PLANNING APPLICATION AT PHEASANT RISE CHESHAM

APPLICATION REF – PL/26/02036/OA

OBJECTIONS BY THE CHESHAM SOCIETY

The Society would like the Council to record the following objections, which justify the refusal of planning permission.

As the site is in the Chilterns Natural Landscape (CNL), national policy guidance in NPP F Para 11 and the footnote makes it clear that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply *where assets of particular importance (ie protected landscapes) provide clear reasons for refusal*. Protecting the natural landscape - hence preventing the harm that would arise from developing the site – is a clear reason for refusal on its own.

The site is also in the green belt where there is a presumption against development unless it can be demonstrated that very special circumstances exist to override the presumption against building houses on it. The developer argues that there are very special circumstances - namely a shortage of housing land to meet needs, and a lack of available and suitable housing sites elsewhere outside the green belt.

This is not accepted a means of getting around the green belt restraint as it fails to recognise a number of significant factors :

- There are brownfield sites in the town within the built-up area which are the priority for housing development as opposed to building on greenfield sites on the edge of town. On the issue of 'brownfield sites first', the Council are well aware of the efforts of community led organisations to promote brownfield developments in the town. This work is on-going. If the Pheasant Rise site is granted, the development of more deserving brownfield sites – which have support across the board and are completely compliant with long established planning and regeneration objectives – would be severely compromised. This is because it would undermine the development potential of brownfield sites by limiting their attraction as investment opportunities. The Society therefore strongly objects to the proposal at Pheasant Rise on this ground.

- The town's Neighbourhood Plan, approved only late last year, has the protection of the surrounding countryside from inappropriate development and the promotion of brownfield sites for development at its core. If the Pheasant Rise site was approved, it would run directly counter to the contents of a recently adopted Plan. This would amount to an unacceptable erosion of the planning process, and the community's efforts involved in preparing it.

- The Council's Local Plan is reasonably well advanced. The draft Plan - which will include housing land allocations - is due to be published in approximately three months with the final version to be submitted for examination in December this year. This is the proper mechanism for deciding where new housing is to be located both locally and across the County as it involves the balanced consideration of options and more importantly, enables the community to be involved. If one off speculative proposals like the current application at Pheasant Rise are granted, it would pre-empt the local planning process. This is because it would fix a large proportion of future housing for the town on a single site and take away the opportunity for a balanced debate on where housing should be best located and in what numbers. Moreover, the opportunity for the Chesham community to engage in the plan making process would inevitably be constrained if this application was granted. Therefore, the Society has an in-principle objection on the basis that granting the application would undermine the proper operation of the planning process.

The Society strongly supports the Chilterns Natural Landscape (CNL) objection. In particular, the site itself is part of the setting of the town. This is important as the character of Chesham is in part made up of views outwards towards woodland and sloping fields falling from hill tops down towards the vale bottoms. Building on the site would impact adversely on the local landscape and therefore detract from the setting of the town.

On a specific issue, there is concern about the highway implications of the scheme. Essentially, there are two roads off Waterside into the area – Pheasant Rise and Chessmount Road - which currently serve the estate and would provide the only road access to the application site. The intuitive local experience of these roads is that they are at or close to capacity especially at morning and evening peak periods. Also, there are issues of flow restriction arising from kerbside parked vehicles particularly on Pheasant Rise itself which is the primary access to the site. Adding the traffic movements associated with an extra 116 houses is likely to exacerbate the situation to an unacceptable level and the Society wishes to lodge an objection to the proposal on this basis, in addition to the objections set out above.