Kingsmere Residents Association

C/o 3 Goodwood Close

Bicester

Oxfordshire

OX26 1AA

Ms Linda Griffiths

Principal Planning Officer (Major Developments)

Bodicote House

Banbury

Oxfordshire

OX15 4AA

25 February 2016

Dear Ms Griffiths

**Reserved matters submission 15/02103/REM**

**Local Centre at Kingsmere, Bicester**

We write in relation to the above application, following a presentation by the architects in relation to the scheme on Thursday 28th January. They suggested that you have raised some concerns in relation to the proposals for the local centre and community building and explained that they are in the process of seeking to resolve some of these, including the introduction of a first floor element above the retail units to provide potential for office accommodation.

We have subsequently reviewed your letter dated 14th January.

We have worked closely with Countryside, their architects and Vicki Zielinski at Cherwell District Council in relation to this scheme and are fully supportive of it. Once delivered it will provide a great community asset and the focal point for public activity and engagement within Kingsmere.

As explained to the architects when we met them we would like to see some additional cycle parking provided within the public realm and note that this was also referred to within your letter. We understand that this is being addressed through the submission of amended plans.

With respect to some of the other comments set out within your letter we would not want to see any reduction in the amount of parking proposed to the front of the local centre. We also do not support the use of render on the scheme, which is not considered to be appropriate for public buildings and would result in an unnecessary burden on the community to have to maintain and upkeep the finish, which would be particularly susceptible to vandalism and graffiti.

While we have no objection to the inclusion of some additional commercial accommodation at first floor level we would not wish to see any form of residential uses within the local centre, which would place additional pressure on parking and traffic flows in the immediate vicinity of the centre. We would not want to see any additional floors of development introduced for the sake of it. The primary school is a focal building and is primarily single storey while still being a focal building.

Turning to the design of the buildings, as noted above we have been involved with the design process and support the approach taken, particularly with respect to how it will stand out from the surrounding residential buildings, creating more of a destination location.

Additionally we also understand one of the reasons for refusal for the Bicester Gateway project to the edge of the Kingsmere site was the height of the buildings. Adding floors to the Local Centre will increase the height and be a direct contradiction of your reasons for refusal of a positive retail development Bicester so urgently needs yet Banbury appears to have no problem in obtaining.

It is quite clear there is one rule for one Town and one for another and this must stop immediately. If it continues we will have no alternative than to raise this concern at the highest of Central Government levels. There must be fair and equal rulings on all developments where ever they may be in the County.

May we also take this opportunity to remind you that Bicester is constantly promoted as the fastest growing town in Europe yet the retail offer in the town is shambolic for such a rapidly growing population. It lurches from Gucci and Prada for the rich tourists to charity shops for the local Council Tax paying residents! That is not acceptable. As such, residents have to travel out of Bicester (by car mostly as it’s the easiest method) to do general shopping in the likes of Banbury, Oxford, Aylesbury or Milton Keynes thus making a complete mockery of our ‘eco-town’ status. Surely you cannot be proud of that?

We have invited you and your colleagues to meet with us to discuss key issues. Indeed, Victoria Prentis MP also called for a meeting to discuss issues such as the Middleton Stoney Road yet there appears to be a reluctance to meet which is most unhelpful and unprofessional. We would like to extend another invitation to you to meet your constituents to discuss key issues affecting Kingsmere and as such invite you to our Kingsmere Residents Association AGM on Tuesday 3 May at the new St Edburgs School on the estate. We have welcomed many guest speakers since our first meeting and would willingly give you the floor for ten minutes to talk about key developments in Bicester.

We trust that these comments will be taken into account in your determination of the application and that permission for this much needed development will be granted shortly. We also look forward to welcoming you to our AGM in May.

Yours sincerely

Graham Brogden & Viki Heil

Co-Chairs, Kingsmere Residents Association