

PLANNING REF: 242067

Land between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst, RG10 0EG

Outline application for “the proposed development of up to 99 dwellings, green infrastructure, open space, pedestrian and cycle links, recreational facilities and other associated infrastructure and access points on Lodge Road and Tape Lane with required improvements (ALL matters reserved except for means of access).”

OBJECTION

Submitted by: Andrew Dolinski

34 Martineau Lane, Hurst, Berkshire, RG10 0SF

Date submitted: 16 September 2024

My wife and I have lived in Hurst for 22 years. Our property is directly adjacent to, and overlooks the fields subject to this speculative planning application, an application to which **I strongly object**.

Let us be clear, the proposed development is for the

“wrong houses, in the wrong place”.

The residents of Hurst village are united in their condemnation of this flawed speculative development proposal.

THE EMERGING LOCAL PLAN

“ Hurst is defined as a minor settlement “

On 12 September 2024 Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) published its “emerging” Local Plan. In doing so it confirmed that WBC will pursue a “plan led” development policy based upon a “spatial strategy” and a three tier “settlement hierarchy” (Policy SS2), namely:

- Major settlements
- Modest settlements
- Minor settlements

The village of Hurst is “defined” as a minor settlement, “places which have limited services and facilities. In general they are small villages. These places will receive an **appropriate** level of **planned** housing growth, where opportunity exists, to support the evolution of the community in a way which **respects its rural character**. Beyond planned development, development **will be limited** to the exception sites which accord with Policy H4.”

I strongly believe that WBC are best placed to ensure that “right houses are placed in the right place”. Houses should be located where they are needed, in a location that is sustainable and which has the lowest environmental impact. The heart of the semi-rural village of Hurst is not such a location. The “emerging Local Plan” demonstrates that WBC understand, and accordingly the contents of the “emerging Local Plan” must be given **SIGNIFICANT weight** when considering this speculative planning application.

GROUNDS FOR OBJECTION

I am of the firm opinion that any perceived benefits of this proposed development **DO NOT** outweigh the harm caused by it.

“ The harm of this proposed development demonstrably outweigh its benefits “



“ A field full of houses, or a field loved by many, in which horses, ponies and donkeys reside amongst a rich carpet of diverse flora and fauna? “

The grounds of my objection are as follows:

- The proposed development is on a greenfield site and falls **outside** the development limit of Hurst, and is therefore contrary to Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) core strategy CP11.

None of the exemption categories under the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) have been met.

- The village of Hurst and Whistley Green is classed by WBC as a Limited Development Area (LDA). As such developments in excess of 25 homes are ordinarily not permitted. Furthermore during the current Local Plan, Hurst and Whistley Green have delivered circa 38 homes.
- The applicant has not shown that there is a 'rural' need for this type of development in Hurst. The applicant has not properly assessed whether there is a need for their houses. Where is the local employment which would not require the use of private cars to reach?
- The site was rejected in the WBC (2021) call for sites, being assessed as:

“Unsuitable; development would be inappropriate to the existing form, pattern and character of the landscape. Any increase in cars in the area could impact the rural/local road network. Journeys to services and facilities such as secondary schools, shops and GPs are likely to be by car”.

The application fails to address these issues. Hurst is a semi rural village with few quality services, for example there is no doctors surgery, no pharmacy, no dentist. There is only one small convenience store/post office, there are no secondary schools within walking distance and transport links are poor. And despite the numerous references within the applicant's proposals to the existence of a **Hurst Bakery**, the residents of Hurst can assure you;

“ Hurst does not have a bakery! “

This is a standing joke within the community. Time after time we see planning applications appear claiming that 'Hurst has a bakery'. The so-called experts assisting the applicant have fallen into the trap of relying upon Google to demonstrate their knowledge of Hurst as they carry out their so-called 'on site work' from their desktops far away from Hurst.

Only basic daily needs are met by the services within the village. Everything else requires transportation outside of the village. The existing bus service is unreliable as confirmed by Thames Valley Transport in a letter to me earlier this year. The households will have an over reliance on their cars. Accordingly, this development does not comply with WBC core strategy CP6 and CP9.

