

PLANNING REF : 250517
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Hyde End Road
:
: RG7 1DA
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Anuj Chopra
DATE SUBMITTED : 13/04/2025

COMMENTS:

Formal Objection to Richborough Estates' Proposed Development Plan

Dear Planning officer,

Please see my comments below in response to the Richborough's planning proposal

1. Location Outside Defined Settlement Boundaries

Richborough Planning Proposal document Reference:

- Page 5, Paragraph 2.1: Confirms the site is located outside the defined settlement boundary.

Wokingham's Adopted MDD Reference:

- Policy ADPP1 - Spatial Strategy (Page 23): Requires that major development be contained within defined settlement boundaries.

- Policy ADPP6 - Eastern Area (Page 33): Specifically limits development in countryside areas such as the one in question.

Objection: The proposed development lies clearly outside Wokingham's established settlement boundary and is designated countryside. This is not an allocated site for housing, and no exceptional circumstances have been presented that would justify an override of these

restrictions. Allowing this application would be directly contrary to strategic policies ADPP1 and ADPP6 and would open the floodgates to further unjustified countryside development.

2. Unsustainable Scale, No Infrastructure Strategy

Richborough Planning Proposal document Reference:

- Page 10, Paragraph 3.2: Proposes the construction of 420 new homes.

- No concrete plans or timelines are presented for schools, GP services, public transport, or community infrastructure.

Wokingham's Adopted MDD Reference:

- Policy CS5 - Infrastructure (Page 45): Requires new development to deliver appropriate infrastructure upfront.

- Policy CS6 - Transport Infrastructure (Page 46): Stresses the importance of transport capacity and access.

Objection: The development would introduce approximately 1,600 new residents, placing unmanageable strain on schools, roads, healthcare, and other services. There are no confirmed commitments to

infrastructure delivery, and Richborough fails to propose a timeline or funding guarantee. This amounts to piecemeal planning and is in violation of CS5 and CS6.

We argue that no conditional or "future-dated" infrastructure proposals should be acceptable. There must be no caveats allowing land to revert to the developer if the council fails to deliver amenities. Instead:

All infrastructure and community benefits must be funded and implemented upfront, as a prerequisite for any building work.

3. Emergency Access and Evacuation Risk

Richborough Planning Proposal document Reference:

- Page 12, Paragraph 4.1: All proposed access routes lead toward Burghfield.

Wokingham's Adopted MDD Reference:

- Policy CS6 - Transport and Access (Page 46)

Objection: In the case of a genuine emergency particularly one involving the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) in Burghfield, or even widespread flooding or fire this site becomes a high-risk trap, as all exit routes converge toward a single danger zone. This is a gross failure of sustainable and safe design. It breaches CS6 and violates NPPF Paragraphs 110 and 112, which require that new developments ensure safe and reliable access.

4. Presence of Protected Species - Ecological Breach

Richborough Planning Proposal document Reference:

- Page 15, Paragraph 5.3: Refers to "preliminary ecological assessments" but provides no detailed findings, mitigation strategies, or licensed species surveys.

On-Site Ecological Reality:

- The site is confirmed to be inhabited by bats, a European protected species.
- Deer are also regularly sighted within the field boundaries and hedgerows.

Wokingham's Adopted MDD Reference:

- Policy CS17 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity (Page 43)

Legislation Breached:

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (UK Habitats Directive)

Objection: All UK bat species and their roosts are strictly protected. It is a criminal offence to:

- Damage or destroy a roost (even if unoccupied)
- Disturb bats during breeding, hibernation, or roosting
- Obstruct access to a roost

No licensed bat surveys have been presented. The Richborough proposal is therefore not only in breach of Policy CS17 but illegal under UK wildlife law. Proceeding with this development would expose the council and developer to potential judicial review or criminal enforcement.

5. Loss of Rural Landscape and Character

Richborough Planning Proposal document Reference:

- Page 18, Paragraph 6.2: Minimizes the development's visual and ecological impact.

Wokingham's Adopted MDD Reference:

- Policy CS19 - Landscape and Historic Character (Page 49)

Objection: The site currently serves as important green buffer land, connecting habitats and maintaining the rural identity of the area.

The large-scale housing development would irreversibly:

- Remove mature hedgerows and visual corridors
- Reduce open space between villages
- Urbanize rural settings

This is a clear violation of CS19, and the developer's downplaying of this impact is misleading and dangerous.

6. Pattern of Disregard - Richborough's Track Record

Richborough has a notable history of pursuing inappropriate, premature, or speculative developments, including:

1. Sholden, Kent: Application for 117 homes rejected on environmental grounds.
2. Hampton Magna, Warwickshire: Initial refusal due to transport and infrastructure concerns.
3. Cheshire East: Legal dispute reached the Supreme Court over protected "Green Gap" land.

