

Milton Keynes Council
Civic Offices
1 Saxon Gate East
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 3HQ

Friday 8th March 2019

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Draft North Crawley Neighbourhood Plan

I write regarding the draft North Crawley Neighbourhood Plan ("NCNP"). The NCNP calls for the construction of up to 35 dwelling houses across two locations in the village:

- H3 and H4, which are immediately adjacent to each other, and situated along the northern edge of the Kilpin Green housing estate.
- H5, which is at the eastern end of the High Street.

I wish to express my concerns regarding the latter aspect of the NCNP and to oppose the NCNP as failing to meet the Basic Conditions on this basis. My reasons are as follows:

1. Inconsistent and unjustifiable resulting density of housing.
2. Disregard for and contravention of planning policies and constraints.
3. Detrimental impact on the village boundary.
4. Unmanageable increase of and disruption to road traffic.

1. Housing Density

The proposed development at H5 would significantly increase the housing density of the eastern end of the village. The equivalent area on the opposite (northern) side of the High Street contains only five dwelling houses. The construction of up to three times as many houses to the south of this part of the High Street, as the NCNP proposes, would radically alter the character of this part of the village.

The NCNP calls for the proposed housing to be: 'in keeping with adjoining dwellings'. The dwellings referred to are a terraced row of six dwellings, closer to the centre of the village, and comprising the most densely housed part of the eastern High Street. Nevertheless, the proposed development at H5 allows for the construction of nearly double the number of houses that exist within the adjacent area on the same side of the High Street.

By contrast, the land immediately to the south of H3 and H4 (based on an equivalent area) is occupied by an approximately equal or even greater number of houses than that which the NCNP proposes in these areas.

The insensitivity of the development at H5 will be rendered still starker by the fact it will necessarily dissolve the only publicly accessible green space along this section of the High Street. Whilst the access in question consists of a public right of way, this is arguably contrary to the objectives of Policies L2 and/or L4 of Plan:MK.¹

Additionally, H5 encompasses an area approximately 30 per cent of the size of that encompassed by H3 and H4. More than 10 per cent of the land within H5 is effectively occupied by a horse chestnut tree, which has been subject to a tree preservation order since 1984 (see below).

Despite this, the NCNP allows for more than 40 per cent of the proposed housing (up to 15 of a possible 35 dwellings) to be within the markedly smaller area of H5. This would result in a significantly greater housing density than is proposed in the combined area of H3 and H4. This entirely fails to account for the fact that existing housing density is far greater in the vicinity of H3 and H4 than it is in the vicinity of H5.

It is also notable that the provision for sensitive development is far clearer within policies H3 and H4. They both expressly seek to avoid overlooking between the two sites and of the other properties on Orchard Way. H4 seeks to incorporate the existing hedgerow to the north and provide new screening on its eastern edge. H3 proposes to incorporate the existing right of way running through the site.

H5, by contrast, makes no provision to prevent overlooking of the existing properties on the same road. It merely affirms that it seeks to complement/accord with applicable policy, and to 'respect' – rather than incorporate – the existing right of way and protected tree. It is also silent on the subject of the establishing hedgerow – replacing that which had been unaccountably removed in recent years – that currently divides the proposed site of H5 in two along its entire length (see below).

For these reasons, I would argue that the proposed development at H5 is contrary to the objectives of Policy D5 1(e) of Plan:MK², amongst other policies, and is not in keeping with the village.

2. Planning Policies and Constraints

The proposed development at H5 encompasses two plots:

- i. the Slipe, which is privately owned, has a public right of way across it, and contributes approximately 60 per cent of the land for the proposed H5 development; and
- ii. the land to the east of 46 High Street, which is privately owned, occupied by a number of allotments, and contributes approximately 40 per cent of the land for the proposed H5 development.

These are owned by two different parties. The consultation document states only that the Steering Group understands the two landowners to be: 'happy to work together to bring the site forward'. However, the NCNP itself neither explains what this means nor, indeed, acknowledges the fact that the land has multiple owners.

The two plots are subject to different environmental and planning constraints. The land to the east of 46 High Street falls within the North Crawley Conservation Area and Heritage Site. Meanwhile, the

¹ Protection of Open Space and Existing Facilities; and Public Open Space Provision In New Estates.

² Amenity and Street Scene: 'All proposals will be required to create and protect a good standard of amenity for buildings and surrounding areas, and in particular should ensure... New development is not overbearing upon existing buildings and open spaces.'

