

## **An urgent open letter to Brandon Lewis, Minister of State (Communities and Local Government)**

Dear Mr Lewis.

It seems that there may be a move to accelerate development of land west of Farm Lane, Leckhampton, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. It would be unfortunate if this happened prior to the conclusions of the Examination in Public (EiP) of the local Joint Core Strategy (JCS), as they may include important considerations about this specific parcel of land. Preliminary findings of the EiP suggest that development of this land may be unsound and, accepting that the Inspector takes an independent and impartial view, such a result would indicate that development here now would not only be premature but also wrong. For the sake of reasonableness, fairness, and democracy, it is essential that the EiP is allowed to conclude and report, particularly bearing in mind this should happen within the next month or so.

Aside from this crucial point, it should also be noted that the original decision by Tewkesbury Borough Council to permit the development of 377 dwellings appears to be seriously flawed, including:

- The presumption that this development would be part of a larger urban extension, a major part of which has, in fact, had planning permission refused. Without the larger development (and even with it), there are inadequate facilities and infrastructure including health services, transport, schools and open space.

These failures are against the NPPF and planning policies which, for example, require a choice of school places and, in this case, at least 2.08 HA of open space of which 1.4 HA should be playing pitches. Sport England objected to the application due to inadequate provision. When considering a previous application for 360 dwellings on this land, a former Secretary of State said there was inadequate green space for 360 dwellings. The development now being proposed is for 377 dwellings, increased at the last minute from 369.

- There are significant unresolved concerns raised by Cheltenham Borough Council (one of Tewkesbury's JCS partners) including the landscape and visual impact of the proposal with regard to the AONB, the density of the proposed development and the lack of information as to how the scheme will contribute to the economic role of sustainable development by ensuring that development requirements are co-ordinated, including the provision of infrastructure.
- There were in excess of 800 objections to the application, including the relevant MPs and Parish Councils. Despite assurances that all the concerns of the local community were taken into account and that all issues were properly considered, I cannot see one shred of evidence to support this claim.
- The NPPF is being used to justify a presumption in favour of sustainable development due to the Local Plan being out of date. However, selected elements of the Local Plan were invoked throughout the Planning Officers submission to the Planning Committee to support the application. The unresolved issues with Cheltenham Borough Council, some of which are reflected in the conditions applied to the development of this site in Tewkesbury's Local Plan, do not appear to be given any weight even though they would be key to refusing the application.
- The Urban Design Officer raised several concerns with the proposed plans and despite some changes, expressed continuing concerns about the very dense appearance of the development, the lack of variety of house types, the general appearance of the detached units being

particularly unattractive, the street scene appearing overly car dominated, insufficient car parking for the dwellings and for visitors resulting in anti-social parking making difficulties for pedestrians cyclist, prams and wheelchair users.

- The need for mitigation measures concerning noise, transport and biodiversity were mentioned although there are no apparent suggestions as to what these measures might look like or how viable they may be.
- Although the JCS highlights that permission will not be provided for development unless the infrastructure and public services necessary to enable the development to take place are either available or can be provided, permission was granted with none of these in place or likely to be in place. The site is isolated and is dependent on a nearby larger scale development which may never happen.
- There is an outstanding Local Green Space (LGS) application which is currently being considered as part of the EiP. However, the Planning Officers at Tewkesbury said that a LGS designation allocation would rarely be appropriate for an existing residential site allocation. The allocation referred to, however, is in the Tewkesbury Borough adopted Local Plan which the officers have consistently decreed is out of date. The LGS application is therefore entirely legitimate and a decision by the EiP Inspector is awaited as part of the whole JCS review.

These are a few examples of real puzzlement about how permission could ever have been granted for 377 dwellings on isolated rural land west of Farm Lane, which are entirely out of character with the local area. Concerns about where houses may be built if this land is not developed will be addressed by the EiP which is also investigating various sites omitted from the JCS submission version.

In order to establish a real strategic plan which correctly meets planning rules and requirements, the proper process must be completed and the EiP allowed to report before any major development goes ahead. It is therefore important that whatever actions necessary are taken to stop construction until there is a clear way forward that has been expertly and accurately established.

Please use your influence to urgently effect this reasonable and only fair course of action.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jean Ringrose

**Copies to:**

Mike Hale, Inspector Ord (via Ian Kemp), Alex Chalk, MP, Laurence Robertson MP, Councillor Robert Vines, Mike Dawson, Councillor Steve Jordan, Steve Morgan, Gloucestershire Echo Editor.