Objection: Richborough has repeatedly challenged and attempted to circumvent local development frameworks, and they cannot be trusted to act in the long-term interest of the borough. To allow them to proceed here on a site already in breach of six major planning policies and protected wildlife law would be to undermine the legitimacy of Wokingham's planning policy entirely.

7. Dangerous Precedent If Approved

If Wokingham Borough Council or planning officers permit this application to proceed despite the overwhelming breaches, the following dangerous precedent will be set:

- Council policies will be seen as optional and no longer enforceable
- Developers will be emboldened to push further into the countryside
- Protected wildlife and ecological legislation will be openly disregarded
- Future infrastructure demands will be ignored or "retrospectively promised"
- Community trust in the Council's ability to uphold local planning rules will be lost

8. IF THE APPLICATION IS APPROVED Non-Negotiable Conditions for Community Benefit

Despite the numerous breaches and legal shortcomings outlined in this objection, should the Council and planning officers choose to approve Richborough's proposed development, the following minimum conditions must be imposed to protect the public interest and preserve community cohesion.

Absolute Requirement: No Caveats, No Clawbacks, No Conditional Infrastructure

There must be no clauses that:

- Allow land "reserved" for schools or clinics to revert back to Richborough Estates
 - Defer infrastructure delivery to future stages
 - Make community benefits contingent on future funding rounds
- All community benefits must be delivered by the developer BEFORE any housing construction begins.
- This is in accordance with:
- NPPF Paragraph 58: Planning obligations must be "necessary, directly related to the development, and fairly and reasonably related in scale."
 - Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010: Benefits must be secured in advance and enforced transparently.

8.1 Proposed Community Benefits - Mandatory

1. Widening and Upgrading of Local Roads

- o Richborough must fund the widening of all primary and secondary roads impacted by the development, especially those leading into and out of Burghfield and the wider parish area.

- o Road improvements must meet Department for Transport safety and emergency evacuation standards.

2. Creation of a New Local Primary School

- o A full school site (not just land allocation), complete with construction, staff-ready facilities, and equipment, to accommodate the incoming families.

- o No shared or split-site models permitted.

3. Direct Funding for Local GP Recruitment and Practice Support

- o Richborough must establish a ring-fenced fund specifically for the recruitment, retention, and operation of new general practitioners and staff, in conjunction with local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

- o GP buildings must be constructed or expanded to accommodate at least 1,600 new patients.

4. Local Amenities: Shops, Gym, and Community Centre

- o The proposed local centre must include retail space, fitness/gym facilities, and a community hub open to all local residents.

- o These must be built and operational prior to any occupation of new homes.

5. Significantly Reduced Housing Numbers

- o The proposed figure of 420 homes is wholly excessive. We propose that this be reduced by at least 50%, to a maximum of 200 homes, in order to align with:

- ? Policy CS4 - Housing Mix, Density, and Layout (MDD Page 42), which requires development to be "of an appropriate scale and massing in relation to its surroundings."

- ? NPPF Paragraph 124 & 127: Requiring developments to be "sympathetic to local character, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting."

6. Protection of Privacy: No Back-to-Back Development

- o New homes must not back directly onto existing properties. This avoids:

- ? Overlooking

- ? Overshadowing

- ? Loss of residential privacy and amenity

Legal Reference:

- o Building Research Establishment (BRE) Guidelines on minimum spacing for privacy, as cited in:

- ? Fitzpatrick Developments Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2008]: Failure to respect existing residential amenity can justify refusal.

- ? Local authority design guides often specify a minimum of 21 metres between rear elevations this must be upheld.

9. Current Benefits Package is Inadequate

The benefits outlined by Richborough (ViewDocument, Page 21, Paragraph 6.4) are:

- Generalised, underfunded, and vague

- Contain no enforceable commitments

- Are unfit to support 1,600 additional residents

This "gesture package" does not address core pressures on infrastructure, education, transport, or healthcare. The planning authority must not accept these token promises at face value.

10. Strong Recommendation

Given the scale of:

- Policy violations
- Wildlife legislation breaches
- Emergency access failures
- Ecological destruction
- Weak community benefit proposals
- And Richborough's track record nationally

We firmly reiterate that this application must be rejected outright.

However, should it progress, the Council must legally require that:

- Community infrastructure be delivered in full, in advance
- Housing numbers be halved
- All development respects existing homes and character
- A detailed ecological and legal assessment is completed

Failure to uphold these safeguards would be a dereliction of duty, violate the Council's Local Plan, and set a dangerous planning precedent for speculative development across Wokingham Borough.