

Interested Person Statement

Scotland Lane Enquiry 8 April 2025

Jane Devlin

I am here today as a long standing member of Transition Town Haslemere.

I am not a planner, or a landscape architect, or an ecologist.

I have lived in the area for 30 years, and am a lover of the Surrey Hills, for its natural amenities, treecover, wildlife and character.

I can claim strong connections with the town of Haslemere; my children attended school here, I use the leisure centre, spend money in businesses, and have for at least a decade been the treasure of Transition Town Haslemere. I also help on a voluntary basis look after the bees at Haslemere Educational Museum.

As a parish councillor in Chiddingfold, I have engaged with the planning system, commenting on applications, and referencing relevant adopted planning policies.

Whilst I am not a professional Planner, I believe that the planning system and the policy framework that underpins it should be accessible and foster confidence for everyone. It provides a referenceable framework for expectations about development, especially sustainable development.

Sustainability is defined as *meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

Mr Ware, sir, you and I and the planning professionals here, and the KCs, all play a part in the Planning system, although my place is nowhere near as elevated as yours.

Each of the relevant planning policy documents have been drafted by diligent qualified planning professionals, those policies have been debated and discussed, scrutinised and consulted upon, and are subject to democratic acceptance - in the case of the neighbourhood plan, inspected, and subjected to a public referendum.

Therefore, these policies are not trivial, or optional, they are material considerations and enforceable. They are the basis of public confidence in the Planning system to deliver the places we want to live in, love and call home.

In considering this statement, I looked at the policies of relevance:

Waverley BC Local Plan Part 1 LPP1.

SP1 states that 'the authority will work proactively to secure developments that improve economic, social and environmental conditions in the area. '

The current scheme has scant local economic improvements, small and far from unique social benefit, and harms the natural environment considerably.

Waverley BC Local Plan Part 2 LPP2

SP2 'To Maintain Waverley's character whilst ensuring development needs are met in a sustainable manner, the Spatial Strategy to 2032 is to avoid major development on land of the highest amenity value, and of landscape value, such as the Surrey Hills AONB/National Landscape.'

The scheme is a major scheme, and is outside the settlement boundary in the AONB (now National Landscape.)

Policy RE1 on Landscape Value states

'development has to enhance the distinctive character of the landscape in which it is located....' and it goes on to say that the Surrey Hills is a landscape of national importance, and references the Surrey Hills Management Plan.

The Surrey Hills NL have provided evidence that argues proficiently against the scheme which I won't repeat here, but it is non trivial, and relevant..

LPP2

DM11 Trees and Woodland and Hedgerows

...and here I am thinking especially of the avenue and canopy of trees on the Midhurst Road.

The policy says that it will '

- a) retain woodland and important trees
- b) protect trees.

The scheme does not satisfy either of these. '

DM15 Rural areas where outside the settlement boundary

'b) Development must recognise the natural beauty and undeveloped character which is intrinsic to open countryside and the transition to rural environment. '

The scheme does not respect the undeveloped character and is visible in the landscape from many perspectives due to the rolling hills nature of the area.

The Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan

'Policy H9 Trees and Woodlands and Hedgerows

9.1 Development will be supported where they conserve and enhance trees, hedgerows and woodlands of value.

9.2 Development proposals that avoid damage and loss of mature and semi mature trees will be supported.'

Neither of these policies support the scheme.

Policy H1 Settlement boundaries

1.3 Development outside the settlement boundaries will be strictly controlled.

The scheme is outside the settlement boundary.

In summary,

I would like to quote the first appeal Inspector “*Collectively, the benefits of the scheme are not sufficiently compelling to justify the harm that would result. Allowing the appeal would not be in the public interest.*”

More than that, allowing this appeal would shake the confidence that the public has in the planning system and the adopted relevant planning policies to adequately conserve and enhance our natural environment.

It would be a dangerous precedent to set in favour of unsuitable development in a protected landscape.

I have two further points to make responding to the opening statements of the Parties:

1. The Queensmead development in Chiddingfold (cited as an example by one of the parties) does not provide any support for this scheme by example: Queensmead is within the settlement boundary, and the site was identified in the properly adopted Neighbourhood Plan. It is an infill development, in fact since several units replace redundant garage buildings.
2. The Grayswood Forest School anticipates the use of a site within the scheme. Grayswood is two miles away on the opposite side of the town centre to the north along the A286. Co-incidentally, I own 10 acres of woodland (Fowlshatch Copse, accessed from Prestwick Lane). There are suitable woodland sites - several options - located near to the Nursery. Using a nearby site would also eliminate the need to transport children through the town centre, at the cost of additional time and expense on a regular basis.

....ends....

Jane Devlin 8 April 2025.