



BuntingfordTownCouncil

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Land East of A10 Buntingford

Ref: APP/P1940/W/22/3340497

PUBLIC INQUIRY

Planning Application 3/23/1447/OUT

Interested Party Statement

by Graham Bonner

Chair, Planning Committee

Buntingford Town Council

Introduction

My name is Graham Bonner and I have lived in Buntingford since 1984.

I am currently Chair of Planning on Buntingford Town Council and a former Mayor. I am also a member of the Civic Society and on the management committee of the Buntingford Chamber of Commerce.

The last 10 years has seen a massive increase in the Buntingford housing stock with 1189 new dwellings built via several major developments an unprecedented increase in population by 61% and a subsequent increase in vehicles of 62%. (Source: Comparison - Census 2011 to 2021).

There was no master planning undertaken on any of the developments with the result that no essential services were updated to cope with this influx. Buntingford has moved from being a quiet market town to a dormitory town.

The proposed Vistry application will add 350 dwellings – that will equate to another estimated 1200 people and 1000 motor vehicles. It is well documented that Buntingford vehicle ownership is amongst the highest in Hertfordshire as was shown in the 2021 census. The lack of job opportunities in Buntingford will mean that most of these vehicles will be used daily to get people to their places of employment making this a wholly unsustainable development. There is also a high percentage of “self-employed” tradesmen, who require a vehicle to carry out their daily work, whether it be in and around the environs of the town or further afield. The totally inadequate, unreliable and erratic public transport on offer will not be of any use to most commuters who will inevitably use their vehicles to travel to local employment areas in Royston, Stevenage, Baldock/Letchworth, Hertford/Ware and Bishops Stortford. There are also many who travel daily to London for employment either by vehicle or by train. They are limited to using one of the following railway stations, Royston, Stevenage, Ware, Harlow or Bishops Stortford as Buntingford has no railway connection to anywhere in the UK. (Closed down by Dr Beeching in the 1960’s).

The vast majority of Buntingford residents strongly object to this unnecessary and unwanted major housing development – referenced by the huge number of objections registered on the EHDC planning portal. For some considerable time now, the local resources in Buntingford have been overstretched and inadequate for the vastly increased population of this small town. Traffic and parking are already a horrendous challenge, the medical facility is stretched to serve the existing local population, the schools are overburdened, and the roads are already inadequate and in an appalling state.

The Vistry proposal comprises a substantial urban extension of Buntingford which would encroach into the rural area beyond the Green Belt, beyond the settlement boundary, to the detriment of the landscape character, rural appearance, and distinctiveness of the area contrary to Policies DES2, DES3, DES4, GBR2 of the East Herts District Plan (2018), Policies ES1, HD1, HD2, HD4, BE2 and INFRA4 of the Buntingford Community Area Neighbourhood Plan and other policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

If this development gains approval it would form a substantial extension of the built-up area of Buntingford. The adopted District Plan does not require this area to be developed to satisfy the Council’s objectively assessed need for housing.

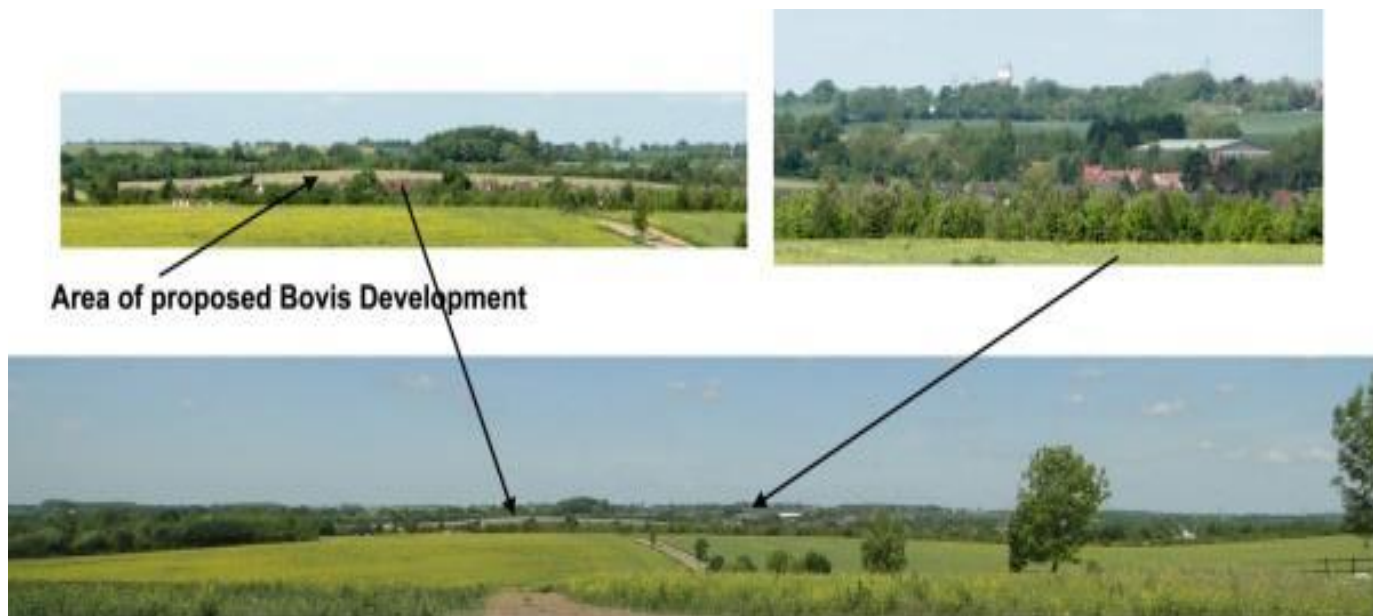
The site is entirely open agricultural land forming a clear and well-defined boundary to the built-up area of Buntingford. The Agricultural Land Classification is Grades 2 and 3a which comprises

