

**From: Harbord Road Residents Association (HRARA) and Kidlington Development Watch**

**Date: 8 January 2024**

**Response to: The Moors, Kidlington – EIA Screening Request (Request for Screening Opinion under Regulation 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, for proposed residential development at land north of the Moors, Kidlington.**

## **1. Introduction**

White Peak Planning (WPP) is seeking an EIA Screening Opinion from Cherwell District Council (CDC) in respect of a proposed development of approximately 300 new dwellings, two cricket pitches, a pavilion and associated drainage, access, and ancillary infrastructure at land north of The Moors, Kidlington.

WPP states that the site has been under consideration for housing development since 2013 through various stages of the evolving Local Plan process and is currently being assessed in the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2040. This is misleading: it has not been under consideration for development since 2013, rather the developer Harper Crewe Bloombridge has unsuccessfully promoted the site since 2013.

This Screening Opinion Request seems particularly premature as the site is in the Green Belt and is not currently included in a local plan. We are disappointed that the developer is seeking to avoid preparing an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). We consider that this large development is likely to have significant effects on the environment and therefore request that the Council requires an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.

Substantial development is already planned in the locality with the huge Oxford North development plus the 4,400 dwellings already allocated to Green Belt sites in the current local plan. It is also clear that the number of dwellings that will be approved will significantly exceed the original allocations. In addition, the draft local plan 2040 incorporates the allocation of further land nearby for housing SE of Woodstock/ Upper Campsfield Road (LPR002) together with a large amount of land for employment uses in the area (at Langford Lane, the Airport and Begbroke Science Park).

**We believe that the proposed Moors Development cannot be considered in isolation. It is necessary to consider the cumulative effect of a further Green Belt development in an area that we consider to be ecologically and environmentally sensitive.**

## **2. Flora and Fauna within or near the proposed site**

The site includes many habitats which are beneficial to local fauna including wide tree belts, large mature hedgerows, tree lines, rough grassland margins, a pond with protected species. Whilst much of the proposed site is arable land this is also of value to some important species, depending on what crops are grown. For example Skylarks, a Red Listed species (see below), can be found on most areas of open farmland, preferring larger arable and grassland fields. The areas of scrub also provide a particularly valuable habitat for nesting birds. The site is also near to the Thrupp Community Forest and is therefore part of wider varied habitat.

Locally there is much anecdotal evidence of a wide variety of wildlife being present in the area. This includes bats, birds, badgers, foxes, deer, reptiles and amphibians. Local ornithologists, including Oxford Ornithological Society, have records of bird sightings in the area. These include a number of species on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List<sup>1</sup> including Swift, Skylark, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Linnet, Yellowhammer, as well as birds on the Amber List.

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<sup>1</sup> Birds of Conservation Concern is compiled by a coalition of the UK's leading bird conservation and monitoring organisations and reviews the status of all regularly occurring birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

A local member of the Bat Group tells us that the tree lines are used by several bats, both types of Pipistrelle, and there have been sightings of both types of noctules over the fields with area near the woodland being something of a hot spot.

The presence of Great Crested Newts, potential roosting sites for bats, reptiles, Red Listed birds etc are significant and they merit full assessment. The Screening Request conclusion (for each of these species) that "It is therefore, considered unlikely that significant adverse effects will occur as a result of the construction and occupation of the proposed development" are both premature and unfounded. We believe it is important that further assessment is carried out via an EIA.

### **3. Designated Sites**

Rushy Meadows SSI is located just over half a kilometre away from the proposed site. In addition there are Local Wildlife Sites in the area, some nearby. The Screening Request seems to pre-determine the effect on these areas on the basis of an Ecological Assessment which has not been provided. However, we believe that there is potential for significant effects on these areas and further assessment is required via an EIA.

### **4. Local transport, congestion and air pollution**

Development of this site would mean a significant number of additional vehicle movements, which will mean even more vehicles being mostly directed to Banbury/Oxford Road. This road is already severely congested at times and drivers make use of rat runs through residential areas. And this is before the already planned development mentioned above takes place.

