

Tarmac appeal

Resident's statement: John Rowland

I understand you may have already visited our village. You will have noticed the banners and posters. Our campaign is Save Colney Heath Village – save what? It's to save the character, community and environment of our village.

Colney Heath was historically a few small farms. Most of the original housing was built to provide for the farm labourers, terraced cottages that were built directly abutting the road. These cottages still sit along the pavements in the High Street such as the listed buildings adjacent to the appeal site, Tollgate Road, Roestock Lane, Coursers Road and Bullens Green Lane. Their small frontages and no front gardens means that on street parking is a problem and causes long chicanes of single file traffic along these roads. The proximity of these buildings means that the roads cannot be widened or enhanced to install cycle lanes. Cycling is particularly hazardous past the long line of parked cars and in general on the advice of their parents, children cycle along the pavements along the High street.

There were no cars until the early 1900s when there was a ten MPH limit through the village. Transport was mainly by horse and cart. Eventually the progress of the internal combustion engine meant that Fred Bennett the wheelwright's business ended and his land was used to build Bennett's Close. Similarly The Grange, the grand residence of the First World War hero, Admiral Sir John Fellowes which was built upon after he died, became the housing developments on Fellowes Lane and in Admirals Close at the Roestock area of the village. The village expanded slowly and organically; the coherence and integrity of the village community was maintained.

The historical character of the village is farming. The village is basically a long crossroads, centered on the Queen's Head roundabout, with gaps between the groups of houses at either end, with open vistas over the farmland and The Common. It is this openness that is particularly valued by people living and walking the footpaths that cross the farmland that surrounds and is integral to the village.

Colney Heath is special for several reasons. It is a real village, not of the chocolate box variety, with a long and sometimes infamous history, and a strong community. There are many local families that go back many generations. For instance I have lived in my house for 43 years but still, according to the old hands, I live in 'Bobby Clark's house'.

We have for example a WI, the PTA, a history society, a number of clubs, and a Football and Social club. Not parochial, we informally twinned with a similar village, Boissy sous St. Yon, south of Paris with many families participating in an annual exchange. The French family we have been twinned with for xx years is visiting us at the end of May.

Totalling around 750 houses we are surrounded by green space – the Common, farmed lands, woods, and fallow fields. A village 5 miles from where we now assemble in the city centre. This combination makes Colney Heath special.

The Colney Manor development of 100 houses on Bullens Green is under construction, and flooded for months - so locally known as Colney Marina. The appeal that allowed that development opened the floodgates for speculative planning applications to exploit the potential value of farmed lands : 150 houses on Tollgate Road, 155 houses and 110 houses on Roestock Lane, and the 45 houses that are the subject of this Inquiry. Not yet applied for, but lurking in the wings, are several other sites where interest has been declared – including 700+ houses adjacent to this site with the road through this development for access.

These proposals would massively increase the traffic on the roads. I assisted the Parish Council for the Tollgate Road appeal. I personally counted 800 vehicles passing the choke point, on the High Street next to the Post Office, in one hour between 8 and 9 a.m. I also counted just one cyclist, a young lad cycling along the pavement.

The developments already applied for would double the population of the village. None would add any significant benefits. The s106 agreement for the 100 houses on Bullens Green Lane offers the village token contributions of £36,000 to the Scout hut and £15,000 for a new bus shelter for the one

infrequent, and practically useless, daily bus service. The developments would add pressure on schools, especially on choice of secondary schools. 30 pupils in the 2024 year 6 cohort have been allocated 14 different secondary schools after several appeals, so making the big psychological jump from primary to a new 'big' school with hardly any familiar faces in the playground. Where would the additional children moving into Bullen's Green Lane and this development go to school?

At the moment there are no local GP services or dentists in the village, trying to get a simple blood test means waiting in a queue of 30 plus callers to the GP surgery in Hatfield. Then getting a GP appointment, travelling to the surgery in your car, then agreeing a test is needed, only to be offered an appointment for the blood test five weeks hence, hopefully you're not ill.

The out of date Local Plan has failed our village, allowing the exploitation by developers.

1. The developers do not offer a sustainable solution to the housing shortage and would add to the pressure on schools, medical services, traffic and further deteriorate infrastructure facilities
2. They would destroy the openness and feel of living in a village environment and create something more like a "dormitory unsesttlement"
3. Most residents' needs are only met outside the village. Walking, cycling and buses are not practical, safe or available alternatives to using our cars. Development here will create more avoidable and permanent carbon emissions contributing to climate change.

The issue for us is a matter of scale and location. We think residents would not object to small scale infill with right types of properties at a price that could be afforded by the next generation or suitable for downsizing by older residents.

You are of course concerned with the developer's proposal. The draft Local Plan does not propose any sites in the village. The recommendations in the Arup Green Belt review are particularly relevant.

The developer's proposal is simply too much in the wrong place.

John Rowland, Colney Heath
23 April 2024