“Best and Most Versatile Land” which should be maintained for agriculture to maintain food security, a high agenda item due to Climate Change.

It is also a haven for wildlife and is crossed by two of the most popular and used Public Rights of Way, Footpaths 26 and 29. These PRow's form an open countryside connection for walkers between the south-western edge of Buntingford to access Aspenden. The potential loss of these open countryside routes will mean walking through a housing estate and will thus extend access for residents' to open countryside.

Importantly, the proposed site is very visible from the Wyddial Plateau as described in EHDC document, SPD - Landscape Character Assessment, Area 143, Pages 226-229.

View towards proposed site from west of Owles Farm



View North-North-West from Northern Westmill Turn off A10



As can be seen from the foregoing photographs, the site will be highly visible from the Wyddial Plateau

One of the most important policies in the Buntingford community Area Neighbourhood Plan is **INFRA4**. This policy states:

Developers will be required to demonstrate that there is adequate Wastewater Infrastructure both on and off the site to serve the development and ensure no adverse impacts for existing or future users.

- Where necessary, developers will be required to commission or fund studies to ascertain whether the proposed development will lead to overloading of existing Wastewater Infrastructure.
- Where such studies demonstrate that development would overload the existing wastewater infrastructure and no improvements are programmed by Thames Water, permission will be subject to a planning obligation requiring the provision of the necessary increase in capacity and its completion prior to the first occupation of the development.

There is no evidence that this policy has been taken into account by the appellant in the documentation supporting the application.

Thames Water has confirmed that there are capacity concerns in the local surface water network to accommodate surface water flows from the Site. We have on record a copy of an email conversation between a planning officer and a Thames Water asset engineer in 2014 in which the engineer identified two serious pinch points in the town's wastewater network infrastructure, namely at the junction of Vicarage Road and the High Street at its northern end, and the junction of Station Road, Hare Street Road and the High Street at its southern end. Despite many conversations with Thames Water representatives, we have not been able to determine whether a Hydrostatic survey has been carried out since this email conversation and indeed if any improvements have been made. There are still many instances of the manhole at the western end of Hare Street Road overflowing and flooding the road exacerbated by the developments to the east of Buntingford one of which has a pumping station which causes unacceptable odour when the station is full, and the effluent is pumped into the existing "aged" local sewer network. These incidents come with the added danger of the effluent entering the River Rib.

There are also concerns regarding the capacity and effectiveness of the town's sewage works to cope with any further large-scale expansion. Thames Water has acknowledged this in their response to this application. They have repeatedly exceeded their discharge consent limits into the River Rib which is a protected chalk stream over the past few years, which is obviously linked to the recent and ongoing large-scale expansion of Buntingford.

A local "Citizen Scientist Group" carry out regular checks of water quality both upstream and downstream of the TWSTW and the results show that the Phosphate and Nitrate discharges from the STW are well in excess of those allowed. The group recently took part in the "The Great UK Waterblitz" the results of which state that "Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire had the worst water quality, with 91% and 89% of rivers respectively showing unacceptable levels of nutrient pollution". It should be noted that the major contributor to this pollution is from "dishwasher and washing machine detergents" or from "field runoff" which cannot be removed from the wastewater entering the STW.

Much work has been carried out over the last 3 years to improve the aesthetic value of the river on its journey through Buntingford. These works have been funded by the Town Council, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency and has resulted a dramatic return of wildlife in all its forms upstream of the STW, but a major increase in housing on an area directly adjacent to the STW with its wastewater discharging into an already overwhelmed pipe network will cause

the STW to show an inevitable increase in effluent discharges. There is no evidence of in-stream wildlife in the river downstream of the STW until it reaches confluences further south.

For all the above, and the many other reasons identified by other “Interested Parties”, the residents of Buntingford urge the Inspector to find against the appellants and stop this unwanted, unsustainable and unnecessary development.

Graham Bonner
Chair, Planning Committee
Buntingford Town Council

