

PLANNING REF : 242067
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Tape Lane
:
: RG10 0DP
SUBMITTED BY : Dr Gemma Moore
DATE SUBMITTED : 18/09/2024

COMMENTS:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal. I have looked at the proposal and believe that this proposal should be rejected.

First and foremost, this proposal introduces a development onto a greenfield site which is outside the Development Limit of the Parish and village of Hurst. It should be refused on these grounds. The site is located in designated countryside (Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy Policy CP11), and does not meet any of the exception categories as identified by the National Planning Policy Framework. I understand this site was submitted in the call for potential development sites within Wokingham's Local Plan - but was not allocated. There were key justifiable reasons for this. It was deemed "unsuitable" - partly because the development would lead to an increase in cars, and the increase in cars would impact the local road network. And, any proposed development should seek to support opportunities for reducing the need to travel by private car: this proposal does not do that.

Despite the suggestions of bike racks, advisory cycle lanes and a minibus, there will still be an increase in car usage. From my 10-year experience of living here, the reality of living in this beautiful semi-rural location is that I am, and my family are dependent on cars.

Where we live, we have a precariousness and unreliability public transport system. I often get caught up at work or my trains are late - which doesn't fit with the schedule of the buses - this means my transport options to and from the station are critically reduced. I rely on my car, lift and taxis to get to the station so I can get to work. There is no doubt, that the occupants of this development will do the same. It is exceptionally difficult for us, a working family to get our two children to their respective schools. We are lucky to get our son into the local primary school (which is at full capacity), but our daughter is at secondary school in Early/Reading. For her to travel by public transport would require 2 or 3 buses to get there (depending on time of day). The estimated journey time on the bus is 1 hour 42 mins (marginally quicker than walking - which would be 1 hour 52 mins). However, we opt for the 15 mins in the car - but again we rely on our cars.

Likewise, access to doctors, dentists and chemists are a car drive away.

Our village's ability to support our daily activities - travelling to work; collecting kids from school; picking up shopping for dinner - is fragile. 99 homes, and the influx in population, is unsuitable

for Hurst and the neighbouring village of Whistley Green. It would lead to increased pressure on our fragile infrastructure and ultimately increase car usage to access services elsewhere.

The mini bus is worth commenting on as it is an unsuitable solution to the issue of public transport. Firstly, it is financially unviable - it is estimated ranging between 770 - 1000 per household per annum, if everyone contributes (which is unlikely). Secondly, it is limited in route and timing: the mini bus service will only run between Hurst, Twyford and Wargrave twice an hour between 0700 and 1000 and 1500 and 1900 on weekdays and Saturdays. Modern life is busy and unpredictable - and it can't be that our days are planned around twice an hour between 0700-1000. Finally is disproportionate: only 16 residents will be able to use the new mini-bus service at any one time. Considering the size of the development, and existing residents, this isn't a feasible solution to the fragility of a transport system, and does not solve the wider issues around Hurst being unsustainable. As a result, this development will lead to an increase of cars.

The addition of around 230 cars to local, rural lanes will make walking and cycling even less attractive than they are now, reducing opportunities for social connection and decreasing physical activity. The proposal does mention advisory cycle lanes, but these feel tokenistic - looking at them, they are narrow in places, and will not make the cycle routes safer. Furthermore, the proposal to widen footways, sharing of footways and include advisory cycle routes, are limited to Twyford and do not mitigate the lack of continuity of footways within the wider network around the village - again it doesn't deal with the wider unsustainable location. The reality is our walking environment - down lanes with no pavements, next to traffic - becomes unattractive or considered dangerous at certain times of day or during certain seasons.

The development has been proposed without any meaningful consideration of the real, day-to-day of needs of the existing community. Current research stresses the importance of including technical and community knowledge are both required to create places that work for people: that are healthy and sustainable (Pineo 2022). Ideally, any development would begin by asking and understanding existing context and existing communities' experiences and needs. This development represents suburban development into the open countryside: it doesn't fit with the context. It would create a sudden intensification of built form, eroding the rural character of the village of Hurst and Whistley Green. The land has stood unchanged for centuries providing a rural backdrop to the ancient settlements of Whistley Green. The development is no just one, but 2 developments, doesn't fit with the local context and sense of place. I live on Tape Lane, and the field is part of the lane - it is a site of significance, providing views across the landscape. The proposed development will result in the loss of a key element which is characteristic of the landscape character - noted not just by residents but also by the Inspector at the recent Appeal.

The experiences of the existing communities have not been

considered, and from my opinion, little thought has been given to how the existing communities will be affected. The existing communities of Hurst and Whistley Green will be changed: negatively impacted by the introduction of this out of place, 'suburban' housing estates on the sparse, rural settlement.

Finally, as local resident, I know - and have seen how ecologically rich the landscape is. We have numerous species of birds, stag beetles, grass snakes - all that live in the field and surrounding hedgerows. Where is the enhancement of biodiversity in this proposal? This has not considered, and as such the proposed development will lead to unintended disbenefits to local communities and the local habitat. The "green washing" of the site with manicured spaces - which will be for passive "enjoyment" by residents - will not make up in any form for loss of the current field which provides nesting and feeding opportunities for a rare and declining farmland birds. There will be significant harm to the biodiversity resulting from this development and the wildlife corridor cannot be adequately mitigated. And of course, any construction process will have a long term major adverse impact on the existing and future ecology of this site. It would radically change it.

For the reasons described above, the proposed development would have a negative impact on the local communities and I would like Wokingham to reject this application.