

(Good morning), my name is Dr Catriona Reid. I am here representing Hanwell Parish Council, as well as my own views as a resident of Hanwell.

Today is the 10th anniversary of my moving to Hanwell. I am a member of Hanwell Parish Council. I am a partner in a local GP practice. I am also a mum to 2 small boys whose childhood is enriched by growing up surrounded by the countryside and who revel in observing the farming year. Over the course of this appeal you will hear numerous arguments from both sides. Alongside my friends from the other Ironstone villages north of Banbury, we intend to demonstrate how important this matter is to us. This is not just another field threatened with development – this is the future of a community.

If the decision were based purely upon local feeling and local planning policy, with the existing and emerging local plans, then that decision is clear and unequivocal and this appeal should not be upheld. We are aware that National policy must also be taken into consideration and within that critically the five-year housing land supply. The case we put forward to you today is simple. Regardless of the five year housing land supply within Cherwell, we intend to demonstrate that the significant harmful impact of this development far outweighs even a tilted balance. We will focus on the negative impacts on heritage assets, on the harm to the character and appearance of the area, on the conflict with the local spatial strategy - notably on coalescence and on the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land.

I would also like to draw your attention to recent precedents. In the neighbouring district of Stratford Upon Avon, two appeals by developers were dismissed on the grounds of coalescence between Stratford and Tiddington - despite the fact that the remaining gap between settlements would have amounted to 170 metres – considerably greater than the minimal gap that the Vistry development would leave between Banbury and Hanwell. For reference this relates to :
APP/J3720/W/15/3017900 and APP/J3720/W/15/3132950.

The five-year housing land supply in Cherwell is a transient policy which may change with future governments. It does not in any way reflect the exponential development in and around Banbury in recent years. This massive expansion has not been supported by improvements in key infrastructure. The roads are in an appalling state and travel within Banbury is frequently disrupted by temporary roadworks associated with new build estates. The local hospital is constantly under threat of losing departments. Acute surgery went in 2012. Consultant maternity followed in 2016. A&E and paediatrics continue to fight for survival. There is no access to NHS dentistry within Banbury or a 15 mile radius. The nearest GP surgery, at Hardwick, that Vistry have cited in their application actually closed down during COVID and never reopened. Town centre GP surgeries are not within walking distance. North Oxfordshire Academy, the local secondary school, is so massively oversubscribed

that even siblings are often not being allocated places. Further development within Banbury - and particularly the north where more than 1,000 houses have been built in the last 10 years - is quite simply unsustainable. The appellants have made no attempt to justify why they are not pursuing a more suitable, designated site. Instead Vistry are attempting to push through a development which is harmful and unacceptable to the local community.

Moreover at the recent local elections the people have spoken. The Liberal Democrats have become the largest single party on Cherwell District Council and for the first time have representation on Banbury Town council. They will be disputing the decision that Cherwell alone within Oxfordshire continues to accept a portion of Oxford's unmet housing need. It would be a travesty to make an irrevocable decision based upon a housing land supply figure that is likely to change dramatically in the next few months as this policy is advanced. The current judicial review of a decision relating to Heyford Park could also affect the interpretation of the NPPF in relation to the housing land supply figure.

Turning to the history of Hanwell village, the settlement of Hanwell dates back to Saxon times. It is home to the Grade One Listed St Peters Parish Church, the Grade 2 Listed Hanwell castle and three Grade 3 listed properties that are private residences. St Peters Church dates back to at least the 12th century and there is clear visibility between the church and parcel B of the proposed development. I appreciate that field will not be built upon but the fact that it will be artificially landscaped and its use changed from farming, will detract from its appearance and current designation as open countryside.

The village of Hanwell has been a designated Conservation Area since 1985. The Conservation Area extends down Gullicote Lane and takes in the original footprint of the gardens of Park Farm, which have now been extended. The Conservation Area reaches the far end of the grain store as accessed from Gullicote Lane and there is clear visibility with the whole of parcel B. Notably there is a mere 12 metre gap separating the garden of Park Farm within the village of Hanwell and parcel A. To claim this is not an example of coalescence is frankly nonsense.

The history of Hanwell revolves around agriculture. In the 1811 census 52 out of 56 families were employed in that pursuit. It is therefore of vital importance to the heritage and character of the village to retain the surrounding agricultural fields.

