

Staddle Stones
Sibford Gower
Banbury
Oxon
OX15 5RT

Application ref: 23/01316/F

Dear Mr Campbell,

I write as a local resident to strongly object to planning application 23/01316/F.

In summary, I firmly believe that the proposal constitutes unnecessary, inappropriate and unsustainable development extending beyond the built up limits of the village into the attractive open countryside surrounding Sibford Ferris. Its layout, form, design and location for older people is unsuitable and would produce an incongruous and cramped form of development, which fails to respond to local character, landscape and surrounding context and should be refused as harming the visual and rural amenities of the area. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy C28 of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996, Policy Villages 2 and Policies ESD13 and ESD15 of the Cherwell Local Plan 2011- 2031 Part 1 and Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Design Guide.

The village is under threat from development following the granting of planning permission on appeal for 25 houses at Hook Norton Road in November 2019, when the Inspector regrettably overturned the Council's refusal. This appeal decision overlooked the relative isolation, aged infrastructure, limited capacity, lack of facilities and poor accessibility of Sibford Ferris. The Parish Council is trying to remedy this through the review of the Cherwell Local Plan 2040 but it would be too late if further unsympathetic and inappropriate development is approved. The appeal at Hook Norton Road should not be carte blanche for developers to do what they please, damaging the rural nature, character and attractive qualities of our historic village and its beautiful surroundings on the edge of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The reasons for my objection are because the proposal will be:

1. Contrary to the Local Plan;
2. Unsustainable;
3. Generate extra traffic on unsuitable roads;
4. Harmful to the landscape; and
5. Of poor layout and design contrary to the NPPF and National Design Guide.

1. Contrary to Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031.

The Local Plan housing quotas for rural villages in Cherwell have already been met so this proposal is not necessary.

Since 2014 a total of 1,062 dwellings have been identified for meeting the Local Plan, Policy Villages 2 requirement of 750 dwellings. The Policy Villages 2 requirement has therefore already been exceeded by 312 dwellings, 749 have been built or are under construction and there is an appeal for 43 homes at Station Road, Hook Norton, which could lead to substantially more. All this with 9 more years to go to the end of the Plan period. Why are developers allowed to put land forward for development in rural areas on good agricultural land where targets have already been exceeded and the homes have already been built?

More proposals threaten to follow which would further undermine the Local Plan housing strategy of directing most growth to Banbury and Bicester, where there is access to shops, services, jobs and other facilities and opportunities to travel other than by the car. This helps avoid commuting,

congestion, pollution, climate change and harming the environment. The District Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency, but none of these environmental objectives will be achieved by repeating the same mistakes and approving more and more homes in attractive but inherently unsustainable villages like Sibford Ferris.

2. Unsustainable development.

Sibford Gower and Sibford Ferris are treated as one Category A village in the Local Plan. This is not a true reflection of the community, geography, topography and location of its sparse facilities. Sibford Ferris only has a small shop. The few public amenities there are lie in Sibford Gower and Burdrop, only accessed by narrow roads with poor, incomplete footpaths, limited lighting and congestion caused by parked cars. The two villages are separated by a deep valley (Sib Brook) and have poor accessibility for anyone, let alone older persons without a car. I live in Sibford Gower and on occasion have walked to the shop in Sibford Ferris and back. It is a 40 minute round trip on foot and very steep. I am a fit and healthy woman in my mid-40s and it is not easy. I suggest you try it!

The bus service has more than halved in recent years. It is reliant on subsidy from Warwickshire County Council, has a very limited service to Stratford and Banbury at inconvenient times and has no direct services to Hook Norton or Chipping Norton. The proposed development is unsustainable for older persons. Government advice on the location of housing for older people states that factors to consider include the proximity to good public transport, local amenities, health services and town centres. None of these apply in this instance.

The fact that Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower and Burdrop are wrongly categorised as a Category A Village leaves them vulnerable to speculative and unsustainable development. This Class A categorization is already under review with both communities and our local MP seeking a review on this as soon as possible.

“Of 33 Villages only 4 show little capability to sustainably support additional housing. Shennington, Sibford Ferris/Sibford Gower and Charlton-on-Otmoor perform poorly due to their location on minor roads with long travel times and distances to access key facilities.” CRAITLUS Report August 2009

3. Extra Traffic on Unsuitable Roads.

In this location, occupants of the proposed dwellings, being older, less mobile and less likely to walk or cycle, will be highly reliant on the use of private cars. This was accepted by the Inspector on the Hook Norton Road appeal. It is underlined by the double garages and two parking spaces for each bungalow. This would lead to extra traffic using an access opposite the main entrance to Sibford Friends School, which is already busy at peak times, due to a lack of pavements and narrow roads, where in places it is difficult for two vehicles to safely pass each other. Therefore, the site is not an appropriate location for the development proposed, would result in an increase in private vehicular usage, lead to extra traffic, safety concerns and environmental harm. The amount of extra traffic generated by 25 new homes plus another 6 retirement homes with double garages and little or no public transport available will drive up CO2 emissions and drive down air quality.

4. Landscape Impact.

The proposed development will adversely affect the local character of the village and the outlook over the ANOB. It would lead to compact, built development on greenfield, agricultural land and would have an adverse visual impact on the landscape which has an unspoilt, rural character. The development would be clearly visible at short and more distant range from highways and public rights of way extending out into the countryside and the Cotswolds AONB.

Developer creep is a big concern as this is clearly a phase 2 style extension of the Hook Norton

Rd site, with a phase 3 development site also put forward as part of the Local Plan review. The Gade Homes development started with an approval for 8 homes and is now 25 homes with 9 affordable /rental properties. Considering that Blue Cedar homes have access approved, what is to stop them securing planning and then returning with an application for a larger number of homes?

The Sibfords Community Plan of 2012 resulted in 64% of people saying they would be willing to envisage up to 10 new houses, 31% up to 20 and only 3% over 20 houses. All of these needs have been exceeded by the Hook Norton Rd site and there is no need for further local requirement.

5. Design.

The design, incorporating large bungalows with a variety of roof pitches, timber boarding and other uncharacteristic features is contrived and takes no design cues from the established and historic character of its surroundings. The bungalows are sited close together, have very small private amenity spaces and would appear cramped and out of character with their immediate surroundings and the quality of development in the village, which is designated as a Conservation Area.

Paragraph 134 of the NPPF states:

‘Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes.’ The proposal is clearly not well-designed, does not respond to existing local character and surrounding context and should be refused. In addition, despite being described as for older people, the proposal is to all intents and purposes open market housing, fettered only by the not particularly demanding requirement for the occupiers to be 55 years of age.

For all of these reasons we urge the Council to refuse this application.

Yours sincerely,

Emilia Zakrzewska