

Statement in opposition to the Cala Homes and Polo Fields development proposals.

Clare De Silva, Conservative Parliamentary Spokesperson for St Albans.

From my work as Parliamentary Spokesperson for St Albans, I am opposing the Chiswell Green proposals for three main reasons:

- They are unwanted by local people and unsuitable to the local area
- They are out of step with emerging government policy
- They will not meet real local housing need.

Unwanted by local people

Over the past ten months I have spoken to thousands of constituents across St Albans and in particular in Chiswell Green. Despite trekking down almost every road surrounding the sites we are discussing today, I have not met a single person in favour of these developments. Even to the untrained eye, it is abundantly clear from the sheer number of posters and boards in almost every window of every house, that these developments are neither wanted, nor appropriate for the area.

The concerned residents that I have met are reasonable, environmentally aware and passionate about the area they live in. They are keen to ensure that the next generation in St Albans have good homes to live in, but they are acutely aware that these proposals will not meet this need. The houses suggested in this case will not be affordable for local people in need of homes (even the so-called affordable ones) and they will not ease the housing pressure. In fact, they will add to it by encouraging people from more urban areas to move to St Albans and add even more strain to our infrastructure.

The land in question is firmly part of the green belt. Providing a unique environment for flora and fauna and forming a beautiful and natural barrier between one settlement and the next. Local people have impressed upon me the value of this land in terms of quality of life and the importance of maintaining the biodiversity offered by green belt land. Once this is gone, it's gone forever.

Most concerningly however, is the precedent that allowing these plans to go through will set, opening the door to future developments which will inevitably destroy the character of Chiswell Green and St Albans as they gradually merge into the greater London area.

Out of step with government thinking on housing

In my view, these proposals are an opportunistic move by developers who are trying to sneak their plans under the door before housebuilding targets are scrapped by central government. Over the past few months my colleagues in government have announced that proscriptive targets on housebuilding will be scrapped. Meaning that local authorities like St Albans District Council will have more power to work with local people to build the kind of homes really needed here, in places which work best for the community.

Since the scrapping of housing targets were announced, 55 local authorities across the country have suspended their development plans in preparation for change. To grant this appeal would place St Albans completely out of step with emerging national policy and

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create years of misery for local people who will have to deal with construction and disruption for a long time to come.

These developments in Chiswell Green would be in direct opposition to the direction of travel outlined by the government. If these plans had been brought forward next year, instead of last year, they would never have got even this far. I believe that we have a unique window of time here to re-think what type of housing we really need here in St Albans and it is clear that luxury homes, plonked on the green belt, increasing traffic and putting a strain on local services in not it.

Does not meet local housing need

The plans are also out of step with St Albans District Council's own housing strategy which proposes the development of council-owned land for affordable and social housing, rather than prime green belt sites.

According to the most recent Housing Strategy put together by the District Council, the greatest housing need is for three-bedroom properties suitable for social rent. This is where the real gap is here. 220 such families are currently on the waiting list for 3-bedroom social rent properties with an additional 146 families needing two bedroomed homes. These are the people in desperate need of quality accommodation and the proposed Chiswell Green developments will not meet this need.

Even the so-called affordable homes on the Polo Fields site will be out of reach for those who need it most. The Cala Homes plan in particular will not provide the kind of homes desperately needed by many. Instead, they will offer a slice of luxury for those keen to move to the area, carving up the greenbelt and piling pressure on local services in the process. These developments will make the situation worse for future generations, not better.

Conclusion

This appeal is completely contrary to local public will, the local authority's assessment of housing need and the government view on housing targets. The plans are out of step with just about every factor locally and I urge those assessing this appeal to listen to the strength of feeling in this room and turn these plans down once and for all.