

In the matter of Planning Application 21/04275/OUT

I am a resident of Bucknell and I write to object to the terms of the planning application in respect of Hawkwell Farm development (previously referred to as the Bicester Eco-Town) submitted by the developers on 23rd December 2021. My objections can be summarised as follows:

1. Severe cumulative impact on the road network

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (at para. 110) provides that development should be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impact on the road network would be severe. I submit that as currently set out the plans would constitute a severe and unacceptable impact upon the road network that passes through Bucknell.

Part of the proposal includes an aspiration to “reduce the attractiveness of the existing Bucknell Road”. The developers plan to do this by restricting access to Bucknell from the South. This will encourage motorists to use the Bainton Road and the crossroads in Bucknell which, with the addition of an estimated 5000 extra vehicles generated by the development, will become even more of a “rat run” than it is now. Bainton Road is a single track, heavily pot holed, poorly maintained rural road to which the national speed limit applies. The developers’ only substantive reference to it in their planning application is to suggest it will provide “low key” access for maintenance of the photo-cell array which will occupy the space between the development and Bucknell village. The reality is that the development is likely to result in a very significant increase in the volume and nature of traffic passing through Bucknell. This is likely to impact severely on the safety and the amenity of those who live in Bucknell has not been considered, properly or at all, in the developer’s application.

The committee will need no reminding that the North West Bicester Supplementary Planning Document, at page 33, states that it is the planning authority’s intention “to discourage vehicular movement (“rat-running”) through the villages” of Cherwell District. The application as drawn is likely to have the opposite effect. I submit that the application should be rejected until such time as the developer can provide objectively substantiated assurance for the safety and the welfare of the villagers of Bucknell.

2. Detrimental Impact upon the Culture of the Community of Bucknell

The NPPF recognises the importance of cultural wellbeing within the 12 core planning principles which underpin both plan-making and decision taking. The community of Bucknell has had a distinct and unique culture for more than a millennia. The proposal which will bring the built-up environs of Bicester to within a couple of hundred yards of the boundaries of this ancient village will have a detrimental and permanently damaging impact upon this unique culture. The planning application makes no attempt to consider this. The NPPF clearly provides that impact on culture is an important factor which the authority must consider as part of their decision-making process. How can the authority do this when it has been provided with no information to consider?

3. Unjustified deviation from the Development Plan

The Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031; the North West Bicester Masterplan; and the North West Bicester Supplementary Planning Document all very clearly describe and delineate the area to which the Development Plan for what has been described as the “North West Bicester Eco Town” applies. In making this application the developers seek to extend the area of the development beyond the area defined in the Development Plan. Planning law requires that any application for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan (section 70(2) Town & Country Planning Act 1990). The local planning authority may only depart from the Development Plan where “material consideration” indicate the plan should not be followed (article 32 of the Town & Country Planning (Development Management) Procedure). The planning application contains no factors which would constitute material considerations. Therefore, there is no evidence before the committee upon which the Authority may reasonably base a decision to extend the area of the Development Plan to permit approval of the application as presented.

4. Severe impact on the Environment and on Neighbour Amenity

The North West Bicester Supplementary Planning document says that the proposed development should be sympathetic to the local landscape. The planning application seeks to replace ancient agricultural land which would have formed a natural buffer between the development and Bucknell village with banks of photo-voltaic arrays misleadingly described as an energy farm. It clearly is not a farm; it has nothing to do with agriculture but is in fact a built environment on an industrial scale. By seeking to extend the site beyond the area described in the Authority’s Development Plan the developers intends to turn a green field through which runs public footpaths for all to enjoy with an incongruous, industrial eyesore. ES Chapter 8 “Landscape and Visual Effects” of the planning application judges the impact of this eyesore on local residents as “**negligible**”, a surprising and unconvincing conclusion which local residents should be entitled to challenge.

5. Contrary to Public Interest

It is an acknowledged fact that the courts have taken the view that land use is concerned with land use in the “public interest”. The Cherwell Local Plan Part 1 describes an underpinning vision that “Cherwell District will become an area where all residents enjoy a good quality of life” and “where those who live here will be happier, healthier and feel safer”. The impact of this application as presented will be to diminish and adversely affect the existing quality of life of all the residents of Bucknell. It cannot be said to be in the interests of the members of the public resident in Bucknell.

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