

LEYLAND, KNOCKHOLT ROAD, HALSTEAD, SEVENOAKS, KENT, TN14 7ES

Sevenoaks District Council
Planning Department
Council Offices
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent TN13 1HG

Your ref: 19/05000/HYB

25th July 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990:-
FORT HALSTEAD, CROW DRIVE, HALSTEAD, KENT TN14 7BU
PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE NUMBER: 19/05000/HYB
HYBRID APPLICATION – AMENDED CONSULTATION

Thank you for your letter of 6th July 2020, giving notification that planning application 19/05000/HYB, relating to Fort Halstead, has been amended. I have looked at the amendments, and am writing to stress that the objections and concerns comprehensively expressed in my previous letter of 11th November 2019 still stand. The amendments have not in any way changed my views, and I remain strongly opposed to this application. I would therefore be grateful if you would take this letter and my previous letter of 11th November 2019 into consideration when determining the amended application.

The current proposals for 635 dwellings, plus commercial, business and community facilities, constitute over-development of this site, putting too much pressure on already strained local infrastructure and amenities, harming the sensitive natural environment of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and damaging the site's irreplaceable Ancient Woodland.

Any re-development of this site must be done sensitively and on a scale that can be sustained without harming neighbouring communities and the surrounding countryside. The number of proposed dwellings may have been reduced from 750 to 635, but the average density still ranges from 25 to 55 dwellings per hectare (DPH), considerably above the local housing density of 15 to 18 DPH. The creation of such a high-density, large-scale new settlement would dwarf the neighbouring villages of Halstead and Knockholt. It would destroy the rural character of the Green Belt in this vulnerable part of Kent, have a detrimental impact on the surrounding Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and overwhelm local infrastructure and transport networks.

Surely the current Coronavirus Pandemic has demonstrated more than ever the importance of retaining green open spaces, and the dangers of creating new highly populated areas, which increase the risk and rate of infection, and place an unsustainable strain on existing hospital and medical facilities? A new development on the scale of Fort Halstead, plus all the other numerous developments proposed for the Halstead and Badgers Mount area, simply

cannot be supported by existing GP surgeries and by the Princess Royal Hospital at Farnborough. The current application includes a new medical centre, which sounds good in theory, but how would it be funded? Are the developers expecting it to be taken on by the relevant local health authorities, or are they intending to fund it themselves? Similarly, would the developers be providing funding for additional wards, medical facilities, and extra staff at the Princess Royal Hospital? How would existing local hospital and medical facilities cope with such a substantial population increase in this area – a challenge at any time, but especially when struggling in a Pandemic situation? As far as I can see, these critical issues have not been adequately addressed, and no improvements have been made in the amended application to reflect current and future medical emergencies. Surely this is a grave oversight, and fails to meet the needs of future residents and residents of existing local communities alike. The present Coronavirus pandemic and the demands the crisis is placing on existing health services must surely be an important consideration for all future planning applications, and especially for major developments like Fort Halstead.

Design:

I had hoped the amended application would address concerns and criticism that the design of the new development was too “urban” and inappropriate for its rural and sensitive setting within the Green Belt and Kent Downs AONB. Regrettably, however, this is not the case and no design improvements have been made. The proposed development continues to be described as a “village”, with key areas referred to as the “Village Centre”, the “Village Mews” and the “Village Green”. However, it is clear from the scale of the proposals, the density, heights and distinctly urban style of the buildings, that this is a substantial new **town**, which looks more akin to South London than a village in the Kent Downs AONB.

The proposed character of the “Village Centre”, with 4 storey, flat-roofed blocks of red-brick buildings, creates a solid mass which, in my view, is far too heavy, and urban. I fully understand the need to integrate the new buildings with the retained historic buildings, particularly the listed buildings Q13 and Q14, and to make reference to Fort Halstead’s historic military and scientific use. However, there is a fine balance between designing buildings that maintain the integrity of the site’s previous use whilst at the same time being inspiring and aesthetically pleasing for future users. I agree that it is important for the new buildings to fit in with the listed and other retained original buildings, but I am concerned that the distinctly urban style chosen by the developers dominates the entire “Village Centre” and business hub, creating an unattractive, red-brick “urban jungle”. I would prefer to see the new buildings lower in height and density, to avoid creating such a heavy and dominating mass of built form, with designs and materials more in keeping with the rural character of Kent Downs villages. Buildings of less density, mass and height in this sensitive area would also improve the setting of, and views of, the adjacent Scheduled Ancient Monument, addressing concerns expressed by Historic England, and would create a more pleasant and genuine “village” feel.

Contamination:

Finally, I must strongly reiterate the concerns and fears expressed in my previous letter of 11/11/19, about the **risks posed to existing local residents, the general public, and future residents by contamination, caused by the storage and use of ammunition and radioactive materials, and by residues from experimental testing at the Fort Halstead site for the last hundred years.** It is essential that the contamination issue is

fully and properly addressed and that all areas of the proposed development site are fully investigated before any building works are permitted to commence. We need to be reassured and confident that our existing neighbouring communities will be robustly protected against any contamination risks to their health during the demolition and construction phases, and that future residents will not be at risk from residual contaminated materials remaining on site. The application documents on Contamination risks and mitigating measures greatly alarm me rather than reassure me.

Fort Halstead has great potential in theory, but I cannot help wondering whether the nature of the activities that have taken place there for over a hundred years, and the severity and extent of the resulting contamination over the whole site, make it suitable for such a development. The financial cost to deal with the contamination issue will be immense, but if not carried out fully and effectively, the cost to human health could be much greater.

I would be grateful if these comments and my earlier letter of 11th November 2019 could be taken into consideration when determining the amended application.

Yours faithfully

A S Hayward

MRS A HAYWARD