Work on Hanwell Castle began in the 1490s. It has familial links to Katherine Parr the sixth wife of Henry the eighth. It has recently been the site of exciting excavations to reveal an Italian style sunken pleasure garden. The castle grounds are also home to a community astronomical observatory and there are significant concerns regarding light pollution from further encroaching development towards Hanwell. Experts talking about both these matters can be seen on the video that

Keep Hanwell Village Rural have submitted as evidence.

The 2007 update to the Hanwell Conservation Area appraisal states “the pressure on the village from the urban extension of Banbury is a threat to the integrity and independence of Hanwell. It is important that the setting of the conservation area as well as that of the castle and the grade one listed church is protected. There are two major threats to the character and appearance of Hanwell. The first is erosion of open space and rural character by unsympathetic infill housing and urban additions “. Furthermore the conservation area appraisal states that “the land around the boundary to the north and south is important to the character of the village providing the setting for the conservation area and as such should be protected from any unsympathetic development”. As part of the accepted plan it is stated that the council will “promote the retention of significant open spaces and field systems around the village and preserve the setting of the castle grounds of the conservation area.” This development would be a direct contravention of these terms.

Correspondence between the Keep Hanwell Village Rural action group and the appellant with Historic England has yielded the following :

“Such development would affect the appreciation and understanding for the rural origins of the village and the close connection it has with the landscape. It will also affect to some extent the understanding of the historic relationship of the buildings within the conservation area with the surrounding fields which they farmed. Historic England setting guidance and the NPPF make clear the historic connection between places, the kinetic experience of approaching a place, and factors such as noise can often contribute to the setting of a listed asset. This development would bring the suburbs closer to the church and the castle, closing the gap to the south, and will be partly visible and appreciable (through noise, lighting) on nearby approach roads and paths to both of these highly graded assets. The development is therefore likely to somewhat reduce the ability to appreciate the origins of these buildings which at present can still be appreciated. This would cause some harm, but at a lower level than that identified for Hanwell conservation area.”

This damning verdict from a national body further supports our assertions regarding the irreparable harm that this development will cause and acknowledges the significant harm to the conservation area.

Further supporting evidence is provided by Cherwell’s Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 2018 which listed this site as not suitable for development - due in part to impact on the Hanwell conservation area.

The impact of the Vistry development upon the heritage of the village was carefully considered by the Planning Committee in August 2023 when they unanimously refused the application. As quoted in the Council statement of case to the inspector “ the Planning Committee also determined that the proposed development was likely

to erode the open arable landscape which provides clear separation between Banbury town and Hanwell Village and forms part of the surroundings within which the setting of Hanwell conservation area, St Peters church and Hanwell castle are experienced, to the detriment of and causing harm to the setting of these designated heritage assets, contrary to policy ESD 15 of the council 2015 local plan and government guidance contained within section 16 of the national planning policy framework.”

(NEW PARA) It is important to note that, as a Parish Council, Hanwell has worked with the local planning authority for over three decades to provide long-term protection for the village and its setting in open countryside from encroachment. We have consistently placed our trust in the planning system to deliver that protection with a meaningful strategic gap between Banbury and Hanwell. But now all that could be completely undermined by a single development which disregards long standing policies.

However, this is about far more than policy. This is about a community united against an existential threat. I moved to Hanwell as a twenty five year old fiancée taking up a GP training post. I was buying my first home and I had a dream. A dream of living in a community where I knew all my neighbours. A dream of raising children who could experience farming activities in the surrounding fields each summer and throughout the seasons. For the last ten years I have been living this dream. Hanwell is a thriving community, the home of Hanfest and regular village gatherings. Please do not shatter that dream.

It is clear that Vistry have no consideration for the voices of the local community. It is immensely frustrating for us that they feel their desire for commercial profit should override strong local objections and the democratic processes within Cherwell District Council.

This is also about democracy and it is clear that at every level - from individuals, to local policy, to elected representatives including the local MP - this proposal is strongly opposed. It would cause irreparable damage and destroy the heart and soul of a vibrant and thriving community. It would be detrimental to Hanwell, to Banbury and to other villages were such a damaging precedent to be set. Hanwell is a place with a long, rich history that exudes a special character. This would be lost forever if an identikit housing estate was permitted in the only remaining gap that preserves the village's identity.

Current residents are fighting now for future generations - not just to preserve our beautiful countryside but to avoid the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land to speculative urban development. We all need to fight to keep farming economically viable and to ensure the country's food security into the future. This is

a matter of the utmost importance that must surely supersede transient political policies.

In conclusion, I hope we have demonstrated the strength of local feeling. Please protect and preserve our heritage, stand up for farming and nature, endorse democracy, and in doing so please save our village Hanwell for future generations. Thank you.