



Quince House

25<sup>th</sup> October 2018

School Lane

Weston Turville

Buckinghamshire

HP22 5SE

Ms T. Aldworth

Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Aylesbury Vale District Council

The Gateway

Gatehouse Way

AYLESBURY

Bucks

HP19 8FF

Dear Ms Aldworth,

**PLANNING APPLICATION 16/00424/AOP "HAMPDEN FIELDS"**

You will be aware that despite the serious and fundamental reservations in relation to highways put forward by the Hampden Fields Action Group, the meeting of the Strategic Development Management Committee on 25 October 2017 resolved to defer and delegate the approval of the above application to officers. Approval was subject to the completion of the s106 agreement. At the time of writing, planning permission has not been granted.

In the meantime, the latest version of the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan was submitted and is currently undergoing Examination in Public by the independent Inspector. Full and thorough



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representations were made by this action group, both in writing and at the public hearings in July. The Inspector's Interim Findings were signed on 29 August and published on 1 October.

We have had the opportunity to read and consider these in detail, in conjunction with our various expert consultants. We have some very strong concerns regarding their implications for application 16/00424/AOP. I am therefore writing to make you aware of these.

During the presentations and discussion at the Strategic Development Management Committee, members were left in no doubt that the Highways Authority were firm that the Aylesbury Transport Strategy and the modelling that underpinned the proposal were fit for purpose, had been provided by experts and could be relied upon in terms of the Committee's assessment of the planning application. They were also told that there would be a real benefit arising out of Hampden Fields' provision of a proposed Southern Link Road as part of the Aylesbury Transport link road strategy. Mention was made of comprehensive and detailed interrogations by the Highways Authority in the context of traffic mitigation and link road design. All these comments were made by officers from AVDC or BCC.

Further, at paragraph 1.7 of the Overview Report accompanying the officer's report it was made clear that although the VALP was not to be given any material weight, the "evidence base" around it was to be given weight. Subsequently, the emerging VALP evidence base, including the transport documents and strategy, were material considerations that both the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and Local Highways Authority (HA) used on which to base their reports and recommendations to the planning committee. Whilst I am sure this would be common ground, if evidence were required, one needs to look no further than pages 6-7 of the BCC Transport Assessment provided to the council on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and repeated in the Committee Report at paragraph 9.41 and following.

In the light of this, we note the strong critique of the transport elements of the VALP and its strategy now made by the Inspector in paragraphs 44 – 52 of his Interim Findings. It is disappointing, though not surprising, that the Inspector has found the transport element of the draft Plan unsound as it stands. This first independent audit of the Aylesbury Transport Strategy and the thinking behind it has ended up with significant criticism. As a result, it is clear that the confidence expressed by BCC and AVDC officers to members of the Strategic Development Management Committee was misplaced. In view of this material consideration, the application should be brought back to committee and, we contend, rejected. If the LPA were to grant planning permission in the current circumstances we believe they would have erred in law.

We have read with interest the LPA's various responses to the Inspector's submissions, including the ORS submission and the latest comments contained in ED 174. Without making any comment on the validity of these, to date we have seen no attempt to rebut the inspector's interim findings set out in paragraphs 44-52.

Of particular concern is paragraph 50 of the Inspector's report. The LPA seeks to grant planning permission for precise alignments of the Southern Link Road in the 16/00424/AOP application (and the Eastern Link Road South in the 16/01040/AOP application), using the Aylesbury Transport Strategy and VALP evidence base as support, yet the Council has not shown any consideration of other potential strategies or alignments. This is a serious omission and a material consideration.

I also draw your attention to the broken links in the logic chain between policies that require developments to implement proposals that are not specified in the Plan (para 46) or even missing from the evidence base for the VALP, as in the case of the County Local Transport Plan 4. You will know that this affects draft policy D1, which calls for all significant development in Aylesbury – by far the most heavily-weighted element in the VALP housing strategy – to make a significant contribution to meeting the Aylesbury Transport Strategy.

The same paragraph points out that proposals in the Aylesbury Transport Strategy (so heavily relied on in the Hampden Fields application) have not been subject to the public consultation procedures for local plans. Nor are key infrastructure requirements contained in the VALP.

None of us need reminding that the transport element of the VALP was also subject to 'comprehensive and detailed interrogations'. During the Examination in Public, clear and detailed written representations supported by evidence and analysis were made by several stakeholders. The whole topic was further examined at a public hearing session that, though scheduled for two hours, actually needed six. The Inspector is therefore working with a substantial base of evidence and comment, from both Councils and all the other stakeholders, from which he has been able to draw his current conclusions.

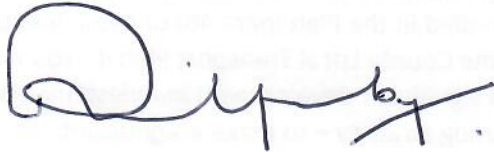
As you are aware we have written to you asking for a meeting to discuss the key issues that have emerged as a result of the Examination in Public. This is a genuine offer of engagement. To date we have not had a response. As members of the community we really did, and still do, want to help both AVDC and BCC come up with a better strategy for the whole of Aylesbury and the Vale. In the absence of any meaningful engagement, formally challenging the Local Plan was our only option.

The council may want to 'talk up' the Inspector's belief that the draft plan *can* be made sound. That being said, it would be unfortunate in the extreme to underestimate the amount of work required to do so. To characterise the issues as 'One more large housing development here and another model run there' belies the fundamental issues identified and the work that will be needed to make the plan sound. The last thing we want to have to do is to continue to oppose the Local Plan, though we are prepared to do so if necessary. We again urge, even plead with, the Council to engage with us at the earliest opportunity.



I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



.....  
Phil Yerby

Hampden Fields Action Group

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