



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The Heart of
Berkhamsted*

January 7th 2020

Berkhamsted Citizens are writing to express our surprise and concern regarding the proposal, circulated, it seems, to all residents in the HP4 (Berkhamsted postcode) just before Christmas by Thakeham Group for a development of around 1,100 new homes (called 'Bulbourne Cross') located on Green Belt land between Berkhamsted and Bourne End. 'Surprise' because this new proposed development site is not identified in the suggested sites in the draft Dacorum Local Plan 2020 – 2038, which is currently out for public consultation - and 'concern' because this development, would add to the proposed scheme for 850 new homes, identified as "South Berkhamsted", or BK-01 in the draft Local Plan. It seems to us quite bizarre that as soon as a Draft Local Plan is issued out for consultation, a developer can then over-ride this by proposing an alternative development proposal which is entirely outside the Plan.

The proposed Bulbourne Cross scheme, along with 'South Berkhamsted' will coalesce Berkhamsted with Bourne End. Bourne End will itself become a satellite of Hemel Hempstead by virtue of the LA3 development, west of Hemel, which we understand has approval to proceed. In fact, these proposals will help to create ribbon development all the way from Northchurch to Kings Langley! Preventing coalescence of communities is one of the fundamental tenets of Green Belt policy, and we strongly object to the resulting erosion of the Green Belt if these developers are permitted to proceed.

We applaud the "net zero homes" and "carbon neutral living" that the developer is putting forward. In terms of 'construction' and 'use' carbon consumption, that is the direction of travel for all new buildings - though our understanding of the effects of the Government White Paper on reforms to the Planning system is to place more emphasis on how a building *looks* than how it *performs*. Despite claims by the developer to the contrary, the fact that the new development is 3km from Berkhamsted town centre, and probably the same to Hemel town centre means that the vast majority of journeys to and from the new housing, school and sports facilities are likely to be undertaken by car. Although cars will be electric in time, until then, we cannot see how the developer's claim of "carbon neutral living" can be substantiated. However, they are powered, cars still cause congestion, and it is difficult to understand the developer's claim that Bulbourne Cross will somehow "reduce traffic in Berkhamsted High Street". In connection with this, we also fail to understand the logic of trumpeting the provision of "40% affordable homes" in a relatively remote location, away from established communities. Surely those in need of affordable housing and those least likely to have access to a car or multiple cars, and hence are more suited to a town centre location.

The Berkhamsted Sports Ground Charitable Trust is also celebrating the prospect of "free land" on which to place sports pitches, new indoor sports facilities - and 400 car parking spaces. We would question how 'partnering with developers' fits with BSGCT's stated charitable objects ("to provide for the inhabitants of Berkhamsted and the neighbourhood in the interest of social welfare facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation for the purpose of relaxation and the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants") given that the new sports facilities

will be closer to Boxmoor and the western neighbourhoods of Hemel than they will be to many parts of Berkhamsted. Berkhamsted Football Club, one of BSGCT's tenants and local provider of "social welfare facilities for recreation and leisure time occupation" has made it clear that it doesn't want to move from its current stadium. Furthermore, the lands currently identified for sports pitches (and the proposed school and its playing fields) are unsuitable for these uses given their hilly nature, unless extensive – and expensive – re-profiling of the landscape is envisaged.

When the A.41 'by-pass' was built, the buffer between the road and housing in the town was intended as a 'green lung' to absorb traffic noise and pollution. Over time, this principle appears to have been eroded such that housing and the school will be built close to the main road. Along with this, the quality of life for residents on the new housing developments will be detrimentally affected by constant traffic noise – even if the homes are well insulated.

We hope that residents of Berkhamsted and the wider locality – and indeed, the local planning authority - will be able to see past the developer's incentives of providing "better places to live" to see the bigger picture. Once Green Belt land is built-on, it is lost as open space forever.

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