

LAND SOUTH OF GREEN LANE- CHESTERTON

Planning Inquiry 6th February 2023

Chesterton Parish Council Representations

LAND SOUTH OF GREEN LANE CHESTERTON

Representation on behalf of Chesterton Parish Council

My name is Stephen Webster and I am here today speaking on behalf of Chesterton Parish Council. I have lived in the village for the last seven years. I was co-opted on to the Parish Council a few years ago to advise, in particular, on major planning applications as I have worked in the land and property industry all my professional life.

As you will be aware, the Parish Council submitted a strong and very comprehensive objection to this proposal when the application was made to Cherwell District Council. This document, along with all those other objections from neighbouring parishes, CPRE and others plus, the 100 or so individual objections are, of course, on the Planning Portal and no doubt you will be reviewing them.

We also made representations at the Planning Committee meeting on 23 July 2023. I recommend that you listen to the webcast of that meeting, which is publicly available on the District Council's website, under Agendas and Minutes – Planning Committee. You will see the considered approach and strength of feeling of the committee, lead the elected members to unanimously refuse the application. Barry Wood, leader of the Council, is particularly vociferous in his many criticisms of the proposal.

I appreciate that much planning argument will undoubtedly flow at inquiries such as this, but what I want to do is speak from a local perspective, which can often be relegated by higher ethereal debate.

First of all, I recognise that as a country, we do need more housing, given our increasing population. We have to have the right housing in the right place.

Those living in a particular location or moving to it, have a right to know what the plan is and that decisions will be made in accordance with that plan.

Plans have to be transparent, relevant, up to date and robust. Cherwell have such a plan 2015-2031. It is that plan against which proposals for development should be judged.

Allow me to paint a picture of Chesterton:

It is one of 24 variously sized villages in Cherwell and sits in a rural area surrounded on all sides by productive farmland, woodland and parkland. We have our distinct character. Originally a Roman settlement, Chesterton village has organically grown over the years.

There has been some phased development of a size in keeping with the character of the village. Modest development projects were undertaken in the 70's and 80's, together with infilling and extensions etc. in the last 10 years we have had two residential schemes of 45 houses each. We currently have something just over 400 houses and a population of 1200. We are still as relatively small village but one with a strong community feel.

Chesterton has very limited village services, for example neither shop nor health facilities and poor transport links, other than by car. Whilst close to Bicester, Chesterton is not absolutely not Bicester from which it is separated by the newly planted Burnehyll Wood.

It is, of course, not only the fabric of the buildings and their setting that creates a village character – it is importantly the scale of that village. Were this proposal to succeed, Chesterton would, overnight, see the number of houses increase by 34%. As the properties would probably have a higher density of occupation, the increase to the village population would be nearer 40%.

This cannot be right and indeed wouldn't be right for any settlement, large or small. In fact, as the village has already accommodated 35 dwellings in the current plan period, Chesterton would actually be seeing something around a 50% increase.

Consultation

I would like to raise briefly the question of the consultation process on this application, as we have noted the suggestion that the Parish Council were somehow supportive of the development provided certain facilities were included. Nothing could be further than the truth. We stated at the outset that Chesterton was not a sustainable location and a development on this scale would swamp the village. I am afraid "consultation" seems to be more of a box ticking exercise. Whilst community engagement is reported no mention is made of the result of it...namely that the Parish Council and indeed the whole community were opposed to it. Clearly as is usual if the development were to be consented we would hope to be involved in any s106 negotiations.

I also want to point out that the applicant states that there would be benefits to the village if more playing fields were provided. This is not true. In fact more than 90% of the memberships of the very well run and successful Football Club and Cricket Club come from outside the village. Sometimes this does result in parking issues. So additional playing fields are not seen as a positive by the village.

..

Public Transport , Footpaths and Cycleways

Well basically there are none.

The town of Bicester is fairly close by and does have facilities and services such as shops, post office, doctors etc . However both roads out of Chesterton towards Bicester are designated “not authorised for pedestrian use” Quite frankly it would be dangerous to walk on them. Contrary to the appellants advisors opinion they are narrow, busy roads..in fact very busy in the morning and evening rush hours as the village roads become a rat run to avoid congestion at Jnct 9 ,the A34 and M40.

If there are any traffic incidents on these roads the situation for all the rural villages in the area can at times be horrendous

There are no footpaths out of the village other than across three muddy fields .

