

From: Tony Slinn [REDACTED]
Sent: 04 April 2021 15:56
To: Planning Comments
Cc: laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk
Subject: 19/05000/HYB, Amended Application—proposed development of 635 houses at Fort Halstead
Attachments: Society's letter to SDC ref 750 houses sent 27 Oct.2019.doc; Society's letter to SDC ref Fort Halstead 450 homes August 2015.doc; Society's letter to SDC ref Fort Halstead amendment consultation July 20....doc
Importance: High

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Sunday, 04 April 2021

Ms. Claire Shearing, Case Officer
Planning Policy
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Council Offices, Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
Kent TN13 1HG

Also by email to: planning.comments@sevenoaks.gov.uk and laura.trott.mp@parliament.uk

Ref: 19/05000/HYB, Amended Application—proposed development of 635 houses at Fort Halstead.

Dear Ms. Shearing,

Thank you for your letter of 22 March 2021 advising the Knockholt Society of the amended Fort Halstead proposal. Thank you also for your note that previous comments from the Society would be taken into consideration.

I have attached copies of some of the Society's letters to SDC, dated 21 August 2015, 27 October 2019, and 23 July 2020: all the points made then remain valid.

Following the raft of amendments from the original 'employment-led' scheme (2015)—in which SDC granted planning permission for 450 houses—the Society continues to feel that SDC should have thrown out the entire application and rescinded planning permission. As the Society pointed out in its 2015 letter to

SDC: “As the developer is making clear in its amendments, there is a very real danger that the developer will seek to replace business / industrial buildings with more profitable housing.”

That, of course, is exactly what happened and is continuing to happen.

This latest amendment, however, sets a further dangerous precedent.

The developer is now seeking to build 635 houses with 2.77 hectares of land (down 26% from the original 3.6 hectares) allocated for commercial development. As SDC admitted when it granted permission for the ‘employment-led’ scheme, we are talking about Green Belt land (SDC’s exact words at the time were: ‘a Major Employment Site in the Green Belt.’)

These hybrid applications, as the developer has shown, are dangerous because SDC has already granted permission to build on Green Belt land. So what happens with this one when the developer says it can’t market the commercial allocation and asks for yet more houses?

As SDC must be aware, behind the Mumbai Central restaurant, at the top of Polhill, there are still commercial outbuildings from the former garage that occupied the site. They’re not let. Nobody wants them. Why should anyone, therefore, want commercial premises virtually nextdoor at Fort Halstead?

In SDC’s Allocations and Development Management Plan, adopted February 2015, it states on page 40 that the development: ‘Should be employment-led and should maintain the site’s role as an important employment site in the District. Provision should be made for a range of employment uses sufficient to provide for approximately 1,200 jobs.’

Given that the four-star hotel (76 jobs) has vanished and the application has increased from 450 to 635 houses—up over 40%—just how many more little boxes (housing density of 25 to 50 dwellings per hectare when the average density locally is 15 to 18) will the developer want next?

Including that the would-be developers of the adjacent Broke Hill golf course (also Green Belt land...) are appealing SDC’s perfectly correct decision to deny planing permission for 1,000 houses, the cumulative effect from the bottom of Star Hill to Knockholt rail station, should all these planning applications eventually be approved, would be a staggering 3,500 houses!

The Society’s letters to SDC have detailed at length the inadequate local infrastructure, and especially the appallingly badly maintained roads. Regarding the latter, the main entrance/exit to Fort Halstead is onto Polhill itself.

Now, Polhill used to have four-lanes on the steepest part. The Joint Transport Meeting of September 2006, noting both verge failure and carriageway instability, closed off one of the downward lanes. Nothing has been done to rectify this situation—and as both SDC and KCC must be aware, the land is still slipping ... and there are no plans to do anything about it.

What happens, then, if Polhill is further restricted or even closed? Do you divert all the traffic through Halstead’s and Knockholt’s patchwork quilt of narrow, potholed roads? That would be bad enough as it is today, but try to imagine the impact of the many, many thousands of traffic movements with heavy construction plant entailed in building a sprawling housing estate at Ford Halstead.

When the initial proposal to build about 1,000 houses on Fort Halstead first came up in 2010 it was addressed by SDC under its then Core Strategy. SDC did not support it. Neither did the Kent Downs AONB Unit. Nor did the planning inspector at the inevitable public inquiry—he said the site: “Was not in a sustainable location as its inhabitants would have to travel a considerable distance to access transport, shopping, and other facilities and that the development was not needed to meet the district's future development requirements.” SDC agreed and concluded: “In practice, this means that large-scale housing development at the site is unlikely to be granted planning permission.”

SDC should have stuck to that decision. Instead, it fell for this nonsensical ‘Major Employment Site in the Green Belt’ notion. And 11 years later, look where that’s got you.

Have the courage to back both your and the planning inspector’s original decision. This application is not sustainable, is unnecessary, will wreak havoc on local villages, and will irredeemably concrete over what is, and what should remain, Green Belt land.

Yours sincerely, on behalf of the Knockholt Society

