

Woking 2027 DPD Consultation

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To: Planning Policy

Mrs M J Gates

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30.7.2015

Planning Policy Team,

Woking Borough Council,

Civic Offices,

Gloucester Square,

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Dear Sirs,

Regarding: Woking 2027 DPD Consultation

I have been made aware of the Woking 2027 planning proposals that will impact Mayford. My comments are not specific to any of your documents, however I will refer to the specific site references that I am concerned about:

Site Reference: GB7 (Ten Acre Farm, Smarts Heath Road)

I strongly object to the proposal to increase the number of Traveller Pitches on this land.

Currently, Woking's Traveller sites are concentrated in one part of the Borough – Hatchington, Burdeshott Road (one mile from Ten Acre Farm), Ten Acre Farm, Mayford, and Brookwood Lye

(three miles from Ten Acre Farm). Mayford already provides a major contribution towards the Traveller Community. There is no justification for further expansion in Mayford.

Additionally, Ten Acre farm is adjacent to Smarts Heath Common, an SSSI, used by residents of Mayford for leisure purposes. Any increase in the present Traveller site of five caravans at 10 Acre Farm would decrease the visual amenity and character of the area and also increase risk to wildlife due to increased number of domestic animals in close proximity.

Over the years successive Planning Inspectors have refused applications on this site because they reduce the openness of a Green Belt area.

Furthermore,

- A sequential approach must be taken in identifying suitable sites for allocation, with sites in the urban area being considered before those in the Green Belt. However no urban sites appear to have been considered - there must be doubt as to the validity of no other sites across the whole of the Borough being identified or suitable.

- Where no sites are available in the urban area, priority will be given to sites on the edge of the urban area that benefit from good access to jobs, shops and other infrastructure and services. Mayford does not satisfy any of these criteria.

- Traveller sites should have adequate amenity for its intended occupiers, including space for related business activities. Smarts Heath Road is a residential road of some 25 houses, with two Grade Two listed buildings in close proximity to Ten Acre Farm. Travellers related business activities are out of keeping in such a road.

- Traveller sites should have safe and reasonable access to schools and other local facilities. Smarts Heath Road is not currently close to schools. It does not have easy access to any local facilities; in fact as is clear there are virtually no local facilities within the Mayford village precinct.

Site References:

GB8 (Nursery land adjacent to Egley Road)

I cannot understand how this this site is now up for planning permission (Plan/2015/0703) before the DPD Document has reached its final version and been approved by the Secretary of State and turned into a Local Plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework clearly sets out that sites can only be removed from the greenbelt and developed under special circumstances and as part of a Local Plan, which is what we are commenting on now!!!!.

WBC seem intent on ignoring this requirement.

I object to the school, as the only reason for building it is to accommodate all the children from the sites GB8,9,10,11 thus making it easier for WBC to argue the case for building on these sites in the greenbelt.

If the brown field sites in the urban area cannot be developed as planned and I suspect they cannot, then the greenbelt sites would be brought forward earlier than 2027 and with a brand new school in place waiting for local pupils, then the proposed sites in Mayford would be the first to be developed in Woking as this is the easy option.

I strongly object to the associated application for a leisure centre, running track, football and other sports pitches, café, associated car parking and access provisions. These are totally inappropriate developments within a residential area and do not meet the Council's own stated 800m separation policy. The 5000 visits per week implies a substantial new load on an already overloaded and unexpandable road system and the public transport to and through this area as you know is dire. The early morning and late night operating hours for this site will have a major impact on residents both in the direct view and within surrounding areas. This is a totally inappropriate proposal and its association with the school proposal represents a very unfortunate lack of transparency on behalf of the Council.

Site References:

GB8 (Nursery land adjacent to Egley Road)

GB9 (Woking Garden Centre, Egley Road)

GB10 (Land to the north east of Saunders Lane, between Saunders Lane and Hook Hill Lane)

GB11 (Land to the north west of Saunders Lane)

I strongly object to the proposal for housing on all of the above sites.

The housing will fill in any green space between Mayford and Woking, thereby turning Mayford into a suburb of Woking and increasing greatly the risk of merging of Woking and Guildford – the whole purpose of the Green Belt. There appears to have been no consideration for preserving Mayford as a separate settlement to Woking, nor the impact on the character of the Village. The character of Mayford as an isolated community of less than a thousand dwellings will be destroyed forever; this will have a disproportionate and totally unjustifiable impact on Mayford residents, all of whom chose to live in a semi-rural, not urban, environment.

There also appears to have been no consideration to the impact on Mayford's infrastructure that the increased population will result in, and the resulting dysfunction for existing and new residents alike. More people mean more cars and more strain on the transport infrastructure. I note that there are no plans to upgrade the roads (some of which have no pavements) or railway bridges (which are all single lane) nor robust solutions to deal with the existing traffic problems on Egley Road. Prey Heath Road will become very dangerous as increased traffic to Worplesdon station (which already struggles with very poor access) will be weaving around people walking on the road (as there are no pavements). The idea of directing traffic to 400 new homes down Saunders Lane is ridiculous – this is a narrow road which in parts is not passable to two lanes of traffic; it is already subject to significant through traffic travelling at inappropriate speed very close to houses which are built right up the road edge; and it is bounded by single-lane bridge and tunnel pinch points from all approach directions.

