

Sticking Mires Farm
Bridgemont
Whaley Bridge
High Peak
SK23 7PD

Wednesday 3 May 2023

To Planning Support, Customer Services, High Peak Borough Council

Consultation on Planning Application HPK/2023/0061

I should like to comment on the above planning application described as “Land to the West of Bridgemont, Whaley Bridge, Derbyshire”.

I am strongly opposed to the development for the following reasons:

Green Belt. The proposed development would be on green belt land which should be sacrosanct and, as such, is not in accordance with the Local Plan. We are aware that, for the purpose of providing “affordable housing”, the ban on building on green belt land could be waived. The fact that the current owner has allowed the land to be “temporarily” trashed should not be used as an excuse to destroy its important function as the start of open country to the west of Bridgemont. Both footpaths out of the village on the west side actually border the land concerned. The footpath WHA15 which used to pass through the proposed site, still runs parallel to it for 300 metres of its length at a distance of only 20 metres from the site. Unlike most of Bridgemont, this land, which stands above the current housing on Bridgemont’s street, is clearly visible from the National Park Boundary across the valley, and the proposed development would have a major impact on the local landscape. We specifically urge the committee not to grant outline permission for affordable housing which would then be returned at the detailed stage as a project bereft of affordable housing, and which the committee would then have limited powers to refuse.

It has been said that an exception to the green belt prohibition was allowed for a previous application in the Bridgemont. But that land was no longer realistically valuable in that role, trapped, as it was, between the railway and the A6 trunk road. The land in question here is the beginning of a swathe of green belt which is specifically identified in the relevant documentation as serving as a ‘buffer’ between Bridgemont and Whaley Bridge. The footpaths mentioned above allow residents direct access to open countryside which this development would ruin. Why do we have a Local Plan if we abandon its stipulations?

Parking and traffic congestion. Until a year ago the street running through Bridgemont provided access to 25 houses. This has recently increased to 38 (a 52% increase) with the addition of the 13 affordable houses on Ringstone Rise. The further additional homes proposed in this application would increase the number of properties to 80 – more than trebling the original number. This would put severe strain on the village especially in terms of parking, which is already under serious pressure, and on the exit from the village onto the A5004 which is already difficult at busy periods. It would also greatly increase the noise and air pollution generated by the highly concentrated development envisaged.

Footpaths. This proposal would completely change the character and environment of the local footpaths. One of these, after leaving our garden, passes through what has effectively become a nature reserve. It is a former field with a large and artificially dammed pond. This contains over 1,000 tonnes of water and is only 30 metres from, and significantly above the site. The area has been left to grow wild since 1990. Fauna we have seen there ourselves include over 50 species of bird including nesting snipe, passing goosanders and other water fowl. We have also seen water shrews (the rarest of the three UK species of shrew), and the migrant clouded yellow butterfly. Flora include southern marsh orchids and flag iris. Every March we have migrating toads making their way through our garden to the pond. The footpath through this is widely used by locals and especially so during lockdown when dozens of people per day used it to escape safely into open country. Having a housing estate only 20 metres away for most of its length would hardly maintain this footpath's appeal, and will certainly have a detrimental impact on local wildlife. As lockdown revealed, access to nature and countryside is vital for everyone's physical and mental well-being.

Drainage issues. Geomorphologically the site is a river bank with a west-to-east gradient draining towards the Goyt (about 250 metres away) and a south-to-north gradient draining into Ringstones Clough which is immediately adjacent to the site. The land was part of Sticking Mires Farm (note the significance of the name!) even after the railway divided the farmland in the 1850s, and it remained part of Sticking Mires Farm until 1985. A huge amount of water drains through the site and currently causes problems such as the deposition of leachate onto the Bridgemont pavement and street mentioned in other objectors' comments. It also causes the end of the Bridgemont Street, close to the A5004 junction, to flood across its full width after every heavy rain storm. The Drainage Strategy included in the application admits that the land has "cohesive clayey ground at very shallow depth, with resting water levels at around 1.5 metres below ground level" ^{p 45 §18.12} and this on a site with 1 in 10 gradients and a fall of 10.4 metres shelving steeply down to Bridgemont street. The Drainage Strategy also states that "The existing low to moderate risks of pluvial flooding ... will remain after development" ^{ibid §18.8}. One only needs to read some of the other objectors' accounts (eg. Alan Dunn at no.27), or speak to Rachel Nolan (at no.52), who has had United Utilities come out to drainage emergencies 8 times in the last 9 months, to appreciate the reality of living with this alleged "low to moderate" risk. It would be the height of folly to proceed with this development in wilful denial of these local conditions.

Elevation issues. The elevation of the site poses further problems in that the proposed development will tower over the current houses on the west side of the Bridgemont street. These houses have little or no front gardens but, having open space at the back, enjoy back gardens with a view out into open country. This will be utterly destroyed by the proposed development. Currently most of the Bridgemont housing is hidden amongst trees allowing wide and beautiful views from both sides of the valley. The proposed development will be higher up than present buildings and intrude much more into the rural landscape. This is exacerbated by the plan to further raise the houses at the north end of the site to a height above the Toddbrook Dam flood risk area.

Access issues. The proposed access is too steep and too narrow to be fit for purpose. It is difficult to see how this can be rectified without exacerbating the drainage issues discussed above, and also without threatening the integrity of the railway embankment.

Safeguarding issues. At the northern end of the site dwellings are proposed which will overlook the Bridgemont Mission and the children's playground. In recent years the Mission building has been used as a pre-school nursery, and it is currently used 6 days per week for sports activities with 3 or 4 days per week involving children. As proposed these most northerly elements of the scheme would be unsightly, prominent, and out of character with the surrounding property. They would also overlook both the children's playground and the Mission building and as such would present a significant safeguarding risk.

Residents feel that the affordable housing building project already approved and built is enough for a place the size of Bridgemont. The proposals in this application would more than treble the size of the village, treble the number of residents, and treble the number of vehicles all exiting through the one junction on to the A5004. In addition it would destroy Bridgemont's rural outlook. We all understand the urgent need to social housing, but not at the cost of providing overcrowded developments on fundamentally unsuitable land! We urge the Planning Committee to reject it.

Yours sincerely

(Signed) Dr Ambrose Smith CBE