Slupe is occupied, in substantial part, by a protected horse chestnut tree of significant size, height, and age, which reaches almost entirely across that plot from north to south. There are also indications that the Slupe is a remnant of historic ridge and furrow pasture, remnants of which are an acknowledged characteristic of the North Crawley plateau.³

Any development of the land at H5 would be liable to conflict with these critical protections: the construction of up to 15 new dwellings, with road access and on-plot parking, inevitably must be precluded on any sensible reading of these protections.

H5 is directly opposite the only listed building in this part of the village: an early 19th century estate cottage. The largely vacant land to the south of the High Street allows the distinctive front elevation of the building to be seen from public rights of way almost a quarter of a mile to the south. The conservation area in general, and its southern perimeter in particular, currently affords good views across the surrounding countryside.

Policy HE1 of Plan:MK states: 'Proposals will be supported where they sustain and, where possible, enhance the significance of heritage assets which are recognised as being of historic, archaeological, architectural, artistic, landscape or townscape significance'. This is consistent with Strategic Objective 15 of Plan:MK: 'To protect, maintain and enhance the natural, built and historic environment of the Borough... and to protect and maintain the open countryside in the Borough.' In my opinion, the proposed development at H5 fails to accord with the protections imposed by the affected conservation area, heritage site, tree preservation order, and listed building.

The proposed development at H5 is unjustifiable in light of its location within, across, and in proximity to multiple protections. This aspect of the NCNP entirely fails to accord with established local policy for the protection of the countryside.

3. Development Boundary

Plan:MK, and the Core Strategy which preceded it, both recognise the importance of the development boundaries. These boundaries are intended to help identify: 'the interface between settlements and countryside for development management purposes'.⁴ The term 'open countryside' is a policy designation that applies to all land outside the development boundaries of settlements, as outlined in the Settlement Boundaries Review (2017).⁵ Policy DS5 A provides:

'Planning permission within the open countryside will only be granted for development which is essential for agriculture, forestry, countryside recreation, highway infrastructure or other development, which is wholly appropriate to a rural area and cannot be located within a settlement, or where other policies within this plan indicate development would be appropriate'.

The map of the proposed developments within the NCNP appears to show H5 as falling entirely within the settlement boundary: in fact, this would be the proposed future settlement boundary under the NCNP. H5, for the avoidance of doubt, is entirely outside of the boundary established by the Settlement Boundary Study.⁶

³ Milton Keynes Landscape Character Assessment, June 2016 (LCT 3).

⁴ Milton Keynes Settlement Boundary Study, November 2017 (para. 1.4).

⁵ Plan:MK (para. 4.78).

⁶ See Figures A15.1 and A15.2.

Whilst the land to the east of 46 High Street falls within the village conservation area, it falls outside of the North Crawley development boundary. Taking into account the other areas where the development boundary does not accord with the conservation area, this means that H5, unlike H3 and H4, encompasses and proposes to dispense with one of only three areas of countryside within the North Crawley conservation area.

In this regard, the existing development boundary is consistent with preceding plans for the development of North Crawley. The consultation of April 1981 excluded both the Slipe and the land east of 46 High Street from the development boundary [or 'village envelope'] upon exclusion of: 'land in agricultural use... [and] land whose inclusion would result in a loss of amenity... or would detract from the character or appearance of the village'.

In so doing, it also maintained already existing policies regarding views of and from the village. On the subject of limitations on growth, the village appraisal of 1971 stated:

'Although the contours of the land surrounding the village would not inhibit expansion from the point of view of building or drainage, the preservation of the countryside and landscape impose severe limitation... to the south, the edge of the village is clearly defined and exposed to view. Any new development in these parts would be visible from the surrounding countryside and would mask the outward views from the village...'

'Future development should, therefore, be restricted to small scale growth within the confines of the village, and to limited expansion on the flatter land immediately to the north.'

The village, including the Kilpin Green housing estate, has developed in accordance with this proposition. In consequence the views of and from the village across the countryside to the south have been deliberately – and successfully – maintained over the course of almost half a century of the village's planned development. Approval of any development of the Slipe or the land east of 46 High Street would be the first departure from this policy and obstruct the views in both directions between the historical eastern High Street and the open countryside. It would also be contrary to the objectives of Policy NE5 of Plan:MK:

'Where development in the open countryside is acceptable in principle under other policies in this plan, it will need to be undertaken in a manner that respects the particular character of the surrounding landscape. In particular, development proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures:

- *The locally distinctive natural and man-made features that contribute towards the landscape character and its quality*
- *The historic setting and structure of the villages and hamlets*
- *Important views e.g. of local landmarks Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.'*⁷

As a resident of the northern High Street, living directly opposite the site of the proposed H5 development, I can say that the views across the countryside from here are wonderful. For the said reasons, any development of the proposed site, particularly to the extent allowed for under the NCNP, will fail to conserve or enhance the landscape character.