Not only will the wildlife in the developed areas be wiped out, but also there will be increased risk to wildlife in our protected Heaths (Smarts Heath and Prey Heath) due to the proximity of the development.

Some more detailed comments on your proposals follow, all of which require consideration by Council in keeping with your statutory obligations:

National Planning Policy Factors:

- National Policy states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in “exceptional circumstances” – this has not been proved by Woking Council, especially as Policy clearly states that “housing need – including for Traveller sites – does not justify the harm done to the Green Belt by inappropriate development.”
- No evidence (independently verified) has been produced to demonstrate that Woking Council has exhausted Brownfield sites for development in its Plan
- The Green Belt Review incorrectly dismissed the Green Belt Purpose “To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns” stating that “Woking is not considered to be a town that has a particularly strong historical character” – however Mayford does have a strong history and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. This important touch point with our past will be lost forever if your proposals proceed, as Mayford will effectively become Greater Woking.
- Green Belt land in Mayford is fundamental to the physical separation of Woking, Mayford and Guildford – this is incorrectly classified only as “important” in the Green Belt Review
- There is only two miles between the Mayford roundabout and Slyfield, which results in a high risk of coalescence between Woking and Guildford should Mayford develop further; far from “ensuring a strong defensible greenbelt boundary”, as your proposal suggests, the urbanisation and absorption of Mayford will just represent a natural kick-off point for further development towards Guildford. Strong boundaries are considered to be motorways, district roads, railway lines, rivers, prominent physical features, protected woodlands – the proposed changes would in fact make a weaker boundary due to removal of the escarpment
- Woking Council openly states that it considers land available for development (for example owned by the Council or a Developer) as more “viable” for removal from the Green Belt – the ownership status of land has no bearing on whether it should be Green Belt or not.

Landscape and Environmental Factors:

- The Green Belt Review was worryingly inconsistent in its approach as it identified areas of land not to be considered (due to a number of constraints), however it then proceeded to recommend land that contained these constraints (Mayford included). The Brett & Associates Report rejected the 10 Acre Site as a Traveller site.
- Land relating to Special Protection Areas (including a 400m buffer) was excluded from consideration of the Green Belt Review to protect endangered birds. Prey Heath and Smarts Heath are SSSIs (Special Sites of Scientific Interest) and are designated by Bird Life International as “Important Bird Areas” and therefore should also have buffers applied for the same reason.

- The Mayford Village Society is currently pursuing the inclusion of Prey Heath and Smarts Heath into the Thames Basin Heaths SPA (Special Protection Area) which, if successful, will result in a 400m development buffer zone within which development is not allowed.
- Land North of Saunders Lane includes “Escarpments and Rising Ground of Landscape Importance” (1999 Local Plan Policy NE7 –referred to as CS24 in the Woking 2027 submission) and therefore should not be considered for development.
- The Green Belt Review proposes to change boundaries without a Landscape Character Assessment – this questions the validity of the Review and suggests why areas of landscape importance NE7/CS24 have been ignored.
- The Green Belt Review indicates that a school on Egley Road would maintain the openness of the area, however this is misleading if the school is merely a Trojan horse as a precursor to housing on fields either side of the school later on.
- Mayford is a key area for the absorption of rainwater to alleviate flooding. Developing on the land proposed will increase surface water and increase flood risk to surrounding properties.

Infrastructure Factors:

- The Green Belt Review recommended Mayford on the basis of the ease of access to Woking Town Centre, stating that it takes 7 minutes to travel from Mayford to Woking. The report acknowledged that this was estimated using Google Maps timings. At peak hours the actual travel time on A320 can be over half an hour; the natural response of motorists is to take alternative routes through narrow residential roads, exacerbating the impact on all residents south of Woking.
- Mayford has a very poor road network. Roads are narrow and most are unlit at night with few pedestrian footpaths. Traffic is gridlocked in the Village at peak hours. This will be further adversely affected by traffic from 550 new homes being built on Mayford’s boundary at Willow Reach and Kingsmoor Park. The proposed school for Egley Road will further exacerbate this situation.
- Mayford has a poor public transport system with limited bus services.
- Worplesdon Station is inaccessible with unlit pedestrian footpaths leading to and away from the station.
- There are three single line bridges, two with traffic lights in the village. Those on Smarts Heath Road and Hook Hill Lane service the area proposed to be developed - neither could handle additional traffic. The third services Worplesdon Network Rail station which would notice a major increase in congestion.
- The Green Belt Review recommended Mayford on the basis of proximity to a “Local Centre”, however, other than a Post Office and Barbers, Mayford has no supporting infrastructure in the form of shops, doctors, dentists, medical facilities, or schools. Residents living on any major development in the Village would be isolated unless they have a vehicle.

Please reconsider your plans - what is currently planned will have a devastating impact to Mayford as a Village.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Marion Joan Gates

Woking Resident