There are no dedicated cycle ways out of the village . I have seen the occasional bicycle on the A4095 but never on the Church Road route to Bicester which is narrow and has two nasty bends on it and ends up at the extremely busy roundabout on the A41 by the Park and Ride. Its bad enough negotiating this roundabout in a car never mind a bicycle (its more of a chicane really) where speeding traffic on the A41 makes it almost impossible to get out.

Sir I do hope that when you make your site inspection you will be able to judge this for yourself.

As to public transport it is accepted that there is none. Play has been made of the possible funding of a bus to serve Chesterton from the proposed Great

Wolf Resort development planned just outside the village. In this regard I would make the following points:

The S106 obligation is to fund a bus service from the Great Wolf Resort site to the Bicester stations for 10 years to service those visiting or working at the resort. No details are available as to the route, frequency .. eg will it just go straight down the A4095? We just don't know.

As of today it has to be said that there is no certainty that the Great Wolf project itself will proceed and if it does when that might be. Whilst some off-site infrastructure works have been undertaken including a footpath from the site to Chesterton nothing has been done to facilitate links to Bicester and no road improvements have been carried out. The infrastructure works are not connected and question marks remain about water supply which we were told would have to come via a new pipe line from the neighbouring village of Kirtlington which is located 3kms away on the other side of the M40..There remains a lot of uncertainty surrounding the site and Great Wolf have actually pulled back from starting on site and are currently focussed on a site at Basingstoke .

If the Great Wolf project were to be constructed as it is a destination/stayover family resort it was accepted at the appeal that 90% of those visiting would actually arrive by car which is bound to impact on village roads including Green Lane

It should also be noted that many rural bus services fail because hardly anyone uses them .Its rather different in an urban are where a bus stop is normally close at hand and the next bus will be coming along soon. People in rural villages prefer to use their car... a journey to the centre of Bicester by bus would take 22/24 minutes and by car 8 minutes (Wates figures) Plus the need to factor in carrying heavy shopping from supermarkets, household stores, garden centres etc.. To be honest if you live in village with no substantial services you need a car. From a practical point of view that would make it extremely difficult for any new resident who might not be able to afford a car.

School

I would now like to raise the question of the village school.

It is an excellent school with a very good reputation and some great teachers. It serves primarily the village of Chesterton but also the neighbouring villages of Wendlebury, Weston on the Green and Middleton Stoney who do not have a school. The number of households in the catchment is about 990 and the population is 2400.

The school has a capacity of circa 200 and is full. In fact last year 8 children had to be turned away. There is no scope to extend it.

There are indeed some children who attend from Bicester -- as presumably the idea of an education in a small successful village school is appealing to their parents. It is likely that those who currently attend from Bicester will not be keen to move their children to the new school coming on stream in Kingsmere Bicester. The wish for siblings to attend the same school will mean that this factor is likely to be maintained for the foreseeable future. Chesterton school advise that last year they did accept 7 children from outside the catchment who have siblings at the school but that with children from families in the newer housing developments in Chesterton coming of school age this may not be possible in the future.

Using the same criteria as used for the Wates development (147 households requires 45 places at primary school)-- which actually seems quite low-- the size of the school to cater for the existing catchment 990 households (after making an allowance for other possible options) the present school capacity for the catchment seems about right.

So OCC having accepted that the village school cannot cater for this scale of development have assumed they are all going to Bicester and have proposed a

payment of £1.5m to further expand primary school facilities in Bicester should this development be consented. I am certainly no planning lawyer but I was under the impression that there is usually a requirement for CIL payments for education to be directed to the location of the development that gives rise for the need for those payments..namely Chesterton.

In any event it seems that all children from the development would have to travel to Bicester...probably by car (not very sustainable). It would also have a serious negative impact on social integration in the village.

Planning grounds for refusal.

I don't propose to debate the housing supply figures which the District Council are confident are robust.. What I would say though that even if these were not accepted this development fails in so many ways and in our opinion would cause considerable harm to the village of Chesterton.

The list of reasons for refusal (10) are there for all to see. Its hard to imagine a proposal that is in conflict with so many policies..

To supplement all the comments we made at the time of the application I just want to make a few observations on the planning arguments which will be discussed at this Inquiry.

The local plan is up to date. Wates accept that the basket of policies which are most important is not out of date. The development plan has primacy and any application therefore should be determined in accordance with the development plan.