- The proposed development is adjacent to an Area of Special Character (ASC), and does nothing to maintain, protect or enhance the ASC.
- The proposed development is on a nationally important wildlife corridor. The development of the fields would result in a loss of an important bio diverse rural habitat in which all manner of flora and fauna cohabit and which adds to the semi rural aspect of Hurst. The planet needs to preserve such areas and it must not be lost for speculative commercial gain. The generations who follow will not forgive us if that was allowed to happen. Please have the foresight to listen to them.
- The existing hedgerow and trees, of which many are protected by TPOs, are most likely to be damaged by the development. It is inconceivable to believe that the erection of 99 houses and the provision of underground services will not do irreparable damage to the root system and ecology of this bio diverse site.
- The proposed development is likely to add undue strain upon the existing services to neighbouring properties in Hurst, namely water supply, runoff discharge and sewerage.

Surface Water Flooding

“ Hurst increasingly suffers from flooding. “

Surface water flooding is an issue many residents of Hurst are increasingly concerned about.



The applicant states that there is only anecdotal evidence of surface water flooding on the site. Those of us who have lived in the village for many years can testify to the regularity and extent of such issues.

Such surface water flooding leads to unchecked runoff into the ditches to the south and west of the field, and into Tape Lane to the east.

The applicant acknowledges that the site has a very high water table and proposes that their attenuation basins discharge into the national waterway, known as Hatchgate Ditch located on the site's western edge. Unfortunately if they and their so-called experts had carried out due diligence, and not least a physical inspection, they would have observed that Hatchgate Ditch has been severed on the north eastern corner of their site as a result of inappropriate works carried out a few years previous.

Comically the applicant's experts comment in their reports that "Hatchgate Ditch appeared to be full". Not surprising, **it has no connection** and **cannot** flow northwards! Furthermore whilst the applicant's drainage experts have provided maps showing Hatchgate Ditch being connected, their ecology experts have provided a map correctly showing that Hatchgate Ditch has been truncated. Perhaps these experts should talk to each other, and furthermore perhaps the applicant should have carried out their own due diligence before presenting proposals based on negligent advice.

More evidence how **inept** the applicants so-called experts have been.

This national waterway has been illegally blocked by the applicant and their client's own carelessness and is now no longer able to discharge water in a northerly direction.

Accordingly, water entering Hatchgate Ditch, in the form of runoff from their field, now flows south and enters the ditch at the foot of my own property causing my garden and those of my neighbours to become waterlogged.

The blockage of Hatchgate Ditch also means that surface water pools in the ditch and forces water to travel southwards resulting in flooding in gardens in Barber Close as well as localised flooding in Castle Hill and Orchard Road. It no doubt adds to flooding recently experienced in Hogmoor Lane as ultimately the ditch meets with water travelling towards that part of Hurst.

The blockage of Hatchgate Ditch by the applicant and their client has been referred to the Environment Agency with a request that remedial work be carried out.

So bad has the flooding been, that in 2023, WBC were compelled to commission an independent Section 19 Flood Risk Report dealing with flooding in Wokingham Borough, most notably Hurst.

The applicant has chosen **to ignore** the findings of that damning report. **Negligence?**

Unsustainability

“ Hurst is, and remains, an unsustainable location “

I refer to the following planning applications (amongst others), each of which were dismissed at appeal by Planning Inspectors notability on the grounds of **unsustainability**:

- **172894, Land at Lodge Road**

Appeal decision dated 31 January 2020 (Appeal ref APP/X0360/W/18/3194044)

The reasons to refuse 172894 by both WBC and the Planning Inspector should be applied to this adjacent parcel of land.

In the closing words of the Planning Inspector, Mr. Major:

“The proposed development simply fails to address the fundamental shortcomings associated with the appeal site. Put simply, this would be the wrong development in the wrong place.”

Prophetic words which have a direct bearing upon this application.

- **220458, Land East of Lodge Road**

Appeal decision dated 9 March 2023 (Appeal ref APP/X0360/W/22/3309202)

Again, the reasons to refuse 220458 by both WBC and the Planning Inspector should be applied to this current application.

As one of the many villagers who endured the full two week appeal hearing which resulted in Mr Wildsmith rejecting the applicant’s appeal against WBC’s refusal to allow 200 homes on this same field I feel that **significant weight** should be applied to Mr Wildsmith’s findings, of which the following is key:

“I have further found that the appeal proposal would not fully accord with the 3 objectives of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 8 of the Framework, and would not represent development in a location which can currently be considered sustainable, or could be made sustainable by the improvements and contributions offered by the appellant. The appeal proposal would therefore not represent sustainable development and does not benefit the presumption in favour of such development”.

