

KHVR VISTRY APPEAL VIDEO TRANSCRIPT (May 2024)

COALESCENCE

20" - TOM SADLER, ACTION GROUP MEMBER & HANWELL RESIDENT

This planning application covers two fields. The field behind me is actually part of the Drayton Parish and it also covers the field the other side of Gullicott Lane, which is part of Hanwell Parish. So where I'm standing now is looking towards Drayton, but behind the camera is the edge of the Hanwell Conservation Area, so we are very close to Hanwell village.

We're currently on the edge of the field that is proposed for housing development and this is the strategic gap between Banbury and Hanwell. Just beyond that tree line over there is what was known as Banbury 5 which is now Hanwell Chase, and that was developed under the current Local Plan. And when that was approved, the planning inspector, when reviewing that plan at the time, said that that represented the extent that Banbury could extend, in order to protect the Conservation Area of Hanwell.

This green buffer is what prevents coalescence of Banbury and Hanwell. Preventing material and unacceptable coalescence – which is in the Local Plan – is one of the reasons why the application was originally refused. And there are precedents of the planning inspector previously refusing other appeals on the grounds that they would cause coalescence, resulting in a gap that is larger than the current gap that we have here.

This land protrudes like a peninsular on the north of Banbury – it's not in the current Local Plan or the proposed Local Plan that's emerging, which is regulation 19. It isn't something that is wanted by local people or part of the Local Plan. We've said no to housing here and the local Council have said that too, so it isn't really wanted by the local residents.

I think an objective assessment of this planning application is that there are some gains, but very limited. There's more housing that would be provided with some affordable housing but that's really the only gain there would be. The planning harms are numerous and significantly outweigh those gains, so the fields that we have here effectively are the last separation between Banbury and Hanwell village. And this is what is protecting the identity of those two settlements.

2'38" - JOHN SPRATT, CHAIRMAN, HANWELL PARISH COUNCIL

I share the views of our elected Local Authority members and their experts for all the good reasons that they've put forward under the planning legislation – that those are the reasons that I object to it too. It will change the nature of Hanwell from an ancient rural village to something lost in a housing estate.

3'06" - DR CATRIONA REID, HANWELL RESIDENT

This is my bedroom window with a view out over this beautiful pink field – and they're not very far away at all. We can see where the proposed Vistry development would be. While I probably have the best view of it, around the corner in Gullicott Lane is the extension of the Conservation Area, and it will actually come to within 12 metres of the nearest Hanwell Garden which is that of Park Farm. And it'll be clearly visible from the farmyard where the grain store within the farmyard is within the Conservation Area. The trees are not very dense at all there – a few scattered individual mature trees – but mostly it's a fairly small hedge line through which the houses would be clearly visible.

The tree line behind that, which is the existing buffer of the town, is really well established. It's many, many meters thick – it takes about 20 or 30 seconds to walk through it. If building were to occur beyond that, it would essentially be its own separate enclave because this development would literally be in my back garden, and we're in a village that should be protected. It's protected as part of the the Local Plan – both the adopted one and the one that's emerging – so therefore it should be protected from unsympathetic development, which is exactly what this would be.

I mean the community are immensely frustrated. We've done everything that we can to put forward the strength of feeling of individuals, of elected representatives, and the fact that it ultimately comes down now to the decision of one individual, who's not local to this area, is incredibly frustrating.

4'42" - REVEREND ALICIA BAKER

I think the feel of the whole village will change. And it's not just about the people who live in the village, it's about the people that live in Banbury and just love coming here. And the whole thing, you know, because the housing is going to come so close to the village of Hanwell and, in particular, not that far from the church either. It will ruin the place for everybody, anybody who enjoys coming here.

5'05" - ROB KINCHIN-SMITH, CHAIRMAN, BANBURY CIVIC SOCIETY

Well certainly when it came to developing the current Local Plan, this tree buffer – which has been significantly enhanced – was determined to be, would be, unacceptable to build the other side of this tree buffer because that would still protect the setting of Hanwell, and it would not intrude into the open countryside. However, this is very much a step into to the open countryside.

It's 'ribbon development' along the Warwick Road and as a society that's here to protect the social, historical and environmental amenity of Banbury, we feel that that kind of kind of ribbon development stretching out into the open countryside is very harmful to the setting of Banbury and indeed surrounding villages, particularly in this case, of course, Hanwell.

