Rivendell

Pound lane

Knockholt

Kent

TN14 7NE

Dear Sirs

*Subject*: **Revised planning application for Fort Halstead, 750 houses**

*Your Reference*: **19/05000/HYB**

*Sent by email*—**16 November** **2019—to planning.comments@sevenoaks.gov.uk**

We are writing concerning the application to further extend the initially approved plan to redevelop the area known as Crow Drive, Fort Halstead. This application was due to be discussed at the local Planning Enquiry, which we feel is the correct forum for a full exchange of views, given the significant size and potential impact of this enlarged development. Furthermore, Fort Halstead should not be considered in isolation as there are other proposed developments in the area, clustering around the A224, all north of Sevenoaks. These would together result in urban sprawl which is out of keeping in this area of the Green Belt. As the Enquiry has been suspended for the present time, we feel it is premature for any significant changes to be made at this stage, and the plan should be rejected.

Our understanding was that the development was to be ‘employment lead’ which we wholly support. However, with the abandonment of the proposed hotel and very limited plans for a light industrial park, we feel the development will turn into a sprawling housing estate, which will be completely reliant on our already stretched local facilities.

The original proposal was for 450 dwellings, which is more in keeping with the size of the local villages of Knockholt and Halstead, though even for this size the influx of this number of families and their cars, has not in our view been properly factored in. To expand Fort Halstead with a further 300 dwellings to be in effect a small town is surely misconceived and indicative that neither the developers nor the site owners, the Merseyside Pension Fund, are interested in anything other than financial profit. Harmonising with the area, the environment and the local communities seems to be farthest from their minds. The concentration of dwellings is also a major concern, and constitutes over-development which is inconsistent with a rural area.

The public transport serving this area has become truncated over the years with minimal bus services for the villages. The train service from Knockholt, being the last station on the line in Zone 6, continues to draw in commuters from outside the local area, so that station and road parking is often at capacity. A development the size of Fort Halstead would put unreasonable strain on the commuter train services, which barely copes. In addition we have been told by the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers Association that services are already configured for a maximum of 10 coaches and the Kent Route Study shows there is no capacity for any extra trains on the congested local lines into London. Changing at Chelsfield for the faster London bound trains is problematic already, with standing room only during the rush-hour.

Returning to the issue of cars, our local roads are often quite narrow, and will not be able to cope with more traffic from the new developments, particularly as the main feeder road for the majority of these local developments, the A224, inevitably becomes congested. The situation is exacerbated by poor public transport.

The main exit road for Fort Halstead is the A2234 but a secondary one was proposed onto Star Hill Road, which is currently is restricted to use by DSTL. Star Hill would not be able to cope with extra residential traffic, due to its configuration, width and steepness .Furthermore all the surrounding villages would suffer massively with the through traffic, and often speeding vehicles. To mitigate this we strongly support Sevenoaks District Council’s pledge to restrict this exit to use by emergency vehicles and buses. We also note that Polhill itself, on the A224, has had carriageway width reduced, due to ground movement.

Another key consideration, we have touched on is the provision of local services. It is hard to see how the congested roads of Sevenoaks and Orpington would cope with the extra traffic for access to shops, schools and medical facilities. The local hospitals alone cannot cope at present, and with little being proposed to make Fort Halstead more self-contained.

The impact on the Green Belt and environment with this enlarged development beyond the original brown-field area. would be irreversible and inconsistent with SDC ’s policy on protecting the Green Belt.

There are also issues of ground contamination, which seem to have been swept ‘under the carpet’ by the developers, and with rising development costs any ideas of affordable housing (which the area sorely needs) will evaporate.

The continued threat over the possible development of Broke Hill Golf Course, just a couple of miles away is also a consideration, which receives no support locally nor from neighbouring Bromley Council. The addition of this to Fort Halstead would destroy any character remaining in the area and would cause irreversible damage to the local communities. In that respect, Fort Halstead is a preferred option, but using existing Brown-field areas, with a cap on the additional residential development of 450 dwellings, and an improved services infrastructure for the community.

We therefore hope that good sense will prevail, as Sevenoaks District Council supports the local communities in the vicinity of Fort Halstead, and rejects this further development.

Kind regards

Raymond and Virginia Picot