

Highfield Park Village Centre, Hill End Lane, Herts AL4 0RA  
Telephone 01727 825 314  
Website [www.colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk](http://www.colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk)  
Email [clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@colneyheathparishcouncil.gov.uk)



Land adjacent to Colney Heath Football Club, Colney Heath, St Albans

## Planning Inquiry

PINS Ref : APP/B1930/W/23/3333685

LPA REF: 5/2022/0599

date	version	
23 April 2024	1	Issue for Inquiry

## OPENING STATEMENT COLNEY HEATH PARISH COUNCIL RULE 6 PARTY

Appointed to represent Colney Heath Parish Council

- ◇ John Clemow and Tony Burns, Parish Councillors
- ◇ Mike Rawlins, Neighbourhood Plan Project Officer (voluntary)

- 1 In summary, the Parish Council's position is simple and specific – namely that Colney Heath village generally, and the appeal site in particular, are evidently not a suitable or sustainable location for a residential development of the scale represented by this appeal scheme.
- 2 Before I continue, I need to mention that the Parish Council has not been consulted on any of the Statements of Common Ground which contain some matters that we do not agree with. We will, however, endeavour not to disturb the process of this Inquiry as a consequence.
- 3 A very considerable number of objections were made to the planning application for the Appellant's proposal. Virtually no support in favour has been expressed.
- 4 The Planning Officer's report on the objections shows concerns on a wide range of the topics. These include Green Belt issues of course, but also loss of farmland, the proposal being out of character with the village, impacts residential amenity, highways and parking (many issues), environmental and sustainability, impacts on wildlife, social and physical infrastructure. Fundamentally these are the issues of real and responsible concern from everyday experience of life in our village.

- 5 The LPA's regulation 18 draft Local Plan does not allocate any sites in Colney Heath village for good reasons :
- a. the sites that are proposed in the draft Local Plan are accessible on foot to public transport services with good frequency and suitable timetables. Colney Heath is not.
  - b. the village is at the bottom end of the settlement hierarchy so not suitable for allocation,
  - c. the 2023 Green Belt Review by Arup recommended the village should be retained as washed over.

- 6 The appeal site is clearly part of the wider open landscape, both physically and experientially, beyond the settlement edge. This edge is formed by a line of single properties. The proposed development would jut out prominently from the existing edge, encroaching deeply into the open landscape. It is not filling in a gap between adjacent parts of the existing settlement.

It would negatively impact

- the openness and purposes of the Green Belt,
- the landscape character and appearance
- the settings of the adjacent listed buildings that are closely associated with the appeal site. We appreciate your acceptance of our additional submission on heritage in response to the Heritage Statement of Common Ground.

- 7 Furthermore, we consider the visual impacts of a proposal need to be actually visualised in addition to the formulaic approach which requires the impacts to be imagined "in the mind's eye". We will show photomontages based on the appellant's Design and Access Statement. These are from viewpoints that are not included in the Landscape Statement of Common Ground.

We consider these photomontages are instructive when considering the negative impacts on openness, on visual impacts, on overlooking, loss of privacy, quality of life, and on the settings of listed buildings.

- 8 The facilities in Colney Heath are what one expects in a village – a church, a primary school, a pub, a village hall, a social club, a small convenience store with a post office. We also have a hairdresser and an Indian takeaway. These do not support the day-to-day needs of employment, education, most shopping needs, and healthcare services.

- 9 4ColneyHeath residents' association conducted a survey in February this year of residents' modes of access for these essential needs. The results clearly demonstrate that residents are wholly dependent on the use of cars for all their needs other than recreation in the village.