Since March 2023 nothing in Hurst has changed. Hurst remains as it was when the Planning Inspector visited. Accordingly it remains an **“unsustainable location”**. Yet the same applicant has submitted a new development proposal on the same site, in the same **“unsustainable location”**.

Crucially the applicant acknowledges that they ***“accept (the decision of the Planning Inspector) and we have carefully considered the reasons for refusal, and made significant changes, in preparing our revised proposals. Our revised proposals will deliver up to 99 homes whilst ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY and biodiversity and providing new public amenities”.***

To what extent are the applicant’s proposals to **enhance sustainability** guaranteed to be deliverable or mere **undeliverable paper proposals**? Unsurprisingly **none** are guaranteed. All are mere proposals and some are even referred to as no more than ‘a possibility’. Most ‘proposals’ require third party agreement. No such agreements have been entered into. **Therefore they must be discounted.**

- The applicant has reduced the number of homes from 200 to 99. Does that in itself make Hurst a more sustainable location? Clearly **no!**
- The proposal is for two clusters, one attached to the north east corner and one to the south west corner. Does splitting the development in two enhance sustainability? Clearly **no!**
- The proposal is that 50% of homes will be “affordable”. Siting “affordable” homes in an unsustainable location does not enhance sustainability. The “**wrong homes, in the wrong place**”.
- The applicant is “**proposing**” a small, 16 seater minibus to serve the development overlapping the times of the existing 128/129 bus service during the periods of 7am to 10am and 3pm to 7pm. The applicant proposes that the residents of the new homes contribute a minimum of 45% of the annual cost of running the mini bus service for a minimum term of ten years. The annual cost of doing so is not insubstantial, and if they are to be an occupier of an “affordable home”, is such an annual “service charge” in itself “affordable”? The mini bus is proposed to only serve the limited destinations of central Twyford and Piggott School. This presupposes that residents of Hurst only wish to travel to those limited destinations. What of school children needing to reach schools in Woodley, Winnersh and Wokingham? What of employees needing to travel to Wokingham, Reading and beyond? Twyford station is not the only commuter rail line, what about the line to Waterloo, also a popular line. No mention is made of the needs of those requiring access to medical facilities in Twyford, Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell. This mini bus service will not meet those needs. As for the needs of pensioners and of limited mobility, they are ignored under these proposals. Clearly the applicant is naive about the travel needs of existing and future residents of Hurst.

The mini bus is a proposal aimed to “catch the eye”. It is ill thought out, and no more than a “suggestion put forward for consideration”. There is no guarantee of delivery and as such, **should be discounted**. A ‘paper proposal’ of a ‘minibus’ with no guarantee of delivery cannot and **does not** make Hurst into a sustainable location.

- The applicant is proposing rerouting the existing 128/129 bus service through the development. In doing so they will make the limited, inefficient bus service less attractive to the existing residents of Hurst. The proposed minibus may also reduce the patronage of the existing service calling into question its viability. In effect this would **reduce sustainability**.
- The applicant is proposing ‘**advisory**’ cycle lanes from Hurst to Twyford station along the A321 and Lodge Road. Again they exclude those who may wish to cycle towards Woodley, Winnersh, Wokingham or Bracknell. An ‘**advisory**’ cycle lane on narrow and busy roads leading to a single train station **does nothing** to improve sustainability. The applicant clearly has not attempted to cycle those unlit roads in the depth of winter or in pouring rain. Not something many have tried more than once, and only for the accomplished or fool hardy cyclist!
- The applicant further ‘proposes’ the following **unguaranteed** ‘sweeteners’:
 - A **possible** bike hub
 - A **possible** car share club
 - A **potential** new footpath through School Road Recreation Park to the rear of the village convenience store

The applicant’s choice of the words **possible and potential** demonstrates that these **possible and potential** sweeteners should be discounted as they are **unguaranteed**. Do they enhance sustainability? Clearly they **do not!**

The harm arising from the proposals

“ **Harm means harm!** “

The applicant claims that by reducing the number of houses from 200 to 99 they **halve the harm** caused by the development. This is such a **silly, naive and misleading claim**.

It beggars belief that they should say this, let alone believe that this will be the case.

