

Firethorn Developments Planning Appeal Core Documents - Land at North West Bicester, Home Farm, Lower Farm and SGR2 Caversfield

Planning Application reference: 21/01630/OUT

Planning Appeal reference: 23/00062/NON

Location: Land at North West Bicester, Home Farm, Lower Farm and SGR2 Caversfield

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PAUL TROOP

I, PAUL TROOP of 6 Foundation Square, Graven Hill, Bicester OX25 2AQ will say as follows:-

1. My name is Paul Troop. I am a resident of Graven Hill, Bicester. This is another development in Bicester that has similarities with Elmsbrook, but is on the other side of the town. It is a self-build development, but attracts people who care about the environment and who like to walk and cycle, much like residents of Elmsbrook.
2. I do not have a car, though sometimes have access to my ex-wife's vehicle. This means I tend to cycle most places. I have a folding bike that I use when I travel to London, a Dutch city bike that I use when cycling around Bicester (such as today), and a cargo bike that I use for shopping, taking the dog around, and picking my children and my ex up from places like the station.
3. When I was younger, and living in London, I would take risks while cycling, such as cycling on busy roads. Now I am a bit older, I do not do that any longer as I feel it is too dangerous. Particularly with two young children, I do not feel it is safe to share busy roads with cars. If I am cycling on the road, I only tend to do it where the roads are slow (20mph) and quiet, with few vehicles. Otherwise, I will use cycle paths, of which there are a good number in Bicester.
4. In relation to cycle paths, it is really important that these are fully segregated from pedestrians. For pedestrians, it is really unpleasant to share space with faster moving cycles, particularly if you are vulnerable such as being elderly, disabled, a parent, or with caring responsibilities. This problem is getting worse with increasing numbers of e-bikes. Equally, it is not nice as a cyclist to share with vulnerable pedestrians, who often do not like to see cyclists sharing the space. This can make interactions awkward and discouraging.

5. For cycle routes, it is really important that they are objectively and subjectively safe along their entire route. In Bicester, there are a number of 'black spots' which are very difficult to use. For example, on our way to school we cycle, but there is a busy road to cross. Because of the high number of vehicles which rarely give way to let us cross, we can sometimes wait 5-10 minutes just to cross a few metres of road.
6. Because of legacy design, there are a number of these problem areas on the cycling network, which act a bit like a blood clot and disrupt the entire journey, meaning that people choose to use other means of transport rather than risk them. One of these legacy areas is the Banbury Road junction, just south of Elmsbrook. Oxfordshire County Council is spending £5M on improving this junction so that it will have 'Rolls Royce' standard provision for walking and cycling.
7. Charlotte Avenue is then a crucial link in the network for walking and cycling. There is no other safe route to access the development. At present, the low traffic flows mean that it is reasonably safe to cycle on the carriageway. However, as I understand it, the applicant wants to direct the additional traffic caused by this development along Charlotte Avenue, which will then make it unsafe to walk and cycle, also discouraging most cyclists from using any routes which incorporate this road (as most journeys starting and ending in Elmsbrook will). Once it is no longer possible to use the carriageway, it is necessary to provide segregated paths. However, there does not physically seem to be a conceivable way to fit segregated paths along Charlotte Avenue, particularly the length between the primary school and the B4100. While this is said to be the county council's problem, I feel that there is not a workable solution.
8. I will be cycling to Elmsbrook this evening with my dog to go running with friends there. However, if traffic volumes along this road are allowed to increase, this would probably not be possible in the future. This would be a great shame.
9. I therefore object to this appeal on highways grounds, primarily on the basis that, as currently conceived, it would severely and detrimentally impact on the ability of residents to travel by bike. However, I have listened to all the other objections which I agree with. There would seem to be a wide range of other serious detriments that would negatively affect the lives of present and future residents.

10. I am available to be cross examined on this statement.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings for contempt of court may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed: 

PAUL TROOP

Dated: 13 June 2023