6'11" - JO DAVIS, HANWELL CHASE, BANBURY RESIDENT

I was assured by Persimmon at the time that there was no plans to build this side of the park so we would literally be the boundary, and that was one of the appealing factors of moving here. This was just the nicest ratio to countryside to town close proximity that I could find, particularly with that particular house because I can see – I could see – the horizon, until Bovis just started building their latest bunch of houses. And I can't see that anymore. I've lost the sunset, unfortunately.

6.30 TOM SADLER

So the edge of this field behind me is only 12 metres from the south edge of a residential garden within Hanwell and it's about 85 metres to the edge of the Conservation Area which is a significant heritage asset that needs protecting.

I'm speaking up to protect the interests of Hanwell and the other villages around Banbury. There has to be a limit to how far Banbury can extend in order to protect the identity of those villages, and also keep Banbury as a separate settlement.

So this proposal was partly refused to prevent material and unacceptable coalescence. This refusal is supported by other precedents from planning inspector appeal decisions. We've seen cases near Stratford Upon Avon where he's dismissed appeals on the grounds of coalescence, even though in those cases they would have left a gap between settlements which is larger than the gap [text

edited: Vistry Housing would leave] [original dialogue: we have here] between Banbury and Hanwell.

7:27" - JOHN SPRATT

I've been the Chairman of the Parish Council for some time and we've faced successive waves of development out towards Hanwell. And, at each success of the developers, they have promised that this is the furthest it will go. And so I know – I'm not guessing – I know that if they're successful here, then the next thing is that there'll be a plan to surround Hanwell having destroyed its separate identity. Their quite logical argument would be – what further harm would it do?

HERITAGE

8:14" DR STEPHEN WASS - ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANT

We're in the marvellous gardens of Hanwell Castle and the reason they're so important is that they are a survival from way back in the 17th century. And gardens from that period are incredibly rare. The fact that there was a major family tragedy in the 17th century meant that the gardens were left to become an archaeological site. But the other reason that they're important is that, way back in the 17th Century, the whole scene was connected with a lot of really important things that were happening down in Oxford, where at that time a number of extremely clever people were, in effect, inventing modern science. And we have very good evidence to suggest that Hanwell, as a location, was part of that whole movement that, in many ways, affected the world we live in today. So it's not just a garden, it's a place of enormous historic and scientific interest.

9:20" - REVEREND ALICIA BAKER

I do know that most of the church was from the 12th century and it has an awful lot of fantastically still-detailed carvings around the church inside and out which show that that's the age of the church. But actually part of it – and the font in particular – goes back another 100 years and I just find it amazing that people have been baptised here and continue to be baptised here for nearly 900 years. It's amazing.

9:47" - JOHN SPRATT

Well there's the church, there's the castle – a Tudor castle – as well as a number of interesting ancient houses in the village. And this is why it should be conserved. These things can't be replaced and they exist in a context. Hanwell Church wouldn't have the same impact in the middle of a modern housing estate, and so it would be lost – and it shouldn't be.

10:26" STEPHEN WASS

Back in the 17th century someone called Robert Plot wrote a book called 'The Natural History of Oxfordshire', and in that book he described, in some detail, the gardens here at Hanwell. And we've been able to follow his descriptions and identify and excavate a number of really key structures. For example, over there in the woods was the site of something called the House of Diversion, which was a glorified summerhouse-cum- museum where Sir Anthony Cope – who was living in the castle – and all his scientific chums would gather together and discuss great issues of the day, particularly scientific ones.

What we're currently standing on, however, is the site of a rather grand staircase which led up from the House of Diversion up to the castle itself. And again, we're trying to excavate this to really understand the exact details of the layout of the garden and, of course, the wider park that surrounded it.

11'28" - REVEREND ALICIA BAKER

The attraction of this particular church is the situation that it's in – right on the edge of the village. And yet for people who really love walking across these beautiful fields, that's the first thing they see when they come across the ridge and come towards Hanwell. As I say, people come and visit, it's open every day and people hold events there. I think I would say it's probably the biggest space in the village and so and it's very flexible, and you can use it for all sorts of different things.