- The loss of a greenfield is a **total loss**, not half a loss!
- The damage to the ancient landscape will be **total**, not half!
- The harm to the ecosystem is **total**, not half. The field currently has a number of resident mammals, including foxes and deer. Are they claiming that harm will befall upon only half of the population of these animals!!! Preposterous. In fact their ecological report **negligently excludes** mention of these resident animals. Conveniently swept “under the hedgerow”! Mind you we should be impressed by the ecologists ability to time travel as they claim to have completed their survey in December 2024! Yet in the same report they admit it was rushed and relies on outdated data as some aspects, such as the bat survey, have yet to be completed. The ecology report is therefore **not fit for purpose** and should be disregarded.
- The pressure upon the local waste water system will be significantly impacted no matter whether 200 or 99 homes. The Thames Water pumping station in Broadhinton can not cope with any more demand. The harm is **total, not halved**.
- The discharge of water runoff from the proposed development into the non functional Hatchgate Ditch will continue to lead to localised flooding elsewhere in Hurst. The applicant doesn't seem to mind that their proposals will result in the flooding of existing homes in Hurst. Flood risk due to this development **cannot be halved!**

The applicant claims that the harm caused by their latest development proposal **halves the harm** caused by their previous proposal is an **admission** that their proposal **CAUSES HARM**.

Harm means harm. **Zero harm** is what the residents of Hurst ask for, **not 50% harm!**

Fact or fiction

“ **They don't have a clue!** “

Clearly the applicant does not know the area, for if they did they would understand the difficulties that families currently have finding secondary school places for their children, and when they do find places, the difficulty they face in finding transport to take them there. WBC are currently having to provide taxis to take children to numerous schools within the borough not served by the 128/129 bus route. This is a huge financial burden upon WBC. This development would only add to this burden.

Walking and cycling to secondary schools is almost impossible, especially in the depths of winter. Piggott is just one school. Forest School in Winnersh, Waingels College in Woodley and Holt School in Wokingham invariably require parents to take their children by car, not only for normal school hours, but also for pre-school clubs, as well as collection from after school clubs and sports events.

They also have no idea how difficult it is to get an appointment at the oversubscribed GP practices, none of which can easily be accessed other than by private car. Try getting to medical appointments at the Bracknell health centre other than by car!

Ecology

“ Wanton ecological destruction has already taken place! “



The importance of maintaining the semi rural aspect of Hurst must not be underestimated.



At night my wife and I often see and hear the sounds of nocturnal wildlife. Bats fly, and foxes and deer roam. At times horses and donkeys can be heard snoring! These and other sights and sounds are what makes living in Hurst unique and desirable. Please WBC, do not deny future generations such experiences. Do not allow such sights and sounds to be replaced with the sight and sound of urban life, especially 200 extra cars and vans.

Hurst is blessed with very little light pollution. Cramming an additional 99 houses into the village will destroy this. An irreplaceable loss not only to the residents, but also to the abundant wildlife, both resident and passing through these unique fields at the heart of the village.



The applicant's visual impact statement is laughable. Their specialist consultant concluded that the visual impact would be marginal. The statement disregards the irreplaceable visual loss to those who either live in adjacent properties or the many residents who enjoy the visual and audible tranquillity of these undisturbed fields. Come and take a look. Savour the views, be enchanted, but please do not allow them to be lost forever.

Unsurprisingly the applicant's claim that the proposed development will bring a net gain in biodiversity. It beggars belief that a net gain will accrue from the destruction of an ecosystem, contained in a field of valuable agricultural land of 10.68 hectares, surrounded by mature trees and hedgerow, to be replaced by the building of 99 houses, a network of roads, pathways and other hard standing. This is abject nonsense.

The applicant's ecological report states that the site has little biodiversity and ecological value. Could this be as a result of the ecological destruction which took place in 2021 and which they conveniently fail to mention?

- 5 March 2021



A topographical survey of the site took place. Note the two healthy mature oak trees which had been part of the landscape for generations. However they stood in the way of providing an access road into the larger (Tape Lane) field from the smaller (Lodge Road) field, the later of which has gated access to Lodge Road. Their fate was being decided!

- 10 March 2021



The two mature Oak trees were felled at the north west corner of the large field. This ecological vandalism predated the imposition of a TPO by a few days.

This wanton destruction has **and will not** be forgotten, and both the applicant and landowner need to be brought to account!



Further ecological vandalism has since taken place within the small field adjacent to Lodge Road, which had lain largely undisturbed for many years. On one occasion workmen were present from sunrise to sunset removing a container, felled trees and other log piles which had accumulated over the years.