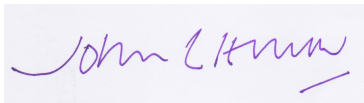
- 10 Our assessment of walking routes within the village, and of cycling routes through and beyond the village, show that they all fail to meet acceptability criteria. These cannot be fixed or adequately ameliorated due to the reality of the physical constraints – building frontages on the pavement edge, on-street parking creating single lane roads.
- 11 The bus services for day-to-day needs are totally inadequate. There is only one bus route providing only 5 services at 2 hourly intervals to St Albans City, Monday to Saturday, with limited start and end times.
- 12 The train stations in the area are too far to walk to, and cycle routes to these stations are unsuitable. Only St Albans City train station is accessible by bus but the last bus returning to Colney Heath departs at 5.26pm so is of little use to most commuters.
- 13 With regard to employment there are few jobs in the village, many of which are part-time. Almost all residents who travel to work do so by car – 96% according to the residents' association survey. Buses do not operate at times to allow travel to or from work, and the services do not connect to the many and varied places where residents work.
- 14 Accessing education: despite the village primary school being within the village, the residents' association survey shows 73% of parents drive to primary school. We understand this is often on their way to work. The village primary school serves other areas of the Parish and is periodically oversubscribed depending on demographic fluctuations. This means children have to be driven to other locations.
- 15 Securing a secondary place is a major and stressful issue for village families. In 2023 the appeal site was outside the catchment area for all but one of the schools in St Albans i.e. the Samuel Ryder Academy. The emerging position is none may be in the near future. Parents don't select their preferred school as their first choice because they know they are unlikely to get it. All 10 of the nearest secondary schools were over-subscribed in 2023 and eight out of the ten have been oversubscribed every single year for the past 5 years.  
  
Places are allocated to schools that are not accessible within reasonable walking distances or by acceptable cycling routes. Due to the diverse range of secondary schools attended by children from the village, the limited bus services do not offer a sustainable alternative mode of transport. Most children have to be driven to and from school. Further increases in the population would increase the stress.
- 16 The village convenience store is small. It provides some, but by no means all, of "top up" shopping needs.

Although the shop has 'fixed opening hours' these can fluctuate depending on when the proprietor is on holiday – or indisposed. Earlier this year the facility was closed for more than 5 weeks.

- 17 Supermarkets are beyond acceptable walking distances and cycle routes are unacceptable. For many the weekly shop on a bicycle would need to be done several times a week. Bus services to a few supermarkets are once only on one day per week, and then during the daytime only - not suitable for the employed or those unable to carry several bags of shopping.
- 18 GP surgeries, dentists and hospitals are also beyond acceptable walking distances and via unacceptable cycle routes. Going by bus requires lengthy journeys as excessive time must be allowed to attend an appointment due to the infrequency in the timetable and the probable need for several route changes.
- 19 While energy efficient buildings can be constructed, development in a car dependent location would permanently embed carbon emissions from access requirements.
- 20 The sustainable transport contribution in the draft section 106 agreement would offer virtually no benefits to Colney Heath village other than, perhaps, cycling to the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield after negotiating the dangers of cycling on the High Street.
- 21 Concluding on this aspect, paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Colney Heath village is not, and cannot realistically be made to be, sustainable in transport terms.
- 22 We contend that the traffic impact from the proposed development is underestimated. We are also very concerned about the impact on parking and safety issues. The access road currently provides parking spaces which would be lost. It serves the large parking area behind the school used by the Football Club and the school. This is already at capacity. School drop-offs and pick-ups would be displaced onto the surrounding roads.
- 23 Vehicular movements to the proposed development would be by drivers not associated with the school, both during the construction and occupation phases. This would present very serious safety concerns which we do not see being overcome.  
The proposed section 106 monies to expand the village school would only make the existing car parking situation worse due to the size of the school's catchment area.

- 24 We don't contest the need for housing in the District, nor the need for genuinely realistically priced housing to rent or buy. The average house prices are 16 times the average annual salary for local residents, and so are unattainable.
- 25 Regarding the provision of affordable housing we consider the village is not a suitable location for this scale of development for low income key workers. They generally do not work from home or have "9 to 5" jobs. Each individual will need to run a car to access jobs that may be at some distance. Owning and running a car would severely strain the stretched budget of two people even with both working fulltime – a fragile position. It will not assist in meeting St Albans' housing needs.
- 26 As an aside, we would note the appellant's substantial effort for this appeal for what is a relatively small proposal when compared with others in the village. We infer the proposal is a trojan horse to access the land beyond, offered in the call for sites, indicatively for more than 700 houses.
- 27 To conclude, the proposed development would cause harm to the Green Belt. The impact on openness and the visual impacts, as shown in our evidence, are striking. Other harms are both environmental and social.

Together with the appeal site being in an unsustainable location, the Parish Council considers the harm to the Green Belt, and the other harms that would result from the proposal, are not clearly outweighed by the District's housing shortfall, so very special circumstances do not exist. We will ask you to refuse this appeal.



John Clemow  
Vice Chair, Colney Heath Parish Council