It is agreed in the statement of common ground that the so called emerging local plan is of limited weight. Along with many others...neighbouring parish councils , CPRE, our MP etc we have strongly objected to the preferred options draft allocation for the very reasons that the Council has used to refuse the current application. We have had constructive discussions with Cherwell District Council in this regard. The local plan review is still at an early stage and there is still a long way to go in the process. I do know from the head of plans that CDC have received over a thousand representations on the draft plan which will all have to be considered before any final document is put before an Inspector at Inquiry. So as stated these proposals need to be judged against the current plan 2015-2031

Under the current plan development is to be focussed on villages with facilities. The classification system in the present plan is somewhat simplistic... and I understand is set to be reviewed. As the case officer has stated there is a wide

variation in size and amenities of so called Category A villages. In addition to the considerable sustainable shortcomings of the location the services in Chesterton are very limited compared with many other villages. We have no shop(s) and no health care facilities. For instance, compare Chesterton to other villages eg Bloxham which is 4 times the size and has very many services.

The local plan requires the rural villages to take 750 dwellings in total.. Whilst this is not a cap it is a guide and the figure is there for a reason. It should not vary materially from that figure so that it accords with the local plans spatial strategy which focusses development in the urban areas in the District namely Banbury and Bicester.

Chesterton has already taken 45 houses and going forward is prepared to take its fair share. If the appeal were to succeed it would have taken nearly 200 houses out of the 750.. That is clearly not a balanced approach and in theory could even be a limiting factor on other locations that might need some additional housing ..to support a village shop for example.

As we know in any event the 750 figure has already been met and in fact exceeded. Whilst it may not be a cap the figure is there for a reason and if materially exceeded could undermine the spatial strategy in the plan. I understand that the number of consented and under construction/pipeline dwellings in the rural areas has now reached nearly 1200 during the present plan period.. Any increase would not be consistent with spatial planning policy..

I would now like to refer to appeal decision 2016 on land in the Hale close to the Wates site

This decision was made in accordance with the current adopted plan and is important .

I believe this decision is significant because:

The Inspector in her decision notes that:

“The 750 figure must have some constraining influence”

“Chesterton has a limited range of facilities in the village itself”...
(NOTHING HAS CHANGED)

“Whilst close to Bicester, the roads are not pedestrian or cycle friendly due to their width and the traffic using them. There are no footways and consequently, cycling or walking to Bicester is unlikely to be a realistic option.”.(NOTHING HAS CHANGED)

“The bus service is subsidised and not viable without subsidy”..

The subsidy was removed and the highly infrequent bus service cancelled. The Wates bus provision is reliant on Great Wolf subsidies and a bus service which has not yet been implemented)

“Chesterton would not be a sustainable location for the scale of new development being proposed” (51 dwellings.. Wates would be 3 times as large)

“The development would conflict with policy ESD 1 which requires the impact of development on climate change to be mitigated by, amongst other things delivering development that seeks to reduce the need to travel and which encourages sustainable travel options” (Wates proposal does not.)

On landscape impact the Inspector concluded that there would be a significantly harmful effect on the setting of Chesterton and on the rural character and appearance of the area. Wates is in a similar location and in fact extends out further into the countryside.

Environmental

Finally I do want to register once again our continuing concerns relating to potential infrastructure issues. Thames water have raised certain water supply issues and whilst they recognise that as the existing sewer system takes ground water as well as foul, it does get overloaded.

Unfortunately we can demonstrate that following periods of intense rainfall, which are increasingly common these days, raw sewage flows out of the sewer on Church Road. We contact Thames water regularly to clean and disinfect the road. They say there is little they can do about it as the system is overloaded all the way to the sewage works in Bicester. The additional sewage from the Waters proposal can only make matters much worse.

We have made the point that the subject site is home to a herd of deer and from time to time geese. On the immediately adjoining land there are polecats, otters, badgers, barn owls and other protected species which might be effected. One of the residents of Chesterton Professor David Jones is I believe going to talk to these ecological issues on Thursday.

So to conclude we hope that at the end of this Inquiry you will agree that this appeal should be rejected.

Sir you will be making your site visit tomorrow and let us know if you require anything. We have made available the community centre which might be helpful if the weather is inclement. There is a private office in there for your use should you so wish.

Thankyou