11'57" - ROB KINCHIN-SMITH

Well it's a charming ironstone village – just as it stands – but castles around here are fairly rare and to have a brick-built castle of its age is exceptional. And that castle actually has an incredibly interesting history, particularly to do with the landscape created by Cope which was really cutting edge at the time to create this pleasure garden – these pleasure grounds – to express the kind of philosophy and highbrow ideas. And that's literally just over there. Stephen Wass has been conducting some very interesting excavations on that site and I think that these lost gardens are something which are only going to get to be viewed as more and more important. They are exceptional for their period in the UK.

LANDSCAPE

12'54" - STEPHEN WASS

Although we're standing in the heart of the garden, that was part of a much larger landscape. So within the main garden itself you have lots and lots of fish ponds, but they're very much located in this valley. And surrounding it on the open fields was a large deer park, and that in its turn was surrounded by a rather well-made stone wall to keep the deer in and the poaches out. And the line of that wall comes right up to the edge of the development so it really is very, very close.

I mean we've been talking about the 17th Century; of course you have to remember that very close to hand we have a major Roman site up by the main road there. We also know from other nearby developments [that] there's been Iron Age material.

The excavations that were taking place up at the castle fairly recently uncovered a medieval manor house, so it's a whole set of different layers from different periods, all of which reflects on the total history of Hanwell itself. It's [the 'development'] going to completely transform the setting from one which is essentially rural into something which is becoming very suburban. And given the nature of the park and the garden, the way in which it's celebrating so many topics to do with the natural environment, it really is going to be a very jarring note in terms of its proximity to this park.

But the main thing that we're interested in – and this again takes us out into the wider park – is we know that Sir Anthony Cope had a marvellous mill. He had a water mill that could simultaneously grind corn, polish stones and bore out guns. And it's somewhere out there in the park, and we don't know where. So our future plans involve a lot of additional work, particularly some geophysics work, some prospecting to try and identify and hopefully excavate the site of this extraordinary mechanical marvel. And again, because we don't know exactly where it is in the park, it's a kind of thing which could again find itself very close to this proposed development.

15'17" - CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR, HANWELL COMMUNITY OBSERVATORY & RESIDENT

Since about 2000 we've been doing all sorts of public astronomy stuff here. I mean by now there must literally be thousands of people who have not just visited the site but actually looked through the telescopes. So I mean dark skies – at least perhaps the most popular sort of stargazing through

telescopes for the public – are vital because if you have a lot of light pollution, a lot of the fainter things which sometimes are the more beautiful and perhaps more interesting – they just disappear. A lot of the really good stuff you simply can't see at all from a town and our point here, particularly, is to get people actually out under the sky – the real thing. Not connected up with a CCD camera down a cable to a computer screen indoors, but actually out here, so that there's the sky above them and they can actually see the stars for themselves and through the telescope. If the sky is flooded with artificial light, that impression just vanishes. I mean the 'wow' factor just dies completely.

We're north of Banbury here and most of the interesting things are in the south so we're looking out over the town. That hasn't, in the past, been all that much of a problem. But as I say, we've already lost the southeast because of increasing lighting down there. The line of sight from here – which is still reasonably dark to the south – is over in the southwest, directly over the Vistry site. So if they build there, that will be it! We will have no direction from here in which we can show people the fainter stuff. We will, for instance, lose the best views of the Orion Nebula which goes across the southern sky. We can only now really get a good view of that – in precisely the direction over where Vistry want to build.

And you know, they commissioned some sort of report – it was in the planning documents – that some outfit or other pronounced the opinion that the light spill impact from the development would be negligible. They were talking complete nonsense. I don't know who those people are but they clearly understand zero about the effect of artificial light on the night sky. I mean that's simply not true what they've said.

17'48" - DR CATRIONA REID

From our window we've got the most fabulous viewpoint, obviously of not just the fields but of the wildlife within those fields. I frequently see deer in the fields, there are almost always Red Kites flying over, I've seen the odd badger, we hear owls all the time. And that's wildlife that would just be pushed further and further afield if the town were allowed to extend.

18'14" - JOHN SPRATT

As you can see, this development would be visible from Hanwell. It would be – it's on high ground – it would be obvious. It would completely change the atmosphere of the village. It would change its whole context. And so, it's obviously wrong for the reasons that the Local Authority have said.

