

Further response to Planning application 21/00922/OUT, land to west of Foxden Way.

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In their latest submission supplementing their planning application, the developer includes a YouGov survey which they claim 'objectively and independently demonstrates that there is a significant public appetite for schemes such as the one currently before you...It is very clear from the survey results that the local public in the District at large supports overwhelmingly exactly this type of development.'

This is simply not true, and let's have a look at the YouGov survey to understand why. We're not sure how frequently the work of the CDC Planning department requires it to engage with 3rd-party market research, so please bear with us if we are teaching granny.

There are two basic types of market research. The first – often carried out by governments, and also by businesses – is to seek to measure things accurately, in order to inform policy or investment decisions. For example, how many people now own an electric car? And how many charging points are there for these people to use? How many people live more than 3 or 5 miles from their nearest bank branch? And how many people have used cash in a transaction in the past week?

The second type – often used by businesses, and by political parties in or out of government – is to provide marketing ammunition for their cause: **'9 out of 10 cats prefer it!'**

This YouGov poll is of the second, not the first, type. There are several things to bear in mind:

1. It is – obviously - not independent and objective: it has been briefed and paid for by the developer to bolster their application. YouGov serves its clients, not objective truth. No harm in that – businesses succeed, like YouGov, when they deliver what their clients want.
2. It is not indicative of what people in Cherwell think, because it has not asked people in Cherwell. It has asked people, and we quote YouGov, 'living in and around the Cherwell district'. That is a rather broad catchment. Does it include the city of Oxford? Almost certainly. Northants? Warwickshire? Buckingham? Milton Keynes? One of the reasons it is not confined to Cherwell itself is cost. It would multiply the total cost of the survey, to require YouGov to narrow the sample frame so precisely.
3. It is also not indicative of what people in Cherwell think, because it is a numerically a tiny sample: 137 respondents, which is less than 0.1% of Cherwell's population – although of course, we don't know how many of those 137 people actually live in Cherwell. Let's be generous, and assume that more than half do. Would CDC base any policy formation at all on the views of a random sample of, say, 75 citizens? We hope not.
4. It is not a survey of people in the market for affordable housing. We are told that all respondents earned less than 100,000 per year. Well, that's not surprising, because approximately **99%** of adults living in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties earn less than £100,000 per year.

In summary: it is a tiny survey, of 'all adults', living in the South-East (and maybe the West Midlands).

Then we need to consider what the survey has asked.

- Should affordable housing be everywhere?
- Would you buy a house within the next 6 months, if you could afford one?

Some languages have a different question structure, when a question expects the answer 'yes'. English does not – but clearly these questions have been constructed to deliver an affirmative answer. They are the equivalent of asking citizens 'Do you think the government should do more to protect the environment?' To which of course the answer will overwhelmingly be 'yes'.

Now consider the question: 'Do you think the government should double fuel duty, to protect the environment by reducing car use?' That is much less likely to produce an affirmative response – although it would be a much more informative response, for policy formation purposes. Similarly, a question asked here – had the intention been to derive genuine data from the survey, rather than to support a particular viewpoint – might have been 'Do you think your local council, in striving to deliver more affordable housing, should focus efforts on repurposing brownfield sites, or on digging up the countryside?'

The YouGov survey is not a serious piece of research, and may safely be ignored. However it is worth making one further point. The survey is included in their proposals by the developer, because they are seeking to confound two completely separate issues.

- Issue one: should there be more affordable housing?
- Issue two: should this developer be allowed to plough up farmland outside an established settlement, to create affordable housing?

The answer to the first question, from most people, including us, will be 'yes'. It is not at all the same as the second question.

The developer claims that the survey shows that the local public 'supports overwhelmingly exactly this type of development.' The developer knows full well – and the responses on this website underline this fact – that the local public actually affected by this proposal – the population of Great and Little Bourton – overwhelmingly reject exactly this development.

In their latest submission the developers also express regret that some of the local residents' responses contain 'errors'.

Firstly they restate their own views on the relative merits of the CDC Plan – CLP 2031 - and the National Planning Policy Framework. This is a technical planning matter, and CDC will have its own informed view on this matter. It is however by no means obvious that the developer's reading of the relative positions of the two documents is correct. As we noted in our original submission, in an adjudication on a nearby application last year, CDC Planning stated that the NPPF 'does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting-point for decision-making. Proposed development that conflicts with the Local Plan should be refused unless material considerations indicate otherwise.'

Secondly, the developer says that they have used TRICS data to estimate traffic movements. As everyone in the parish knows, and as many people have pointed out in responses on this website, this TRICS data is based on School Lane, not Foxden Way, and does not bear the interpretation the developer seeks to put on it.

Thirdly they say that parking is outside the scope of this application, and that they would 'comply with the Council's requirements in this regard'. Case closed? Well not quite, because this issue of parking goes to the heart of the problems with this application.

At the April meeting of the Bourtons Parish Council, the developer spoke about how they are trying to break the mould of affordable housing, and provide excellent accommodation. This explains why only 9 homes are scoped on the plan. The problem is, though, that there is no public transport locally, and the nearest facilities (aside from the pub and the church) are a half-hour walk away. So everyone living there would need a car – and probably, two per household. Yet if the developer makes sufficient space for parking, they will either have to reduce the number of homes on the plan – which imperils the profitability to them; or diminish their quality by cramping them up, which this developer certainly would not contemplate, according to their speech to the parish council; or ditch the greenery with which they have embellished their outline plan, in favour of tarmac for car parking, which would fatally undermine their case for ecological compliance. Because – and this is immediately obvious to everyone who knows the location – there is simply nowhere else for cars to park, because this is a narrow country lane with soft verges. Which is just one of the many reasons this application must be rejected.

We're flattered that the developer specifically took issue with our own earlier submission to this site. As noted above, we're going to leave the interpretation of the CDC Plan and its relation to the NPPF to the experts. We are though going to reiterate that CDC Planning has described the Foxden Way outlook as a 'valued rural landscape'. Just how valued, can be measured by the volume of outraged objections to this application.

Just to show that the developer is not alone in being able to quote selectively from government documents, though, we will note that the government response, on April 1st, to consultation on the first homes proposals, to which the developer refers (though unfortunately the link offered by the developer does not work), includes the observation by the government that 'too much strain was being put on our rural areas'. The government notes that 'We can and must strive to build more homes, but to do so **with sensitivity and care for the environment, heritage and character of existing communities.**'

And as we noted in our earlier submission, but perhaps should reiterate given the developer's passionate attachment to this government document: it has no status as law, nor even as planning guidance. The developer knows this full well, presumably, having gone to the expense of taking a barrister's advice.

Let's end with part of the 'Next Steps' section of this recent government document: 'The increase in the number of homes to be delivered is expected to be met by the cities and urban centres themselves, rather than the surrounding areas. In considering how need is met in the first instance, brownfield and other under-utilised urban sites should be prioritised to promote the most efficient use of land. Development should align with the character of local neighbourhoods in urban areas and support the building of green homes. This is to ensure that homes are built in the right places, to make the most of existing

infrastructure, and to allow people to live nearby the services they rely on, making travel patterns more sustainable.'

The proposed development is in the wrong place, with no supporting infrastructure and no access to services. It must be rejected.

Tim & Ann Brooks
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