⁷ See also: Plan:MK Policy D1 (Designing a High Quality Place): 'Development proposals will be permitted if they meet the following objectives/principles... The development proposals as a whole respond appropriately to the site and surrounding context.'

4. Traffic

Access to the proposed development at H3 and H4 would be achievable via a road adjoining Orchard Way. The sole purpose of Orchard Way is to provide road access to the existing housing estate at Kilpin Green. Residents also benefit from three routes into and out of the village (Chicheley Road, North Crawley Road, and Cranfield Road via the High Street).

Traffic to and from any development of H5 would only be able to enter and leave the village via the High Street (North Crawley Road / Cranfield Road). This would be at a point on or near a bend in the road which already obscures traffic approaching the village from Cranfield. The main road through the village is also the most direct route between Newport Pagnell and Cranfield. The North Crawley Road / High Street already experiences high levels of traffic at peak times. This includes a large number of sizable industrial and agricultural vehicles. Traffic levels will continue to increase as a result of development on the Tickford Fields Estate in Newport Pagnell.

The increase in traffic arising from the proposed development would necessarily result in considerable congestion on the main road through the village, and an increased risk of accidents at the eastern entrance to the village. In consequence, H5 would arguably conflict with the objectives of Policy CT2 A(vi) of Plan:MK⁸, and is not sustainable development.

Traffic flow problems within the village are already exacerbated by increasing levels of on-street parking. The problem is mostly localised in the heart of the village, consistent with the greater number of houses. However, it frequently causes bottlenecks in traffic flow during the day. The extent of the problem, both in frequency and geographical extent, is likely to be increased by the addition of up to 15 dwelling houses in the eastern part of the village. The NCNP arguably seeks to address this problem by means of on-plot parking (distinguishing H5 from H3 and H4). For the reasons given under the heading of 'Housing Density', above, it is patently impossible to provide adequate parking for up to 15 new households within the boundaries of H5. In consequence, H5 would arguably conflict with the objectives of Policy CT10 (ii) of Plan:MK.⁹

The H5 development suggests: 'Consideration should be given to appropriate demarcation of this important entrance to the village. A mini-roundabout or other bespoke junction design may assist with this'. This fails to account for the said road traffic issues, or to engage with the requirements of Policy INF1 (ii).¹⁰ A related point is the provision that would also need to be made to avoid exacerbating the surface water flooding from which the Slipe is known to already suffer as a result of its clay subsoil.

In my view, H5 policy as a whole fails to account for or address the significant road traffic issues that the development raises. These issues render this aspect of the NCNP impractical and ill-conceived.

⁸ Movement and Access: 'Development proposals will be permitted that... do not result in inappropriate traffic generation or compromise highway safety'.

⁹ Parking Provision: 'Development proposals should meet the following parking requirements... On-site parking should not be reduced below the Council's full expectations if this would increase additional pressure in off-site parking that could not be resolved by on-street parking controls'.

¹⁰ Delivering Infrastructure: 'New development that generates a demand for infrastructure, facilities and resources will only be permitted if the necessary on and off-site infrastructure required to support and mitigate the impact of that development is either: (i) Already in place; or, (ii) There is a reliable mechanism in place to ensure that infrastructure, facilities and resources will be delivered in the most appropriate places and at the earliest opportunity, to the required minimum high standards demanded by this Council and its partners'.

Pre-submission Consultation

The above concerns were raised during the initial consultation period.

Nevertheless, the only resulting amendments apparently made to the H5 policy were the removal of the proposed local green space designation from the Slupe, and the addition of the Slupe to the proposed development area of H5. As such, the consultation process failed to address any of the said issues and arguably exacerbated them.

It was also put to the Steering Group that, whilst the site at H3 and H4, as well as other parts of the village, were suitable for development: the site at H5 was not, for reasons similar to those raised in this letter. In response, the Steering Group concluded: 'Noted. Site H5 considered sequentially preferable in site assessment'.

The failure to identify more suitable locations for development clearly does nothing to address the unsuitability of H5. Indeed, to proceed on this basis arguably seeks to develop the land within H5 at any cost.

Conclusion

For these reasons, I personally oppose Policy H5 of the North Crawley Neighbourhood Plan, and submit that it fails to meet the basic conditions of national policy, sustainable development, strategic policies within the development plan for the area of the authority, and/or applicable EU obligations, including the obligation to strike a fair balance between the rights of those affected and the rights of the wider community.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Elke Sadeghi.

Elke Sadeghi