The workmen have on two occasions used a wholly inappropriate (destructive) remote controlled scrubland clearing machine (e.g. McConnel Robocut). These are generally used on large civil projects to cleanse the land of fauna and vegetation. I observed this machine being used destructively for hours on end. No creature in that field would have been spared.

A few days later ecological surveys began!

Please WBC, do not be fooled by the misleading Ecological Impact Assessment submitted by the applicant nor of their stated environmental credentials. I personally witnessed the reptile survey being undertaken over a period of several weeks. It consisted of an individual “stomping” around the perimeter of the fields and abruptly lifting mats off the ground, briefly examining them before thumping them back down. This was repeated week after week. Unsurprisingly only one grass snake was recorded as having been observed.

This individual's actions do not comply with a “protocol” to be found on the internet (<https://reptile-survey.arc-trust.org/>) which describe how to properly carry out such surveys.



How could they fail not to see the wildlife we regularly observe? Because they failed to carry out a proper survey!

It's no wonder that the ecology survey is woeful and **not fit for purpose!**

Corporate Greed

“ They only wish to line their own pockets. “

Why then has the applicant chosen this site? For no other reason than commercial gain. Do they really care about the impact of adding 99 more homes to the village (a 17% increase), adding 240 more residents and at least 200 more cars.

The applicant is Mactaggart & Mickel Strategic Land Limited (Mac Mic). It should be noted that they no longer carry out developments, having divested of that arm of their business in recent years. They are acting for the landowner and not a developer.

In 2021 an application to build two four bedroom detached houses and two three bedroom semi-detached homes at land off Sawpit Road (211532) was refused. Planning permission was later given on appeal. The landowner quickly sold the land to a developer and through numerous subsequent applications to vary conditions, has since built homes substantially different in scale to what was allowed by the Planning Inspector.

Residents of Hurst are concerned that giving outline planning consent to an application based on mere proposals does not guarantee that a totally different development will ensue.

Mac Mic works with landowners to promote sites with an aim to gain **outline planning permission**. If successful the land owner is free to sell their land to a true developer and Mac Mic no doubt earn a sizable fee. The application by Mac Mic means that everything in their proposal is merely illustrative and cannot be relied upon to represent the scale and appearance of a future development.

Accordingly this explains why there are no guarantees to any of the proposals contained within the application. Mac Mic are in no position to give guarantees nor to obtain them. Furthermore the latest filed accounts for Mac Mic show that in the year ended 30 April 2023 the company incurred a loss of £1,851,000 and had net liabilities of £10,864,000. Eye watering losses and liabilities The going concern of the company is questionable and the company relies upon the support of its parent company, which itself relies on extensive loans.

A **failing organisation** desperate to recoup the losses sustained in its previous **failed attempt** to gain planning permission.

MENTAL HEALTH

“ The proposed development is harmful to mental health ”

I wish to end by asking why the applicant has not provided a Mental Health Impact Assessment?

Do they not have a duty to consider the effect this proposal has had, and will continue to have, on the mental well being of Hurst residents, especially those who live on the periphery of these fields?



The applicant is seeking to replace a field grazed by twenty horses and three donkeys and teeming with abundant fauna and flora with a network of roads, paths and 99 houses. This overwhelming development, situated to the rear of our property will have a profound impact upon the physical and mental well being of my wife and I. We have a right to live our life privately, and to enjoy the family life we have been accustomed to for twenty two years.

The same can be said of many neighbouring households.

The development would destroy the open aspect of our properties and therefore deprive many of their cherished personal private amenity, an amenity which has a profound **positive impact** on mental health and wellbeing.

SUMMARY

“ This application should be refused! “

In summary I urge the council to maintain their position regarding planning applications which do not meet (in particular) CP11, CP6 and CP9, and the NPPF, and accordingly I call upon the council to refuse this application on those grounds as well as the reasons stated above.

Please do not allow **a wrong development in the wrong place**. The “emerging Local Plan” has been published. It defines Hurst as a **Minor Settlement** where **development will be limited**. Please respect and adhere to the contents of the “emerging Local Plan”.

Please have respect for the **lived experiences** shared by myself and other Hurst residents. We know our communities better than desk based so-called “independent experts and consultants” who have a financial interest in promoting the misleading statements of the applicant.

“ The harm caused by this proposed development in an unsustainable location demonstrably outweighs any benefits. “

Enough is enough!

This application should be **refused!**