AGRICULTURE

18'45" - TOM SADLER

Hanwell is a rural community. It's one that has evolved over a long time based on farming. There's fewer farms now but the site behind you, the large grain store, is used by those farms and it would be effectively almost surrounded by housing from Hanwell, and then new housing extending from Banbury as well. Any traffic to that grain store would have to go through residential areas, so there were various reasons for refusing the application.

I think highest in my mind is the impact of causing harmful coalescence between two settlements and there were further considerations such as the loss of Grade 2 and 3 agricultural land. The Local Plan has a policy that you should not develop on land of that quality unless other options have been exhausted, and there's clearly other places where housing around Banbury would be more appropriate.

INFRASTRUCTURE & SUSTAINABILITY

19'50" - ROB KINCHIN-SMITH

There are many less intrusive sites around Banbury where you could put these houses. There are brownfield sites within Banbury that could accommodate probably much more sustainable homes which would be far closer to shops, bus services, railway station, jobs where you could exist without having a car, for example. So this is not a sustainable site comparatively and it's certainly one of the very least sustainable sites that we know of around Banbury that has been proposed for housing development.

20'28" - JO DAVIS

The infrastructure of Banbury is already completely drowning. You've only got to drive through town from this end of town on a Saturday and you're in a traffic jam. Four or five years ago that did not exist. You had such a thing as Sunday traffic where you could get in and out of town very easily. You do not have that at all anymore – it's horrendous.

20'52" - JOHN SPRATT

It seems to me – if you look at this broadly – that what's happening here is that, for commercial reasons largely, there's pressure to build on this farmland at the expense of the village. And the Local Authority quite rightly says that it's wrong. But there's a bigger thing which is that, within the Town and Country Planning Act's principles, that instead what ought to happen is that the centre of Banbury should be developed. The brownfield sites in the centre of Banbury are where development ought to take place.

HOUSING AND SUPPLY

21':39" - JO DAVIS

I would say to the developer that this boundary was planted 25 years ago. It was agreed 25 years ago [that] the people in Hanwell – that's just over there – do not deserve to be treated the way that they've been treated. That village has been there for hundreds, if not thousands of years, and they need to be respected.

And Banbury as a town does not need any more estates to be built. I appreciate that people do need somewhere to live but if the developers really took it seriously, they would be building one bedroom, two bedroom, three bedroom houses – not the four, five and six, with just the token row of social housing.

20'20" - TOM SADLER

As a community, we've actively campaigned against this proposal and so we're aware of the planning background. And I think, in the words of the National Planning Policy framework Paragraph 11, it represents adverse impacts that are significantly and demonstrably outweighing any benefits. So, irrespective of any arguments around housing land supply, this is a refusal that must be upheld.

This planning application has objectively been assessed as not conforming to that Local Plan so the refusal should be upheld to respect that Local Plan which is an up-to-date reflection of what the people of Cherwell want.

We don't want housing on these fields – essentially, that's the message. Anything other than a refusal would also, I think, prejudice consideration of the current Local Plan which doesn't have this as a housing site.

It's not allocated in the current Local Plan either, and I think riding roughshod over the spatial policies of the Local Plan would result in piecemeal development of the countryside and, I dare say, destruction of the sort of fields that we have here on the edge of towns. So this is exactly the thing that the land-use planning system was set up to prevent.

FINAL WORDS

23'42" - CHILDREN, HANWELL RESIDENTS

I would feel very sad; quite disappointed really, because, you know, you think people would have enough common sense to not come and build on these beautiful fields where wildlife is thriving. And you know, we're just sort of taking that away – and that's not what the world needs at the moment. It's not what anyone needs.

24'07" - ROB KINCHIN-SMITH

Usually such schemes are rejected, and certainly we urge the inspector to reject this scheme.

24'13" - TOM SADLER

Essentially, it's the wrong development in the wrong place.

24'15" - REVEREND ALICIA BAKER

When you join communities together, you lose both the town and you lose the village as well.

24'22" - JOHN SPRATT

I support our Local Authority. I think they've done an excellent job in thoroughly investigating this and they've come to a good, reasoned decision. And the decision is correct and should be upheld.

ENDS