

As ward councillor for Cadwell, I OBJECT to this proposal which seeks full planning permission for 100 houses and an independent specialist school with access plus outline planning permission for up to 130 houses, a 65-bed care home with all matters reserved apart from access.

Reasons for objection:

1. Principle of development.

- 1.1 This development is on Green Belt land. Although the land is in the parish of Ickleford, there is currently no undeveloped gap travelling north along Bedford Road from Hitchin to Ickleford. At pre-application stage, North Herts District Council's planning officers did not consider the site to constitute Green Belt land. The LPA considered the combination of Ickleford and Hitchin as constituting one large built-up area, and that there 'are no features that would weaken the site's contribution to purpose a)' in paragraph 143 of the NPPF.
- 1.2 This Green Belt land is restricting the urban sprawl of Hitchin. It therefore also fulfils criteria c) of paragraph 143 of the NPPF 'to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'.
- 1.3 Development on this site would reduce the openness of the Green Belt. Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that this must be given significant weight as a harm.
- 1.4 Development of this green field site in the Green Belt would not encourage building on brownfield sites or Local Plan sites.
- 1.5 This is not an allocated site in North Herts Local Plan. Site IC3 should come forward before granting permission on any further sites in the ward.
- 1.6 It is unsustainable to add a further 230 homes to Ickleford parish. It represents a level of growth that it not supported by the local infrastructure, particularly the sewage network.

2. Transport

- 2.1 There are up to 230 dwellings proposed plus a 30-place school and a 65-bed care home. The applicant's documents state that this will generate 1379 trips every day. Only one access is proposed.
- 2.2 Bedford Road (A600) is already incredibly busy with frequent queues stretching as far north as the turning to Holwell and Pirton. This development will affect travel times not just for those living in Ickleford, but

also for residents in Holwell, Pirton, Lower Stondon and any vehicle accessing Hitchin via Bedford Road including buses.

- 2.3 The transport assessment carried out for the Turnpike Lane application for 100 homes that was recently granted (25/02401/OP) found that the mini-roundabout at the junction of Arlesey Road and Turnpike Lane would be at capacity. This development can only make this roundabout exceed capacity. Such are the queues on Bedford Road into Hitchin that vehicles are very likely to divert through Ickleford via this mini-roundabout. Transport modelling for this roundabout has not been carried out. This must be done and take into account the cumulative traffic generated from other applications that already have outline planning permission such as the Turnpike Lane application referred to above and up to 71 homes at Ickleford Mill.
- 2.4 The applicant's travel plan cites the available bus services. Stagecoach have recently announced cuts to the 9A and 9B service that will reduce public transport options to the development.
- 2.5 All staff and pupils attending the school will need to access it by car or taxi. The school is located at the very edge of Hertfordshire. If HCC has any places at this school the pupils will need to travel a considerable distance to the school via taxi, making the costs likely untenable.
- 2.6 Residents at Ryder Way and Ryder Avenue in Ickleford have long campaigned for a lighted pedestrian crossing on Bedford Road as the road is so busy it is almost impossible to cross. Adding another 1379 vehicles into this situation every day is unacceptable without adding such a crossing for these residents. If their homes were the subject of a planning application today it would be refused without such a crossing for being in an unsustainable location.

3. Access and neighbour amenity.

- 3.1 The access is proposed to be at the southern end of the development immediately to the north of 35 Bedford Road. The residents outlook will change from an open field to a road potentially carrying 1379 vehicles a day. Notably an application in Royston for 84 houses where an access was proposed between two existing properties was recently refused with the officer's reporting concluding *"Both neighbouring properties currently benefit from private rear gardens with an open outlook across the application site. The proposed access road and associated infrastructure would be in very close proximity to the shared boundaries.... Furthermore, the access would serve up to 84 dwellings. As a result, vehicle movements entering and leaving the development site would introduce frequent noise and disturbance immediately adjacent to [the properties] and their gardens. Although some*

mitigation could be secured by condition, given the close relationship between the access and the boundaries....it is unlikely that mitigation would adequately address the impact. The proposed access arrangements and associated traffic movements would therefore result in a significant increase in noise and activity and therefore significant and permanent loss of amenity... which would be harmful to the living conditions of occupiers of those dwelling houses."

This application will generate at least three times the number of trips generated by the application for 84 dwellings. Although we must consider all applications on their merits, these grounds for refusal are equally applicable, if not more so.

3.2 The access will also be used for the care home. This will increase the potential for vehicular movement on this access at unsociable hours. The residents will have a road in 24-hour use which is an unacceptable loss of their amenity.

3.3 Vehicles and cyclists turning right into the access from Hitchin will be in conflict with traffic turning right from 35 Bedford Road.

4. Green space

4.1 The site is currently open fields. The land is good quality arable land (BMV). The loss of this land is a considerable harm as it could be used to grow crops.

4.2 The site is bisected by a bridleway (the Hambridge Way). This is currently a beautiful open right of way across unspoilt countryside. This development will mean that the bridleway passes through a housing development.

4.3 The fields are home to much wildlife and birds, including ground-nesting birds. A loss of habitat will result.

5. School

5.1 The applicant has used a website 'North Herts SEND' to gather support for their development long before submission of their proposals. I have received many messages from residents, including many SEND parents, who felt misled by this website. Some mailings mentioned the school in isolation (failing to include the 230 houses) and residents felt that it was not made clear that the school was an independent fee-paying school catering only for 30 secondary aged boys.

5.2 There is no debate that North Herts needs better SEND provision. Government policy is moving towards the provision of SEND provision at existing education sites. This school is not in compliance with this policy.

5.3 The Omnia Foundation have a similar school in Essex. At the last OFSTED inspection in 2024 the published fees to attend the school were £87,400 pa. Herts County Council have expressed concern that the fees at this school may be too prohibitive for state-school pupils to access.

6. Community

6.1 This development offers no community facilities – no shop, café, medical centre, pub or community centre. It will create homes with no community - all reliant on a private car or taxi for their journeys – including relatives of the care home residents.

6.2 Developer contributions will fund a fee-paying private school.

6.3 Local Plan site IC3 has land set aside for a new primary school. The site has recently been sold by HCC. The land for the school has not been part of the sale, but this now means that the school will not be part of a masterplan and its location is fixed. If this application and IC3 go ahead without a new state primary school there will not be enough school places for the new residents.

6.4 There was no community involvement regarding the care home, which appeared only when the application was submitted.

7. Summary

Although the provision of affordable homes should be given weight, this Green Belt location is not the appropriate place for them.

- This is not an allocated site in the local plan
- There is harm to the openness of the Green Belt
- This is not Grey Belt land
- There is harm due to loss of BMV arable land
- There is significant and unacceptable harm to the amenity of the residents of 35 Bedford Road
- There is significant and unacceptable harm to the road network occasioned by up to 1379 additional vehicle journeys every day.
- The site is poorly served by public transport – not a sustainable location.
- Developer contributions will fund a private school, not community facilities.