

Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley Parish Council

Objection to Planning Application CB/21/04834/FULL

Entry level exception scheme of 16no. dwellings with access onto Potton Road, parking and landscaping. Land to the south of Potton Road, Wrestlingworth

The Parish Council objects to this application on the following grounds:

1. The site, which is outside the settlement envelope, is on part of a much larger area of meadowland (under the same ownership) which wraps around the settlement envelope in the southern part of Potton Road and the south western part of the High Street and is close to the conservation area. This meadow, known locally as Woodcraft's Meadow, is a notable feature of the character of the village, and of significant importance to local residents. It is grade 2 agricultural land which is classed as Best and Most Versatile, the loss of which should be avoided (CBC Ecologist).

The Parish Council is concerned that the proposed layout of the site includes two potential access points to the adjoining meadowland, indicating that this development could set a precedent for further development on an area of archaeological importance, being the site of earthwork evidence of the medieval settlement (HER 3421). It should be noted that the area of the meadow fronting on the High Street is designated as Local Green Space in the Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2031.

The proposed site is close to a Rural Exception Site (RES) on a former tree nursery owned by CBC which abuts the settlement envelope. This development is nearing completion. It will provide 5 social rent properties for local people, meeting the needs of a Housing Needs Survey conducted in the parish. It is the Parish Council's understanding that a RES does not set a precedent for other amendments to village boundaries.

Wrestlingworth is designated as a small village in the CBC Local Plan 2015-2035 with no allocation for further development. The proposed site is outside the settlement envelope as defined in both the Local Plan and Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley Neighbourhood Plan. In the view of the Parish Council, it does not meet the criteria for an entry level exception scheme as set out in the NPPF, para 72, and would have a detrimental impact on the rural character and appearance of the village.

2. The design of the properties is out of character for its rural location, being more suited to an urban setting. The proposal for grey brickwork is particularly unsuitable. Brick faced housing in the village has been constructed to respect the history of brick making in the county, being either redbrick or similar in colour to Arlesey White bricks.

As the site is located 2m above Potton Road the houses would be overly prominent when viewed from Mill End to the west and from the network of footpaths to the south and west. The Character Assessment accompanying the Neighbourhood Plan emphasises the open views into the village from all directions which contribute strongly to its rural setting.

Despite the proposed ecological avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures proposed, the impact on the natural environment, not least from light pollution is unacceptable.

3. Footpath W6B, which is part of a well walked network of local footpaths, crosses the proposed development. This is a totally unacceptable block on an established, well used right of way.
4. The Ecological Impact Assessment accompanying the application makes no mention of Lousy Bush Nature Reserve, less than 1km from the site. The Reserve has been designated by Natural England as a Local Nature Reserve where many species of birds, mammals and invertebrates have been observed. It is considered to be an important asset to the village.
5. Paragraph 6.81 of the Planning Statement discusses the capacity of Wrestlingworth Lower School and the current uncertainty of its future. The Planning Statement maintains that there will be future capacity for expansion but fails to say that this would not be on the Wrestlingworth site but either at Dunton or Biggleswade, depending on the Schools for the Future options outcome. This would indicate an increase in the number of car journeys from the development as children are transported to school. The current possibility that the school may close reduces the already limited services in the village.
6. It should also be noted that the village Pre-school closed some four years ago. Current services consist of The Chequers public house, village hall, Lower School (as discussed above), children's play area, a hair dressers and a financial advisor.
7. The Parish Council disputes the assumption in para 2.1 of the Transport Report that there are no highway safety concerns. Below is an extract from the most recently available Wrestlingworth Speed Watch Report (May 2019)

As in previous years Potton Road provided the greater share of speeding motorists with 149 reported out of 1770 that passed the SID, (about 8.4%). We all know that the location and time is important – one session at Mill End yielded 25 reported out of 95 between 2 and 3pm (26.3%). As a contrast, 1 Potton Road yielded 7 out of 334 between 7:30 and 8:30am (2.1%). The figure of 334 was the highest traffic flow recorded in one hour on Potton Road last year – this equates roughly to one vehicle every 11 seconds in one direction only.

We provided details of 37 vehicles out of 1629 on the High Street, (about 2.3%). Combining results from both roads we get 186 reported out of 3399 vehicles (about 5.5%). There were 12 sessions on Potton Road and 9 on the High Street. The earliest session started at 7:30am and the latest ended at 6pm with the rest distributed more or less uniformly throughout the day.

The highest traffic flow was 344 vehicles, in one hour, on the High Street. This figure has increased each year since we started. Traffic flows in excess of 300 vehicles per hour, in one direction, are now common. The

fastest speed recorded, along with vehicle details, was 45mph. This occurred twice; once on Potton Road between 8 and 9am and once on the High Street one Sunday afternoon between 1:30 and 2:30.

The high volume of traffic, much of which is made up of heavy goods vehicles, makes it dangerous and unpleasant to walk up and down Potton Road and extremely dangerous to cross the road onto the High Street. This has to be done by listening for oncoming vehicles as it is not possible to see vehicles approaching in both directions.

8. The Parish Council also disputes paras 3.8 and 3.9 of the Transport Report that state that the application site offers opportunity to travel without the need for a car.

The Ivel Sprinter only provides a single journey per week to and from Cambridge. There is one daily journey to and from Cambridge by other providers. This leaves at 6.45am and takes one and a half hours to reach Cambridge. The return journey leaves Cambridge at 17.45 and arrives in Wrestlingworth at 18.50. Other buses provide 5 return journeys a day, finishing in the early evening, to Sandy, Potton and Biggleswade. The Parish Council does not consider these to be frequent services. In reality the great majority of residents need to use a car to get to and from work, shopping/leisure facilities and medical appointments. Those who do not have access to a car find this quite challenging.

9. In view of the comments at 5. and 6. above, the Parish Council finds the calculated vehicle trip rates at para 5.7 to be considerably under estimated.

In conclusion, for the reasons set out above, the Parish Council strongly objects to any development on this site.

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