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Dear Sirs

Re: Woking 2027 DPD Consultation

We are residents of Barnsbury and we strongly object to Woking Council's proposals with respect to its plans for housing, education and leisure facilities in South Woking, specifically the following sites:

- GB8 – nursery land adjacent to Egley Road;
- GB9 – Woking Garden Centre, Egley Road;
- GB10 – land to the north east of Saunders Lane;
- GB11 – land to the north west of Saunders Lane; and
- GB14 – land adjacent of Hook Hill Lane, Hook heath.

We have serious concerns about the Council's plans to build such a large housing – some 500 houses – including a sizable education and leisure development for the following reasons.

- Community

As a direct consequence of this development, Barnsbury will change from being a quiet estate situated on the outskirts of the town with plenty of surrounding green spaces to an urbanised area with heavy traffic.

Mayford in particular will lose its integrity and village character. The development will not be sympathetic to the village and will encroach greatly on the Green Belt land between Woking and Guildford. This in turn will lead inevitably to the loss of the natural beauty of this area, and the significant loss of habitat for many of its wild animals. It will also lead to a high risk of coalescence between Woking and Guildford.

- National Planning Policy / "Exceptional circumstances"

We accept that there may be a need for a secondary school in the South Woking area. However the site of a school in Egley Road would mean that it is only two miles from the nearest secondary school – Winston Churchill. It would however be four miles from Bishop David Brown school in Sheerwater.

A site closer to Old Woking, where there is plenty of available space, would mean that Hoe Valley secondary school would be equidistant with the other schools in the local area. This would ensure adequate coverage across the town and minimise travelling time for pupils.

Whilst a secondary school may be classed as "exceptional circumstances" to allow an incursion onto Green Belt land, neither the leisure centre, running track nor the housing development can reasonably be considered as such.

The National Policy states that *“housing need – including Traveller sites – does not justify the harm done to the Green Belt by inappropriate development”*. It has not been demonstrated that there is a need for this level of housing. Moreover, insufficient consideration has been given to building more high density housing within the town centre or building on Brownfield sites.

Woking Council has also suggested it would be local housing for local people, but this is clearly not the case. Councillor Graham Cundy has acknowledged to the Mayford Village Society that the majority of new homes built would be purchased by Londoners, relocating to the town. On this basis, it cannot be considered that the housing development meets a need for Woking’s existing community.

The running track would be used by a very small number of people within the community. On this basis, it has not been demonstrated there is an overwhelming need for this in order to constitute “exceptional circumstances” to build on Green Belt land in South Woking.

It is also worth noting that it was Woking Council’s intention to build a running track on the other side of town, but due to local opposition they did not proceed with their plans. It is difficult in light of its original plans for it to argue that this is a need for the people of Barnsbury and Mayford.

We are frequent users of the local leisure centre and we have not at any time had any issues with using any of the facilities at short notice to suggest a demand for another leisure centre. Even if there was such a need, it seems a poor strategy to locate another centre only 1.2 miles from the existing leisure centre, particularly when there are no other council operated facilities in the town.

It would seem prudent under these circumstances to build a leisure centre on the other side of town. This would ensure more people live more local to these facilities and reduce air pollution and road traffic, as it would mean fewer and shorter journeys by those using the existing leisure centre.

- Traffic and air quality

Egley Road is a very busy road in the morning as well as the evening, often leading to significant tail backs into Woking town (from Victoria Arch to Mayford roundabout) as well as Old Woking. The construction of the housing, leisure and education facilities and the residents/ users of these facilities will lead to a significant increase in the number of vehicles on Egley Road throughout the day and the evening, not just in “rush hour”. This will at busy times, lead to gridlock.

We are very worried, as the development will lead to a greater strain on transport infrastructure and there is no strategy in place to deal with the traffic on Egley Road. We also understand that there are no plans to upgrade the surrounding single lane roads, which will also be affected – including Prey Heath Road which will become very dangerous as there are no pavements and the development will lead to increased traffic to Worplesdon station.

The air quality will also inevitably deteriorate as a result, which is concerning to all local residents, not just those with respiratory conditions. It is also of concern as the children at the two local primary schools (which are in close proximity to the road) will undoubtedly be affected by the increased air pollution. This calls into question the sustainability of the development.

- Environment

Areas of Mayford are recommended to be released from the Green Belt on the basis of “creating a defensible Green Belt boundary”. “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 the removal of the escarpment.

Mayford is a also key area for the absorption of rainwater to alleviate flooding. Developing on the land proposed will increase surface water and increase flood risk to the surrounding properties, which is obviously concerning.

The development will also lead to a significant loss of habitat for our wildlife. During our many walks along Egley Road, we have seen deer, badgers, foxes, rabbits and hedgehogs and many birds, including a red kite. These beautiful animals will be needlessly uprooted by the construction traffic and housing development, forced to move into territories occupied by other animals with increased competitiveness for any food. As a consequence, it will be a struggle for them to survive.

The development will also be an increased risk to wildlife which have already formed habitats in the protected Heaths, due to its close proximity.

- Infrastructure

The Green Belt review recommended Mayford on the basis of its proximity to the local centre and has suggested a seven minute travel time between Mayford and the town centre. I understand that this was based on timings from Google Maps, however we know from experience this journey can often take up to half an hour.

No consideration also appears to have been given to the increased pressure this development will place on limited community services in the area – shops, doctors, dentists, medical facilities and primary/infant schools. However as we have explained above, we understand that there are no plans to create a new GP practice or new infant or primary school places to accommodate the families that would move into such a development or their increased public transport needs.

- Consultation period

On a final note, we consider Woking Council's plans to let local residents know about the development to be insufficient and we call into question the validity of the consultation period.

We only became aware of the development by way of placards in the gardens of Mayford residents. Given the size, significant and in particular the location of the development, we would expect the Council to have made a considerable effort to let the people of Woking, particularly those like ourselves living nearby, to know of the development plans.

There was no leaflet drop to local residents. We are in the town centre most days, but we have not seen any plans regarding the development in the shopping centres, such as there was in connection with the Council's plans for the town centre. Nor have we seen any Council representatives attempting to make the local population aware of the situation.

We consider it highly likely, on this basis, that many people, who may oppose the development, are completely unaware of it.

For all of the above reasons, we consider Woking Council should not go ahead with the development.

Yours faithfully

Paul and Claire Rogers