Increased traffic will be accompanied by an increase in pollution and the effect of this requires further assessment via an EIA. The incorporation of a cricket pavilion/ hospitality venue is also likely to increase parking pressure both within the development and in Church Street / the church car park (which are regularly at capacity thanks to the large number of visiting walkers and church events).

### **5. Listed Buildings and Church Street Conservation Area**

St Mary's Church is Grade 1 listed (i.e. of national/international historic importance) and is a magnificent architectural gem which dates from 1220. The church spire "Our Lady's Needle" is visible for many miles around particularly from footpaths which cross the proposed site. The fields also have archaeological interest related to the Iron Age, Roman and medieval periods.

Kidlington Historical Society has commented that : "the landscape is a good example of post-enclosure Kidlington, with most of the field boundaries those set out on the Enclosure Map. The age of the hedges will be an indication of their value for wildlife. There is an ancient (possibly Roman) well just north of the area, in Ashpit. It's an odd place to find a well, right on top of the cornbrash ridge running down to the Church, so there may be archaeology around it, extending into the proposed LGS. This area is part of the setting of St Mary's with delightful views down the ridge towards the church from the footpath to Sparrowgap Bridge."

Contrary to the conclusion reached in the Screening Opinion Request, the proposed site is a crucial part of the wider landscape setting of the church. This rural, open setting *does* contribute to its heritage significance, and we consider that the development would be harmful to both the heritage significance of the church and the way its significance is experienced. There are a number of Public Rights of Way in the area and many thousands of people regularly use this easily accessible area for recreation. They enjoy the views of this large historic church from the **rural** setting of the footpaths, much as worshippers have done down the ages.

Furthermore, the briefing note fails to mention the potential impact of the cricket pavilion which may not prove an idyllic neighbour to the listed church building. We understand (personal communication) that the cricket club have proposed a fairly substantial building that will have views

over both cricket pitches AND be used as a commercial venue (for parties, weddings etc) throughout the year. This can be expected to bring additional parking and noise pressures to the land closest the church and conservation area.

Again, the Screening Opinion Request has drawn sweeping and unfounded conclusions based on an initial heritage assessment that has not been made available. We request further assessment via an EIA to ensure that potential effects of the proposed development on this Grade 1 Listed building are given full and proper consideration.

## **6. Users of Public Rights of Way (PROWs)**

The Screening Opinion Request draws the following conclusion: "Therefore, although the new development will be visible to users of the PROW views will be in part screened or softened by new and existing green infrastructure to minimise the impacts of the new housing."

The reality is that the proposed site is easily accessible and is used by many people for recreation but much of its value would be lost as a result of urban development. The site is in attractive open countryside which leads to the Cherwell Meadows Conservation Target Area and the River Cherwell itself. There are almost no buildings until the nearest villages are reached and no through roads. Consequently the area is tranquil and has the feel of being part of unspoiled countryside. This is not the case almost anywhere else on the village boundary.

We understand that the two PROWs which cross and bound the site are enclosure awards from 1818 and should be maintained to a width of 10 feet, though in practice they are not.

To suggest that screening will ameliorate the effects of this is misleading and incorrect and further assessment is required via an EIA.

## **7. Drainage and surface flooding**

We note that Cherwell's own drainage response to the application confirms that " , there are a few areas of surface water flood risk where water can flow overland temporarily or become temporarily trapped". At the time of writing, residents have told us that *"this week the flooding in St Mary's Fields is extensive and much wildlife is harbouring higher up in the proposed build area. I have also taken photos of flooding in the exact fields they plan to build on and the 'cricket pitch' is currently a lake! The drains along The Moors and down Benmead Avenue are overflowing and there is flooding at the end of Mill Street almost too deep to drive through"*.

The concerns that foul drainage could be inadequate and the possible need to discharge rainwater into the river Cherwell seem significant and merit a full EIA. The land is upstream of the housing around Mill End which already has fluvial flood control measures in place. (The road at Mill End is currently flooded, since the Cherwell is at capacity, with buses being diverted) Any additional upstream discharge into the river could make this a more regular occurrence.

## **8. Conclusion**

We consider that this request for a Screening Opinion is premature because the site is not included in a local plan.

However, if the Council does decide to issue an opinion, we request that developer is required to prepare an EIA.

**END**