

Good morning Mr Davies, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is David Boyd and I am the Vice-Chair of St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council.

The Parish Council submitted a detailed objection to this application in September 2024. We also submitted an Appeal Statement, and associated evidence, in June of this year, reiterating our strong opposition to the development. We were a Rule 6 Party at the 2023 Inquiry for this site, and frankly we hoped we would not be back in this room two years later.

The Parish Council's submissions described in some detail all of reasons why we oppose this development. Our objections remain the same as they were to the previous application. We do not believe that the Appellant's changes make it any more acceptable - the reasons for the Inspector's rejection of the previous proposal remain absolutely valid.

Clearly, this proposed development is in conflict with a wide range of planning policies and the spatial strategy. Hurst is Limited Development Area - and remains so under the new Local Plan. There are very good reasons for this – the lack of potential for sustainable development, in both transport and facilities and services; a serious and escalating flood risk, at this site and across the wider village; a landscape, character, appearance and ecology at this site that are all demonstrably worth preserving. In short, this proposal would create a large-scale development in a fundamentally unsuitable and unsustainable location - and cause permanent harm to the community.

Several of my fellow residents will speak in a moment about the lack of facilities and services in Hurst, about our serious and growing flooding

Lane – to enable these turns physically to be made by the bus - going to deliver anything except harm to the people living there?

In summary, the Appellant is proposing a huge transport transformation in Hurst, trying to turn it into a sustainable transport location. The reality - on the ground - is that it just can't be done, as the Inspector found two years ago.

We hope that you will see all this on your site visit - and incidentally we would welcome the opportunity to accompany you on that.

I will end by simply reiterating our view that this site is a fundamentally unsuitable and unsustainable location for a large-scale housing development, and that would cause permanent harm to the community of Hurst. That is what the Inspector found in 2023, and that is what we hope you too will find that over the next eight days.

Thank you.

The Inspector in 2023 agreed with this. He said "*The proposed development will have a detrimental impact on the landscape and the character and appearance of the area, by reason of the quantum, scale, parameters and location of the development*".

Incidentally, that is all he said – he did not ever say, as the Appellant has implied - that a smaller number of houses might have been acceptable.

The Appellant has sought to overcome these objections by reducing the number of new houses – it is now a mere hundred. That is in the context of a village of around 440 existing houses – a 23% increase in size – still hugely disproportionate.

The Appellant proposes to leave a central green space, for now, and plant some more trees and hedges, and they will make great play of this and how it mitigates the visual impact. However, no amount of planting or leaving an area of manicured grass will be able to disguise the fact that two big, solid blocks of modern housing would be built on what is now open country. A suburban estate would be tacked onto the side of a rural village which is currently made up of a diverse range of mainly low density housing. These new houses would not, as the Appellant claims "*integrate into the existing character*". On the contrary, they would be totally out of character.

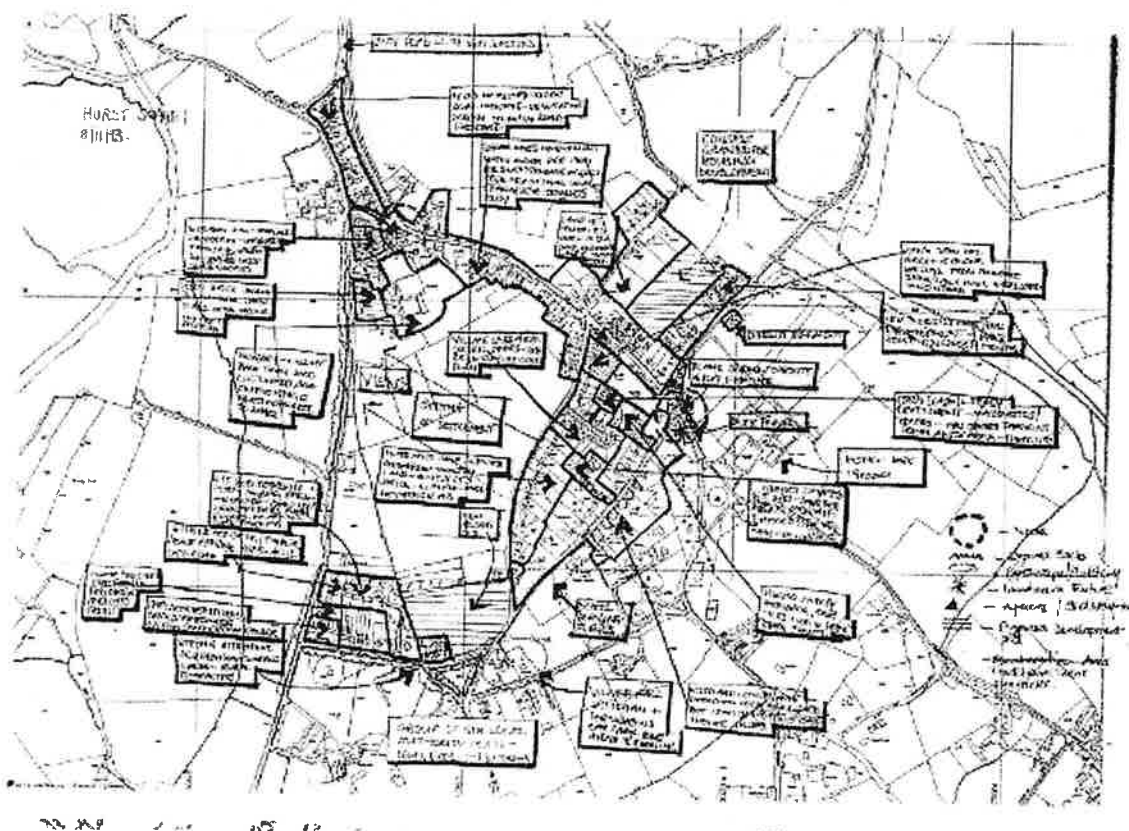
The Appellant says that the development would provide accessible open spaces and allotments. We already have accessible open spaces and allotments, and I do not think anyone in the village has ever expressed a wish to gain access to these fields as a communal amenity. This development adds no new amenity benefits for the community.

