

Planning inquiry – statement – Katherine Howe

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience of living in the village of Hurst.

I moved to Hurst in 2019 with my family consisting of my Husband, two children and our dog. We have always lived rurally and live an outdoors and rural lifestyle. In 2021 I brought a horse having had a few years break due to children. The horse is stabled 2 mins drive away through Whistley Green.

I wish to share my experience of living in Hurst and therefore the impact that I believe would significantly harm the current local residents should this development be allowed to go ahead. Firstly, I wish to address the realities of living rurally as a two working parent family. Our two children, aged 6 and 8 attend the state primary in the nearby village of Waltham st Lawrence. We did not apply for the Hurst village school as at the time, they did not offer full wrap round childcare provision. Previous to this, our son attended full time nursery at Muddy Ducks based at Dinton pastures in outer Hurst.

Both my husband and I work full time for companies based in London. This means we both work a hybrid set up but are expected in the office each a couple of times a week. A day where we are both working in London starts with a 5.30 alarm where I drive into the office. Duncan will then drive the kids to breakfast club (£7 a day) for 7.45am, before driving on to Maidenhead to catch as early a train as possible. He cannot go to Twyford as if you get there later than 7am you are unable to park in the station car park or in one of the 50 plus spaces on Just Park within a 10 min walk, and the controversial parking on Hurst Road, there is no other alternative at this time of day. To the other end of the day, I have to have left the office by 4pm to guarantee to get home by 5.45 to allow me to collect both kids from after school care club (£28/day). Previous to both kids being at the same school, this was even more complicated to also work in a nursery drop off and pick up within the hours of 8-6. All of this, requires significant driving to fulfil our needs, as one expects when they move to a rural community.

In the summer one might think Hurst makes a lovely walk to the station – however despite the time being impractical at all times of the year to make it to the train for drop off/pick up from school, in the winter, this is not only impractical but also unsafe due to the lack of street lights and narrow paths. Should you wish to take a taxi, this will cost £20+ each way and you're lucky to find a bus at all. An addition in the inner Hurst village of the scale of this development will not only make primary school places locally even harder to come by and nursery spaces impossible (Muddy Ducks have a waiting list until Sept 2027 currently). Due to the infrastructure in the area, the need to drive everywhere, and the time involved in making this even vaguely possible for working parents – the whole concept is completely unsustainable. Having then looked at the most recent secondary school allocations in Wokingham district, almost every school had to increase their intake this year above the PAN number due to oversubscription; already we are going to struggle to get our children into any of the local schools, let alone have any form of choice.

The amenities in the village are that suitable to a rural population; we live a 3 min walk to the village shop that is hopefully due to reopen soon, however due to its size and product range, we would use it solely to post a parcel or pick up a pint of milk should we run out unexpectedly – the footprint of the shop means that the products available will be purely in the top up shop category. Unfortunately the 'village bakery' doesn't appear to be open any longer, but when it was, it was sporadic hours mostly selling takeaway curry. This means all shopping must be done by driving to a local

supermarket or having it via delivery, meaning more traffic on the local roads. We have 3 pubs, 1 of which has struggled to make a success (the green man), 1 which we would only use for the kids to play outside in the summer, the other is lovely, but unsafe to walk to, so instead we would again have to use our car to travel there. For children, all activities that we take them to we have to get in the car to drive elsewhere (swimming, gymnastics, horse riding, tennis, stagecoach). And right now, my children are in holiday summer camp over at Blue Coat school in Sonning which I have driven them to before this due to the hours offered at this camp. Similarly, to visit a dentist (private only, no NHS availability), doctor, physio, vet or hairdresser, we also have to travel by car to various other locations. The amount of extra traffic that would be on the roads due to this development has been wildly underestimated.

The second area I wish to address is the lack of safety on the local roads for the current rural lifestyle. I try to hack my horse out twice a week, however the level of speeding and awful driving in the village makes this very dangerous. I try my best to avoid Lodge road completely as despite it being a 30, drivers often ignore this, and will overtake you at a distance that you could reach over and tap the roof of the car. Despite being a rural area, we are limited in our off road bridleways. A development of this size will completely change the feel and community of the villages of Hurst and Whistley Green, making them instead suburban and forcing all those who have rural hobbies and interests to relocate.

As a family, we would be devastated to the impact this development would have on our lifestyle and community, completely changing who and what Hurst is.