to get where they need to go. Meaning the desired behaviour change would likely fail.
- Whilst these were broader comments, existing locals already are environmentally conscious, which I think is from our access, awareness and enjoyment of the countryside we live by thanks to the greenbelt. For my last point, I want to remove the topic of the developments entirely and show you a real life example of what is going on in our local community.
- I have recently set up with a friend, a community garden project for the area. With the aim of improving wildlife, creating a beautiful space in nature, enabling locals to grow their own fruit and vegetables, fill vast flowerbeds with pollinator friendly flowers and have access to a shared green space. The level of interest has been unprecedented. Raising thousands of pounds so far to create it and over a hundred interested participants that would like to help protect and improve wildlife and nurture their own well being. Surely, this shows the passion and appreciation for our environment and access to outdoor space from existing residents and donors from further afield wanting to see nature thrive here.
- I completely accept we must build homes. But when you take the broader view and take a step back from the tit for tat I have seen within this inquiry, for the sake of our current and future generations, we surely must find that the proposals do not justify losing this greenbelt. It is not the right type of development for the area, in the right place, nor the right time for it.