Lastly, on landscape, you will hear a lot about the gap between Hurst and Whistley Green, and the "inverted C" and "light touch" versus "fully

problem, and about biodiversity and the impact of this development on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

However I want to talk now – very briefly - about two of our principal objections – first, the negative impact on Landscape and Character - and secondly, the claim that Hurst can somehow be turned into a sustainable Transport location.

This site has always been an integral part of the rural landscape of Hurst. As far back as 1994, Wokingham District's survey of the built environment included a "Setting of Settlement" map of Hurst, that highlighted the views across these open fields from Tape Lane and Broadwater Lane. This was reinforced by the 2005 Design for Hurst document. The site's importance to our landscape and character is one of the – many – reasons why it has never been allocated in any District or Borough Plan.



the pavement. I am sorry but the Appellant's plan is just not practical or deliverable.

The same constraints on space apply to many of the village roadways where new, wider walkways are proposed. It is simply an issue about the physical space available.

The A321 is a busy road, and getting busier, especially at rush hour. Is it really desirable, never mind deliverable, on an A road, to create a new bottleneck in the middle of the village ?

Our submission highlighted the potential drawbacks with the proposed minibus service, including - the limited new capacity a 16-seat vehicle would provide; the funding model and sustainability of that; and the potential differential treatment of existing and new residents. Again, it is difficult to see a new material community benefit here.

You will hear a lot about the 128/129 bus service and its timetable and its reliability – not great, at just 86%. However, let me just read out a recent Facebook post - “I got moved by the Council from Shinfield to Hurst and was shocked by the bus service, specially as we don't drive and rely on public transport”. I remind you that this development would include 50 additional affordable homes, including social housing, some of whose residents would probably be similarly reliant on public transport.

The last transport proposal I want to highlight is the rerouting of the current bus service so that it would exit the development onto Tape Lane, and then turn into the A321. And the reverse for the journey in the other direction. The practical problems of a full-size bus negotiating these two tight turns are enormous. And why are the parking restrictions to be imposed on Tape

contiguous". However it is described, the fact is that on one side of this field is Hurst and on the other is Whistley Green - and if these houses are built, the debate is over – these two settlements will have become one.

So I submit that the Inspectors 2023 verdict remains valid. The developer's changes do not alter the fact that there will be a major detrimental impact to the landscape, and on the character and appearance of our village.

I am conscious of time, but let me briefly mention transport.

This proposal includes an enormously long and detailed Transport Plan, and reams of drawings, the latest submitted only ten days ago. The key elements are new, bigger footways along virtually every road near the site, a bollarded 20 mile-an-hour zone on the main A321 through the centre of the village, a new cycleway from Hurst to Twyford station, a new private minibus service to Twyford, and rerouting the current 128/129 bus service through the development and onto Tape Lane. All apparently to be paid for by the development of just 99 new houses - plus ongoing charges to new residents, including those in affordable homes.

Those of us who live in the village know that almost none of these ideas are feasible or deliverable, and some of them would cause significant harm.

For example, Wokingham Council prioritises cycling – and the Appellant refers to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the wish for a safe cycleway from Hurst to Twyford station. However, there is a reason why that is still just on WBC's wish list - if it was feasible to put in a new cycleway to Twyford station, it would have been done years ago. There is simply not enough physical space on the road for two lanes of traffic and a 3 metre wide cycle lane to co-exist safely. There are also side roads and many driveways on the stretches where cycling would effectively be along