

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

14th November 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

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

Having studied details of the above planning application, I wish to register my strong opposition to this application for the following reasons:

Infrastructure:

The proposed development includes 300 more houses than the 450 houses agreed in the outline permission granted in 2015 (planning reference 15/00628/OUT), making a total of 750 residential properties, plus significant commercial and business facilities. This is in addition to the existing 72 properties already located at Fort Halstead, but now outside the ownership of the current applicant. This would give a total of 822 residential units at Fort Halstead, plus the proposed new commercial and business use, all of which would put a severe strain on local infrastructure. The roads bordering the development site, Star Hill Road, Polhill and Otford Lane, as well as the roads going through the villages of Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount are already congested at any time of the week – even Sunday mornings! The impact of 750 new houses, as well as substantial new commercial activity at Fort Halstead, would mean a potential 2000 plus vehicles in and around the area, with all the well-known associated effects of increased traffic:- congestion, noise and air pollution, damaging health and contributing to wider climate change and global warming.

Another factor would be the extra demand for mains water and sewerage services. In the Thames Water area, the system is ageing and burst water mains are a regular occurrence, some resulting in major incidents. Imagine the extra strain on the system created by this major development, not to mention all the other development schemes being proposed for this area.

Contamination:

Developing “Brownfield” sites, such as Fort Halstead, is infinitely preferable to building on unspoilt Green Belt land. However, brownfield sites will often have been used for light

and/or heavy industries and almost always there will be a legacy of contamination, resulting from the various manufacturing processes involved. I was worried to see a reference in the application documents to Fort Halstead being a “general industrial site”. This must be as far from the truth as is possible! Over the last hundred years, this site has been used for military and armament research and development, involving testing of components for a whole range of different weapon systems, including weapons of mass destruction. All this has resulted in extensive ground contamination over much of the site, exactly where the proposed new dwellings, business accommodation and community facilities are to be built.

Contaminants include Depleted Uranium, explosive devices, a whole range of radioactive and chemical residues, and “Pink Water”. All of these are highly toxic, and their presence is greatly alarming, considering the size and density of the proposed new development. What is equally as bad, if not worse, is the effect on the local area, especially Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount, once demolition and site clearance gets under way, involving the transportation and disposal of contaminated soil and materials following the excavation of footings. The prospect of convoys of rubble trucks rumbling through the area, plus wind-blown dust from on-site operations is a very alarming prospect. No doubt construction workers will have all the necessary protective masks, respirators, clothing and equipment to deal with such contaminants, but **how will we as residents living close to these operations be safeguarded? Also, once all these proposed dwellings are completed, how effective will “capping” operations be for contaminated areas where it has not been possible to remove toxic materials? I fear that the health of existing and future residents will be put seriously at risk, and am not reassured by proposed mitigation measures.**

Design, Density and Height of new buildings:

The design of the proposed new buildings, both residential and public, does little to showcase vernacular architecture, such as brick with flint, tile-hanging, and weather-boarding. Instead, the proposals are for a mixture of different styles, coming from various parts of the World, and with a distinctly urban feel. The proposed “Village Centre” does not really suggest a village at all, more an urban landscape.

In terms of density, this has increased more than 30% from an average of 34 dwellings per hectare in the 2015 scheme to an average of 46 DPH, which is far too great.

In terms of building height, I note that many of the proposed residential buildings are more than 2 storeys high, with most of the commercial and business accommodation in the “Village Centre” and Innovation/Education hub being 3 and 4 storeys. This makes for a very urban character, and is not a “village” at all.

I think the height and density of the proposed buildings should be reduced, to make a less cramped and more open development. I would also like to see a larger village green at the heart of the development, and more open space around the original Fort.

Landscape and Natural Environment:

I fear that such a large and intense development will damage the irreplaceable Ancient Woodlands on the site, and harm the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which the site is set. The size of the proposed development should therefore be reduced so as not to compromise and encroach upon the natural environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this proposed development is considerably bigger than the 2015 scheme, and would put excessive strain on an already over-loaded infrastructure, such as the local road system and utilities, and on local amenities, such as hospitals, health care and secondary schools.

The issue of historic contamination at the proposed development site is very serious indeed, and must be dealt with thoroughly and vigorously to make the area safe, before **any** building works commence.

The overall design of the current scheme is uninspiring and needs more in the way of vernacular architecture, typical of Kentish villages, to make it more attractive and less "urban".

Finally, the addition of 300 houses to the Fort Halstead scheme must be seen in the context of the many other proposed developments in Halstead and Badgers Mount, particularly along the A224 from Polhill to and around the Badgers Mount roundabout, as well as within Halstead village itself. This is a disproportionate amount of development in one small rural, community, and would transform our village into one of the largest settlements in the Sevenoaks District.

I would therefore urge Sevenoaks District Council **not** to grant permission for the proposed 300 additional houses at Fort Halstead, and to think very carefully in particular about the contamination issues at this site. The lives and well-being of existing residents living near the site, as well as those of future residents, are at very much at stake here.

Thank you for taking these views into consideration.

Yours faithfully

S W Hayward

MR S W HAYWARD